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Losing peace in the Middle East

The new wave of Israeli-Palestinian violence



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Introduction

Israel and Palestine are back on the political scene in the Middle East.

Palestinians' protests have been triggered by an action of the security forces on the Temple Mount, sacred to both Jews and Muslims. In order to reduce the risk of accidents the Israeli government decided to restrict access to the Haram al-Sharif to Muslims, which has caused the controversy raised by Palestinian leadership, in control of the area. Rage has inevitably exploded and several attacks have been reported on the West Bank and East Jerusalem by Palestinian hands.

Netanyahu's assurances aiming to allay criticism by Palestinian leadership have been not enough and the PM's statements about Palestinian complicity with Germans planning the Shoah have certainly not helped appease the situation. It did not make any difference the appeal for calm by the President of Palestinian National Authority and leader of the Fatah Mahmoud Abbas, who has everything to lose in this hot climate after having chosen the path of dialogue.

On the other hand, Hamas cannot distance itself from the protesters and risk of losing support, because this could generate the formation of extremist fringes, isolating Hamas and leaving it in direct engagement with Israel, whose response has not been waited for long. After the reaction to Hamas rockets, the Israeli government has considered the opportunity to lock down the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem. This restrictive measure could be the origin of a Third Intifada, together with the increasing number of deaths and injuries, the bad economy of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the impasse on peace talks between Israel and Palestine.

The First Intifada (1987-1993) has been characterized mostly by boycotts, demonstrations or attacks concentrated mainly towards the Israeli army. The Second Intifada has had more serious effects. It began in September 2000, two months after the failure of the Camp David summit and following the visit to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem of Ariel Sharon, leader of Likud, the main center-right party in Israel and Netanyahu's predecessor, interpreted as a real provocation by Palestinians.

Today, Israel can hardly afford a Third Intifada, because it could be dangerous at political and economic level as well as it could incite Israel's enemies. Moreover, we cannot underestimate the role of the third main actor of the Middle East scenario: the Islamic State.

Federica Fanuli

Editorial Board Manager of Mediterranean Affairs

Intifada 2.0

By *Alessandro Di Maio*

Indiscriminate Palestinian lone-wolf terror attacks are not new, but starting from October 2015, they have been carried out on a daily basis by young Palestinians – mostly teenagers from East Jerusalem – armed with a knife, a car, or a gun. The Israeli response has been strong: Netanyahu's government has taken a series of controversial measures like house demolitions, revocations of Jerusalem residency, roadblocks around certain Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem, and tacit on-the-spot execution of terrorists.

The extrajudicial execution of attackers, besides causing concern among Palestinian civilians, afraid to be accused of terrorism and being instantly killed, has made clear the suicidal character of the attacks: fanatic missions carried out with the awareness of a probable death.

The suicidal aspect, together with daily attacks and the use of civilians as targets, has caused many analysts and journalists to compare this new wave of terror with the suicide terror attacks of the First and Second Intifada.

If the two phenomena share the same 'atmosphere' (how in the security field is defined the sum of social, religious and political elements shaping the mood of the Palestinian population), there are several differences distinguishing them.

Comparison with the First and Second Intifada

During the First and Second Intifada, attacks were meticulously planned by armed wings of organizations like Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Fatah. Terror attacks were executed with the technique of suicide bombings to cause as many casualties as possible among the Israel civilian population. They were organized according to the rigid hierarchic structure of each organization. They involved the group's political bureau, the armed wing, the cell of recruitment and the executors – who, too, were affiliated with the groups.

Immediately after attacks, terrorist groups were claiming responsibility and releasing martyrdom videos.

None of these elements can be found in the current situation. Attacks



Source: Voice of Palestine

are carried out spontaneously by young individuals not affiliated with any political or armed Palestinian group. Moreover, except for one car bomb attempted attack carried out by a Palestinian woman at the checkpoint between Jerusalem and the settlement of Ma'ale Adumin, explosive belts and bombs have been replaced with knives, cars, or handguns often stolen from soldiers.

Though groups are not involved in the planning of the attacks, their social media accounts welcome and praise each of them. Unlike the past, incitement to violence does not follow traditional paths. It runs over the internet, where videos of extremist imams and anti-Israeli cartoons, created by radical groups, are shared on Facebook and Twitter. The goal is to encourage young Palestinians to stab or run over Jews for the liberation of the mosque of al-Aqsa, Jerusalem, and the whole Palestine.

The difference between the first two intifadas and the current situation is even clearer if we look at the numbers.

In the past, the death toll numbered in the thousands on both sides. On the contrary, since the new violent escalation started, the number of victims is a few dozen on both sides. Same thing for the number of Israeli battalions patrolling the territories and the acts of resistance carried out by Palestinian *shabab* (youth) against the IDF in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem. In the past, hundreds of IDF battalions faced thousands of Palestinians in each demonstration/clash. Today the biggest protest so far counted about six hundred people and the number of battalions engaged to control the territories is limited to a few dozens.

What drives a young Palestinian – born and raised after the Oslo Agreements (1993), and generally holding the Israeli ID card or citizenship – to carry out a suicide mission and stab an Israeli civilian, is unclear and debated. Some blame the incitement by radical groups and the growing anti-Semitic feelings in the Palestinian society. Others point the finger to the frustration caused by the settlers violence and terrorism in the West Bank, the Israeli occupation, and the lack of positive political prospects due to the absence of serious peace negotiations. It is very likely that both factors play a role, since one does not exclude the other.

On the Israeli side, despite the concerns of the civilian population,

many tend to consider the new type of terror attacks as the most evident proof of the weakened condition of the Palestinian resistance/terror groups.

However, it is possible to see from graphic videos released by the Islamic State (ISIL) in Iraq, Syria, Sinai and Libya, that from the point of view of radical Islam a knife is not a sign of weakness but the most traditional symbol of jihad. If ISIL cells in the Palestinian territories are insignificant, it is possible that stabbing attacks are the result of the influence that the communication techniques of ISIL have on the local Palestinian jihadist groups that incite youths to defend the mosque of al-Aqsa. Moreover, stabbing and vehicular attacks are just the tip of the iceberg: they not represent the level of violence mounting in the Palestinian society.

The inner Palestinian competition for power

Presenting the current situation as the sole fight between Israelis and Palestinians would be superficial and misleading. Within the conflict, there is harsh competition between the different souls of Palestinian resistance.

In recent years, the Islamist movement of Hamas conquered hearts and minds of many Palestinians in the West Bank. It eroded the popular base that Fatah, the Palestinian National

Authority (PNA), and president Mahmoud Abbas himself counted on. This could be explained by the corruption characterizing many aspects of the Palestinian government and by the general radicalization and Islamization of the Palestinian political spectrum.

The responsibility, however, falls on Israel too. With the Oslo I and II Accords signed in 1993 and 1995, Israel and the PNA engaged in a series of economic, political and security collaborations aiming at improving mutual trust and paving the way for additional peace negotiations that would lead to a peaceful creation of a Palestinian State.

After the Second Intifada, the various Israeli governments that succeeded each other adopted a more conservative line, increased settlement constructions, and stopped considering Abbas as a partner for peace. It was the end of the peace process.

Without it, the Palestinian Authority employed a dual policy: it engaged a series of unilateral moves in the international arena, but it also kept the security collaboration with Israel in order to control the territory and limit Hamas' progressive infiltration in the West Bank. If the unilateral moves increased Israeli suspicions and distances, the collaboration with Israel – often implemented with the arrest of Hamas activists and terrorists or with

the foil of terror attacks – led many Palestinians to think of the PNA more as an Israeli tool to control the West Bank than as a government interested in serving the interests of the Palestinians.

Hamas' public support increased due to the successful propaganda spread over the internet and to the thousands of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel in the latest wars.

The competition for public support and power radicalized every Palestinian

political movement to the point that, pressured by its armed wings (*Tanzim* and the *al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades*), Fatah joined the group of

factions glorifying martyrs and inciting new terror attacks on social networks. Even Abbas changed tone by avoiding condemning stabbing attacks and threatening to stop every security collaboration with Israel or, eventually, dismantling the PNA and leave the IDF with the heavy and dangerous burden of controlling the entire West Bank, including the Palestinian high-populated cities and refugee camps.



Source: Wikipedia Commons

The most dramatic scenario

According to the future behavior of Israeli and Palestinian political actors, the new violent escalation could end soon, persist for long time or, in the worst case, be the prologue of a more dramatic situation.

If Israeli occupation is the major factor that could decrease the violence, it is very Unlikely that Netanyahu – who leads a right-wing government pressured by more pro-settler extremist

fringes – will disengage from the West Bank. A situation like that would endanger the lives of hundreds of thousands of settlers.

Same thing for the peace process: if it could stop the escalation, it is hard to believe that the Israelis will negotiate with a counterpart, the PNA, deprived of any credit among the Palestinians. In addition, it is even harder to imagine the International Community diverting its focus from the Iraqi-Syrian crisis to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It seems evident that neither Netanyahu nor Abbas have an exit strategy from this loop. The evolution of the current

situation will depend on the precarious relationships on the field.

For now, lone wolves are still attacking on a daily basis. Though Israeli intelligence tries to track the internet profiles of possible ‘ticking time bombs,’ the only short-term solution to stop them is respecting the *status quo* over the al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount, pressuring the King of Jordan Abdullah II to leverage on Abbas to calm down the crowd, and helping the PNA to expand its margins of maneuver so that it may regain credibility among Palestinians.

The situation has a high potentiality of violence. If it deteriorates further, there could be a total collapse of the Palestinian Authority or a tighter competition between the various Palestinian factions. In both scenarios, the armed wings would not limit themselves to online incitement to violence, but would activate their militias to carry out suicide attacks and open their rich arsenals (hidden in refugee camps around East Jerusalem and the West Bank) in order to initiate a general armed uprising. This would be the worst scenario. It would be the Third Intifada that could reshape the region for years.

Jerusalem, the disputed Middle Earth

By *Giulia Formichetti*

The recent migration flows affecting Europe highlight the inadequacy of migration policies and the difficulties that States have to face in managing the illegal immigration, as well as in protecting human rights and security at the EU's borders. EU Member States are unprepared for dealing with thousands of desperate people who land on their southern shores to seek their fortune in a continent away from the war.



Source: Israeli Missions around the world

“Eternity” — this refers to Jerusalem.

Talmud, Berachot 58a

The Old City of Jerusalem, whose extension is only 0.9 square kilometers, hosts some of the most important religious sites of the world.¹ In fact, the

three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity, all have their roots deeply set into Jerusalem ground.²

¹ The Temple Mount, the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Dome of the Rock, Al Aqsa Mosque.

² The Christians are linked to Jerusalem because of Jesus Christ's crucifixion; for the

It is undeniable that to understand the role played by this ancient capital in structuring the relations between Israelis and Palestinians, it is fundamental to pay attention to the religious and emotive response that the city generates.³

Yet, the role of the Holy City is not only religious, but also and essentially political. It is the combination between these two faces that makes it one of the most controversial cities in the world, as well as the beating heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Historical background

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 181 (II) [29 November 1947], which partitioned the land of the British Palestine Mandate in two states, one Jewish and one Arab, also established Jerusalem as a separate entity under the aegis of the UN Trusteeship Council.⁴ Despite this settlement, the outcome of the 1948 hostilities put West Jerusalem under Israel's control and East Jerusalem, including the Old City, under Jordan's: as a matter of fact, both parties ignored the UN Resolution. In January 1950

Israel proclaimed Jerusalem its capital and moved there all of its governmental and parliamentary institutions. The Israeli presence in the Holy City was then strengthened after the Six-day War of 1967, when East Jerusalem was annexed to the Jewish State. In 1980, the Israeli Parliament issued the Jerusalem Basic Law, through which it officially stated that "*Jerusalem, complete and united, is the capital of Israel.*"⁵ The UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 478 [20 August 1980] declared the proclamation illegal under international law, but without being able to bring any concrete change in the resulting situation, as the city remained under the aegis of the Israeli State, including East Jerusalem. This area incorporated an additional approximate 64 square kilometers from the West Bank, including a territory that previously consisted of 28 villages and areas of the Bethlehem and Beit Jala municipalities.

Muslims, Jerusalem is the third Holy City, after Mecca and Medina, and it is where the Prophet Muhammad ascended to Heaven and spoke to God, during his night journey; for the Jewish people, King David firstly conquered the city and made it the first capital of the United

Kingdom of Israel; then Solomon, his son, built there the First Temple (Reiter *et al.*, 2001).

³ Adelman & Elman, 2014.

⁴ For more information visit: <http://goo.gl/IJMggH>.

⁵ *Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel*, par 1. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9XOvE8>.



Source: The New York Times

Despite this annexation, it is important to notice that the aforementioned Basic Law stipulated the preservation of the integrity of the Holy Places: *“The Holy Places shall be protected from desecration and any other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions to the places sacred to them or their feelings towards those places.”*⁶ The aftermath of the Six-Day War and the following decades established a *status quo*, according to which non-Muslims were not allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, but could visit it in between Muslim prayer times. Still today, Jews are sometimes allowed to enter the compound under the protection of

Israeli forces – through the Mughrabi Gate – but not to pray there.

The origin of the current uprisings is properly linked to these exceptional accesses to the holy compound. The match was struck by claims that Israel had some kind of plan to change the arrangements governing access to the area within the Old City of Jerusalem, and to the Temple Mount (Haram al Sharif). After several Jewish activists repeatedly entered the site under the protection of the Israeli army, Palestinians erupted with violent protests against them, to such an extent that the Israeli Police decided to limit the access to the Old City and the Temple Mount compound.⁷ Although

⁶ *Basic Law: Jerusalem, Capital of Israel*, par 3. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9XOvE8>.

⁷ “Israeli police were trying to allow Jewish activists to tour the courtyards of the mosque, which in the past has stirred angry reactions from Palestinians who fear Israel may change the rules for visiting the Al-Aqsa compound.

[...] Netanyahu’s strategy is fulfilling his promises to his right-wing and extremist supporters to eventually demolish Al-Aqsa and build their alleged temple in its place.” Source: Anon. (2015, 15 September). Israeli police

both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu⁸ and the Minister of Public Security, Strategic Affairs and Information Gilad Erdan⁹ have denied these allegations and confirmed that Israel does not want to change the status quo on the holy site, violence has continued to increase dramatically.

The land at the center of the dispute

This escalation – the alleged Third Intifada¹⁰ – contributes to demonstrate how Jerusalem and the entire Holy Land perform more a political than a religious function in the hearts and minds of the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Starting from claiming absolute control over Haram al Sharif, the Palestinians initiated a new wave of uprisings and inaugurated a series of violent attacks that extended beyond the borders of the Holy Capital, by penetrating into Israeli territory. From their perspective, it is the appropriate

answer to the oppression and abuse of power that the Israeli government has been perpetrating against them for decades. Three instances were particularly grievous: first, after the Second Intifada, the Israeli government started the construction of the Separation Barrier, which is dividing East Jerusalem from the neighboring West Bank. Secondly, although the Palestinians from East Jerusalem can boast better conditions than those in the West Bank,¹¹ they are not Israeli citizens and their status is anything but stable – indeed, several times along the history of the conflict, the Israeli government has threatened to revoke residence permits, as a way to strengthen its control over the area. Thirdly, the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem has led not only to the illegal construction of Israeli settlements in the Arab part of the city¹², but also to the systematic demolition of countless Palestinian houses for ‘deterrence’ and ‘security’ reasons. The expansion of the

storm Al-Aqsa Mosque for a third day. *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/0h4D7c>. See also: Anon. (2015, 4 October). After stabbings, police bar Palestinians from Jerusalem’s Old City. *The Times of Israel*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/JJN8Af>.

⁸ Anon. (2015, 25 October). Netanyahu: Muslims Pray on the Temple Mount; non-Muslims Visit the Temple Mount. *Haaretz*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/PYYhPB>.

⁹ Erdan, G. (2015, 16 October). The terror in Jerusalem is based on a lie. *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/IMkDN>.

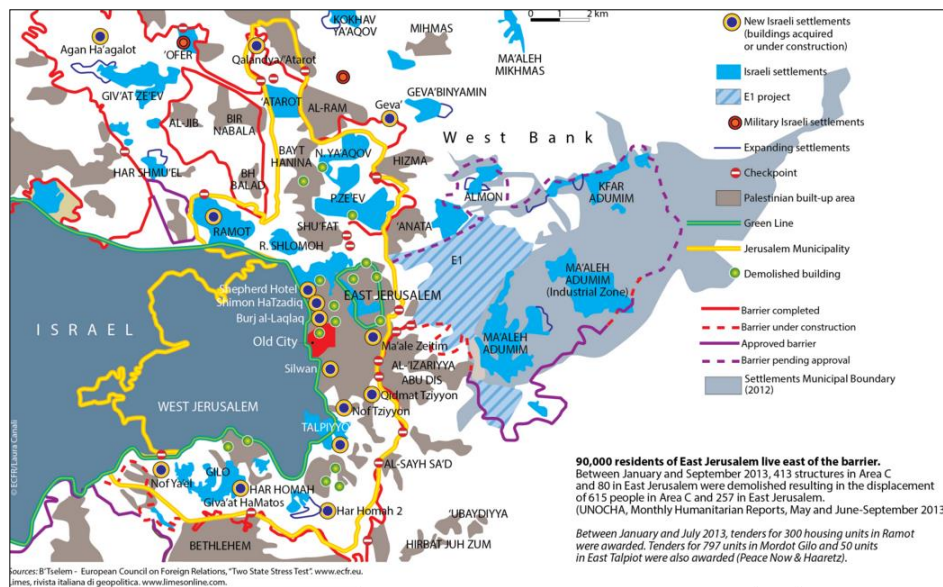
¹⁰ Other names given include ‘Silent Intifada’, ‘Jerusalem Intifada’, and ‘Teen Intifada’.

¹¹ David, A. (2014, 9 December). Who are East Jerusalem’s Permanent Residents?. *Haaretz*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/jqcg83>.

¹² Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared on the matter that: “[...] Our policy on Jerusalem is the same policy followed by all Israeli governments for 42 years, and it has not changed. As far as we are concerned, building in Jerusalem is the same as building in Tel Aviv. [...]” (Adelman & Elman, 2014).

Israeli-controlled territory corresponds to the shrinkage of the Palestinians’.

as a reaction, the Israelis further tighten the grip.¹⁴



Source: The European Council on Foreign Relations

The map here above seals on the paper what someone defines as ‘Judaization’¹³ or ‘Palestinian desertification’ of East Jerusalem – and progressively of the West Bank. Using the pretext of reinforcing its territories, Israel has on one side consolidated its control everywhere in the Holy Land, on the other it has instigated a vicious spiral of violent confrontations: the Israeli government strengthens the security measures and the control over the land; this causes the Palestinians to feel oppressed, and, finding themselves in a political and institutional vacuum, they answer with rudimental means, among which violent attacks stand out;

Someone may ask, which came first, the Israeli securement process or the Palestinian obstinate resistance? We could diplomatically answer, which came first, the chicken or the egg?

At the basis of this cycle lays the fact that both populations have national and religious claims over what they see as their homeland: that territory, that concrete geographical site assumes a cardinal significance to the identities and politics of both nations.¹⁵ Before the State of Israel was established, the Palestinians were a population of farmers, strongly attached to their fields. Nowadays, displaced from those fields, they are Muslims, who claim their

¹³ Yftachel, 2006.

¹⁴ See Black, I., & Shuttleworth, K. (2015, 30 October). Israel places heavy security in East

Jerusalem before Muslim prayers. *The Guardian*. Available at: <http://goo.gl/yvDZ1W>.

¹⁵ Yftachel, 2006.

belonging to the Temple Mount as a guarantee of territorial identity, of belonging to a land from where they have been thrown out. The reaffirmation of the importance of this territorial belonging is enshrined in the *Palestinian Declaration of Independence* of 1988. We read:

[...] Palestine, the land of the three monotheistic faiths, is where the Palestinian Arab people was born, on which it grew, developed and excelled. The Palestinian people was never separated from or diminished in its integral bonds with Palestine. Thus, the Palestinian Arab people ensured for itself an everlasting union between itself, its land and its history. [...], the Palestinian Arab people added to its stature by consolidating a union between itself and its patrimonial Land. [...] In Palestine and on its perimeters, in exile distant and near, the Palestinian Arab people never faltered and never abandoned its conviction in its rights of Return and independence. [...] Whereas the Palestinian people reaffirms most definitively its inalienable rights in the land of its patrimony: [...] The Palestine National Council, [...], hereby proclaims the establishment of the

State of Palestine on our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem (Al-Quds Ash-Sharif). [...]¹⁶

The same attention to the territory is placed in the *Israeli Declaration of Independence* of 1949, where we read:

[...] Eretz-Israel [(Hebrew) – the land of Israel, Palestine] was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal book of books. [...] [It] is the natural right of the Jewish people to be masters of their own fate, like all other nations, in their own sovereign state.

Accordingly we, members of the people's council, representatives of the Jewish community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist movement, are here assembled [...], by virtue of our natural and historic right [...], hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel, to be known as the state of Israel. [...]¹⁷

It clearly stands out in both documents that the territorial element – *where* – is tied to the temporal one –

¹⁶ Palestine declaration of Independence (15 November 1988). See Lukacs, Y. (1992). *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A documentary record 1967-1990*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁷Israeli Declaration of Independence (14 May 1948). Available at: <http://goo.gl/2E5TP>.

when: both populations struggle to find a temporal priority in their respective territorial claim¹⁸, to determine who had been firstly entitled to rule over the Holy Land.

Conclusions

Some scholars have asserted that both Israelis and Arabs “use (and misuse) the history of Jerusalem to score points.”¹⁹ It is undeniable that centuries have gone by since the first stone was laid on this disputed land, but it is equally true that the history of this land still contributes to reinforcing and determining the national identity of the populations involved in the conflict of the last decades, and for that reason, it cannot be ignored.

This assumption is even more valid for the displaced Palestinians, formally stateless, substantially and ideologically attached to the land. The dispute over the Israel/Palestine land in general, and Jerusalem in particular, is not a religious tantrum, rather a way to win, to enter history, by self-determining itself through the territory.

¹⁸ Yftachel, 2006

¹⁹ Cline, 2004.

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The Third Intifada: a socio-political perspective

By Alessandra Vernile

The recent outbreak of violence in Jerusalem has led to the beginning of a new and intense phase of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After his re-election as Israeli Prime Minister in March, Benjamin Netanyahu pursued along with his government a tougher and more severe policy. After being criticized for his 'soft' position against Palestinians during the previous mandate by extreme right parties, such as Shas and the United Torah Judaism, the new PM's policy calls for a political approach that makes hard to believe that the two-state solution will be considered as the only way to put a full stop to this never ending conflict.

The right-wing coalition will hardly negotiate with the Palestinian counterpart. Likud will recognize Palestine as an independent State only if the Palestinian governments will recognize the existence of the State of Israel. Otherwise, the only way is to follow the line traced by the Jordan option.²⁰ The policy of Likud is now changing, as demonstrated by the last statement of its leader that makes hard to believe that a fast solution to this new phase of the conflict will be found.

In the national political landscape, it seems that Hadash is supporting Netanyahu²¹, but it is hard to think that two different factions such as Likud and the major left-wing coalition will collaborate to find a political solution to this conflict. It is also true that the coalition could split, as I will explain in the next few lines.

If in Israel Netanyahu is changing his alliances, in Palestine Mahmoud Abbas and his party Fatah are losing ground. Following the failure of the

²⁰ The Oslo Accords (1993) marked the first time that the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) formally recognized one another, and publicly committed to negotiate a solution to their decades-long conflict based on territorial compromise. Among Palestinians, supporters of Arafat's Fatah movement accepted Oslo as an unfortunate, but necessary, compromise. But rival groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of

Palestine refused to recognize Israel, and warned that a two-state solution would betray the aspirations of Palestinian refugees to return to land inside Israel lost during the "Nakba" of 1948.

²¹ Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the Likud, has been re-elected on 17 March 2015 for his fourth mandate. He defeated the center-left coalition led by Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni. Source: <http://goo.gl/s5yUaj>.

latest round of peace negotiations, mediated by the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, it seems that Abbas stopped to focus on the national level and moved his attention to a play new role on international level. This has led to a decline of the political consensus among the population and a different role for Hamas. Despite the big steps achieved in the last three years, as the recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer State at the United Nations in 2012, the recognition of the Palestinian State by many European countries, the ratification of the Rome Statute to investigate Israeli war crime against Palestine, and the State visit of Mahmoud Abbas to the Vatican State and the meeting with Pope Francis I, nothing has changed. In addition, the rise of Hamas and the meddling of ISIL can affect the political scenario of Palestine.

The situation has worsened since October 2015, with several attacks on a daily basis. By comparing the two past Intifadas and the current one (although



Source: United Nations Multimedia

many analysts would not call it so), different characteristics come to light. According to the Israeli government, the new wave of attack has been brought about by a statement of Mahmoud Abbas over the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Abbas declared that the Israeli government will allow the Jews to stay in the area of al-Haram ash-Sharif (also known as the Temple Mount), where is located the al-Aqsa Mosque, considered as the third holiest site in Islam.

This new wave of violence shows the weakness of Mahmoud Abbas and of his party Fatah. The loss of a guidance in the conflict highlights how the party is losing its power and how Hamas is acquiring more power, although the control areas of the two parties are now different. Hamas has the control of the Gaza Strip, but it has been almost expelled from the West Bank. Instead of being united, as it happened in the past, Hamas and Fatah are divided more than ever.

At the same time, Netanyahu is leading a new struggle against Palestine, in which all the security measures have been tightened and new check points have been placed around the Old City of Jerusalem. According to Netanyahu, the PNA is now far from being a good interlocutor in the peace process. The threats of an occupation of the West Bank by the Israeli military forces will lead to a new escalation.

Another element of this phase is the involvement of ISIL in the conflict. ISIL considers as an administrative province the Holy City and the Palestinian territories. In this new phase, ISIL claims the paternity of all the terrorist attacks: the aim is to gain local consensus for replacing the Palestinian leadership, which is considered too weak to defeat Israel.

What will be the international consequences of this new phase? If it will not evolve in an armed conflict involving other external actors, the Third Intifada will probably lead to a new round of negotiations in which the Jordan option seems to be the best solution. However, as already mentioned above, this policy seems not to be backed by any of the two main Palestinian political parties.

The loss of a strong guidance in this struggle has brought to a new popular response. The interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict expressed by ISIL can be considered as one of the reasons that has led to a new conception of this fight. Massive media campaign carried out by ISIL, as part of its 'political' program, has affected the young generation living in the 'administrative provinces' of ISIL, in Israel and Palestine. Noteworthy, most of the last attacks were carried out by 13-year-old

boys, and even girls, especially on the Palestinian side. Compared to the past, the people that supported the Second Intifada look now apathetic and pessimistic about the future: instead of continuing the struggle for their land and their recognition, they prefer to move away.

What will happen next is not easy to define. The chance to solve the conflict, or to achieve a solution to the conflict, seems unlikely. The availability of Israeli and Palestinian leaders to discuss again about a possible solution that would satisfy both the population and the political sides is unimaginable. The latest statement of Netanyahu on the holocaust during the 37th Zionist Congress in Jerusalem underlined how his policy is harsher than ever and not compatible with a peaceful solution to the conflict²². During his intervention, the Israeli PM declared that the Holocaust was suggested to the Führer of Germany Adolf Hitler by the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini. Still according to the Israeli Prime Minister, Hitler did not want to kill Jews but just expel them from Europe but the Grand Mufti would have suggested him to burn them, otherwise they would have moved in Palestine. The statement has been immediately condemned by the Israeli historian Dina Porat, from the Yad

²² Source: <http://goo.gl/OPKXCR>.

Vashem²³. She replied that the Grand Mufti played an important role in the Shoah, but he did not convince Hitler to exterminate the Jews. Maybe the aim of Netanyahu was to hold the Grand Mufti, and more in general the Palestinians, responsible for what happened during WWII. This wrong theory about the Holocaust can lead to an escalation and a distance between authorities and populations on both sides. The Palestinians can use this statement to justify their attacks, considered in this way a retaliation to what Israel usually do.

Following Netanyahu's statement, it would be possible the extreme-left coalition, anti-Zionist, to split in two parts: the conservative one and the moderate one. The conservative one will continue to pursue the option of the two-state solution, asking for the evacuation of all the areas occupied by Israel and will continue to support the right to compensation of the Palestinians refugees. This part will continue to ask for an Arab-Jewish cooperation and for the end of the ethnic discrimination.



Source: Israeli Missions around the World

This could probably lead to a collaboration with the center-left party Meretz, which has always asked for a negotiation between the two factions for the creation of two independent states. However, this could open a new controversy inside the Israeli Parliament, if Netanyahu will not withdraw his statement. On the other hand, the moderate side of the party could get closer to Netanyahu and Likud trying to support the new tough policy of the center-right party to obtain the recognition of two different states, pressing especially on the recognition from part of Hamas. Even though Abbas keeps achieving important goals for Palestine, the population has not perceived any change, and this reveals a scarce interest in the domestic political situation.

Even here, the distance between authorities and people is strong. The deterioration of the situation will lead to a change in the Palestinian political arena. Hamas could acquire more support from that part of the population who wants to continue this fight and that has been

²³ Yad Vashem is the World Center for Holocaust Research, Documentation,

Education and Commemoration. Source: <http://goo.gl/jeQD64>.

influenced by the strong media campaign pursued by ISIL. Another part of the population asks for a new leadership of the PNA implying that Mahmoud Abbas should resign.

From the Palestinian side, it would be plausible to resort to an armed Intifada. This phase of the conflict could relaunch the image of Fatah and lead to a renewal of the inner structure of the party. While in Israel this new wave of violence is affecting especially the political sphere, in Palestine is the young population to constitute the engine of future change. The old and vintage Abbas' policy will be more and more contested by the generation of young adults who cannot move from their place, and this will probably create

a new movement to contrast the one of Fatah.

The lack of a strong political presence in Palestine could contribute to increase ISIL external influence, especially on the brainwashed youngest population who could identify in ISIL a legitimate leader. If ISIL will expand until including Palestine, the Middle East would completely its shape. Israeli government would not have to face a political conflict but a real armed one. The counterpart would not be willing to discuss the possibility to find a solution. In that case, the international coalition would be forced to intervene, exacerbating the consequences of a new war on international scale.

Conclusions

The international community is currently focused on the war in Syria, the first issue on the international security agenda, which sets what is happening between Israelis and Palestinians on the side of the current international politics. The point is whether the international community will remain handicapped in front of such a situation or will deduce any solutions with some soul-searching approach.

Although domestic politics seems to have come to a halt, Mahmoud Abbas has publicly stated that they had nothing to gain from these incidents and, in fact, does not want to yield to the will of some Palestinian groups, such as Islamic Jihad, because this would harm the future of the PNA. Hamas might be rather interested in triggering a new round of violence, in order to divert attention from the stalemate that has dragged on for months in the internal negotiations with the PNA for the creation of a new national unity government and the internal problems of the Gaza Strip, in particular from the five bombers allegedly Hamas members and responsible for the murder of the Henkin couple. Without having provoked the violence directly, Israel could benefit from this new situational explosion of Palestinian internal politics and is surely going to grab this opportunity to further tighten its grip on Eastern Jerusalem, where stands the Temple Mount, and more importantly the Aqsa mosque, considered the third holiest site by Muslims after Mecca and Medina and 'casus belli' of the current violence. In order to defuse the tensions, the U.S. Secretary of State Kerry has suggested an agreement intend to be signed by Netanyahu and King Abdullah, entrusting the control of the area to the last one.

We must not forget the symbolic value and the identity that this mosque has for many young Palestinians, who express their anger against the Israeli government that tends to make increasingly stringent rules trying to extend its control over the area of the Temple Mount. Since the beginning of the second Intifada, Israel began building the long barriers to defend its colonies, the settlements built in the West Bank and the outskirts of Jerusalem from the end of the conflict in 1948 to the present day. The Israelis built it to guard their people and the land they think they deserve on religious ground, whilst Palestinians deny this right, claiming that the settlements were established on lands that belong to them.

We have enough to conclude that the nature of violence in Jerusalem is by no means the product of a cluster of unexplained factors, such as the cruelty of either side or a deep irrationality, but the result of a weighted calculation of the opportunities in order to change the status quo, whichever is offered to the various political actors.

To address the current situation Israel has three options: the first is to maintain the status quo, although resorting to violence and insecurity could imply an increase in the level of repression; the second option is to implement a plan-negotiation to separate Israelis from Palestinians and create a Palestinian State, however unlikely this solution might seem; the third option is the expansion of settlements to put under a single political establishment, in which recognize equal rights and duties to all the residents, a path rather uphill. A fact of life that seems impractical is the prospect of peace between Israelis and Palestinians based on two-states solution, a formula repeated for years, while Israeli settlements keep on growing in the occupied Palestinian territories and the alternative to Hamas in Gaza takes on more and more the disturbing characteristics of the Salafist militants group, who re-modelled themselves on Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and his army.

Diplomacy is powerless and distant from the one that had inspired the Oslo I Accord, immortalized by the memorable handshake, on the lawns of the White House, between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat at the presence of Bill Clinton, at the time president of the United States.

The result is that those options became even more entangled, and generated new crises breaking the boundaries between Israel and the PNA about the future status of Jerusalem, now the focal point of the 'Intifada of knives'.

Moreover, the escalation of hostilities between Palestinians and Israelis is part of a particularly hot situation for the whole Middle East region. In Syria, Russia has gone into action alongside the regime and this is likely to upset the fate of the civil war and the intervention of the U.S.-led international coalition fighting ISIL, which at the same time threatens Israel on the border with Egypt, with the aim to gain the grip on the heated Sinai. Then there is Iran, at which the Shin Bet, the Israeli internal secret service, points the finger as jointly responsible for the wave of attacks against Israeli settlement.

Despite the flow of arms from the United States to protect Israel's security, would the Third Intifada continue? The escalating anger and violence could result in a regional isolation of Israel, which would be let to face with the danger of ISIL and the nightmare of Iran.

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