BETWEEN TERRORISM AND CIVIL WAR

Definitions of the Al-Aqsa intifada have ranged from being part of the global war on terrorism, an asymmetric inter-state war, to being part of the on-going Palestinian struggle for national liberation. All have validity as explanatory paradigms, but equally, none can capture fully the dynamics of this conflict.

By constrast, this volume seeks to explore whether the current violence, its origins and dynamics can best be understood as a manifestation of civil war. In so doing, it explores the following questions: how the use of violence by all parties has been conditioned and or constrained by the domestic factors pertaining to their societies; how external actors have dealt with the violence internally, and how, in turn, this has impacted on their relations with Israel and the Palestinians; and what does the conduct of the Al-Aqsa intifada suggest about the broader issue of state boundaries and state legitimacy in the contemporary Middle East.

This is a special issue of the journal Civil Wars.

Clive Jones is Senior Lecturer in the School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds and a fellow of the British Middle East Studies association. His publications include Israel—Challenges to Democracy, Identity and the State (with Emma C Murphy, 2002), International Security in a Global Age (co-edited with Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, 2000) and Britain and the Yemen Civil War 1962–65 (2004). Ami Pedahzur is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science, and the Deputy Chair of the National Security Studies Center at the University of Haifa, Israel. His main fields of interest are terrorism, the democratic response to extremism and violence, and political extremism in Israel. His books include Political Parties and Terrorist Groups (with Leonard Weinberg, 2003), and The Israeli Response to Jewish Extremism and Violence—Defending Democracy (2002).
BETWEEN TERRORISM AND CIVIL WAR

the Al-Aqsa Intifada

Edited by Clive Jones and Ami Pedahzur
Biographical Notes

Clive Jones is senior lecturer in the School for Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds. He has published widely in the field of Middle East policies and security studies and is author of Soviet Jewish Aliyah (Frank Cass, 1996), co-author of Israel: the Challenge to Democracy, Identity and the State (Routledge, 2002 with Emma Murphy) and co-editor of International Security in a Global Age (Frank Cass, 2000 with Caroline Kennedy Pipe) <email: iiscaj@leeds.ac.uk>.

Ami Pedahzur is senior lecturer in the Department of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel. His most recent publications deal with political extremism in the Jewish state, political violence and democratic responses to violence and extremists.

Arie Perliger is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel. His MA thesis dealt with political socialisation and democratic education. The focus of his current research is terrorism and counter-terrorism. <email: pedahzur@poli.haifa.ac.il>.

As'ad Ghanem is associate professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Haifa, Israel. His work has covered issues such as Palestinian political orientations, the establishment and political structure of the Palestinian Authority, and majority-minority politics within Israel. His publications are numerous and include The Palestinian Regime: A Partial Democracy (Sussex Academic Press, 2001). <email: ahlamasad@yahoo.com>.

Aziz Khayed is an independent researcher from Ramallah. He holds an MA degree in political science from the University of Jordan, Amman.

Karin Aggestam is a research fellow at the Department of Political Science, University of Lund, Sweden. She has written several articles and books on negotiation, mediation, conflict theory and the Middle East peace process. Recent articles have been published in Mediterranean Politics (2002) and International Peacekeeping (2003). <email: karin.aggestam@svet.lu.se>.

Joseph Nevo is a professor of Middle Eastern history in the Department of Middle East History, University of Haifa, Israel. He has written
extensively on the history and politics of the region, with a particular emphasis on Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Among his many publications are *King Abdallah and Palestine: A Territorial Ambition* (Macmillan, 1996), and co-editor of *Jordan in the Middle East: The Making of a Pivotal State 1948–1988* (Frank Cass, 1994). <email: jncvo@research.haifa.ac.il>.


**Mats Wärn** is a doctoral candidate and teacher in the Department of Political Science, University of Stockholm, Sweden. His research to date has focused upon the integration of Hizballah into the political fabric of Lebanon and the wider Middle East. He served with United Nations forces in South Lebanon between 1992 and 1993 and in Bosnia during 1994. <email: mats.warn@statsvet.su.se>.
A Framework for Analysis

CLIVE JONES

It has become almost an axiom among keen observers of the current violence between Israel and the Palestinians to understand the present through the prism of the past. Following the horrific Seder massacre in Netanya on 28 March 2002, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon addressed the nation in sombre tones, and spoke of the Jewish state being at war with the Palestinians. The emotions stirred up by his speech reminded many of the national mood on the eve of the June 1967 War, when, faced with the animus of its surrounding Arab neighbours, Israel’s very existence appeared to be at stake. This call to the barricades has a powerful resonance among a polity where defence has been the dominant totem around which national life has come to be organised.¹ For others, the map for reading the contours of what has come to be known euphemistically as the Al-Aqsa intifada is to be found in the events of 1947-48 when two communities battled for political ascendancy and territorial hegemony over the territory that was British Mandate Palestine.²

The comparisons, to be sure, are often disturbing in their exactitude. The indiscriminate use of terror bombings, particularly in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem, was a prominent feature of the internecine violence between Palestinian and Jew between November 1947 and May 1948. Professor Yoav Gelber defined this period as a ‘civil war’ between Jews and Palestinians for control of land and resources, albeit one that ‘took place under British sovereignty and in the presence of British troops’. He goes on to note:

Throughout the civil war, [the] characteristic tactics were urban guerrilla raids or shooting attacks on isolated rural settlements, and ambushes on the opponents’ transportation lines. No territory could be gained – even temporarily – and decisive determination of an outcome of hostilities was impossible. Lacking proper objectives, the antagonists carried out their attacks on non-combatant targets, subjecting civilians to deprivation, intimidation and harassment. Consequently, the weaker, less cohesive and backward Palestinian society collapsed under a not so heavy strain.³

Then, as now, such violence, often indiscriminate in its choice of targets, is seen as a strategic threat to Israel since at its heart lies the atavistic fear that
such violence denies the legality, if not the reality, of the other. The contemporary refrain from Israeli politicians and the international community that the elected 
*Rais* of the Palestine National Authority (PNA), Yasser Arafat, must do more to control the Islamist militant groups Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, again, finds an uneasy echo in events over half a century ago. As leader of the pre-state *Yishuv* – the Jewish community in Palestine – David Ben-Gurion had a tense relationship with members of the right-wing militias *Irgun Zvai Leumi* and the *Lehi*. The extent to which Ben-Gurion was able and willing to control these two groups whose terror activities brought heavy retribution on the *Yishuv* from the Mandate authorities was only resolved to his satisfaction with the departure of the British Army in May 1948. Therein, perhaps, lies the moral in dealing with the present violence.

However prescient, analogies remain imprecise guides to understanding the present violence. Unlike the internecine conflict of 1947–48, a state of Israel exists and has recognised formally, under the 1993 Oslo accords, the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. In this regard, the violence occasioned (though not caused) by the insensitive visit of Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount/Harem al-Sharif in Jerusalem on 28 September 2000 appeared in concord with an inter-state conflict, albeit conducted between two parties whose military capabilities remain vastly unequal. Such a view, while parsimonious in explanation, denies the central role that borders, or rather the lack of them, play in how one can or should interpret the conflict. Israel, alone among the member states of the United Nations (UN), has never formally declared the exact location of the borders of the state, a legacy of the competing political agendas within the broad scope of Zionism.

The Palestinian terror attacks have now forced the issue of borders to the fore of Israel’s political agenda. While justified by the exigencies of securing the mass of the Israeli population inside the old Green Line, Israel’s construction of a security fence just beyond its pre-1967 boundary with the West Bank exposes political cleavages that have always simmered between Israelis and Palestinians and among Israelis themselves.

For the Palestinians, the erection of a security fence is but another example of how Israel tramples on their sovereign rights as land is confiscated unilaterally beyond the Green Line. For the settlers, the fence represents the emergence of a de facto border that denies legitimacy to their eschatological claims to ‘Judea and Samaria’ as the state comes to sacrifice their world-view by reference to a casuistry that denies the very essence of what a Jewish state should be.

For the settlers, the security fence implies the acceptance of a border with its concomitant demands on sovereign recognition of a foreign entity.¹
For them, ironically, viewing the conflict as a civil war, rather than just part of a broader global campaign against terrorism supports their world-view as it at least acknowledges that control over land and resources remains a contested issue, and that Palestinian claims to the self-same space can and should be challenged.

The Palestinians share the same sentiment over the erection of a border fence with the settlers but for profoundly different reasons. Aside from the expropriation of land, any border fence adds to the economic distress of Palestinians unable to travel into Israel proper in search of menial employment, while settlers will be allowed to exit and enter as they please along specially-constructed routes. Adding to their frustration, no plans have been announced for any of the settlements to be dismantled or abandoned.

From a Palestinian perspective, little incentive therefore exists to support a cessation of violence against Israel, or indeed to restrict attacks only to the symbols of Israel’s presence in the Occupied Territories, be they settlements or military targets. In this regard, the Palestinian strategy in this ‘war’ has proven to be a doubled-edged sword. On the one hand, attacks inside the pre-1967 border have, to use the parlance of nuclear strategy, imposed a balance of terror, however grotesque or inhumane this may appear to the outside observer. On the other, the retribution exacted by Israel has been costly, both in terms of lives lost, property demolished and infrastructure destroyed. This cycle of violence between two national movements appears more akin to an inter-, rather than intra-state conflict. Indeed, Israel’s Operation ‘Defensive Shield’ was defined as a calibrated response designed to root out the ‘terrorist infrastructure’ in Palestinian-controlled territory. Defining the conflict as a war on terrorism, an asymmetric inter-state war, a struggle for national liberation or a civil war therefore tells us more about the political position of those offering such definitions, than it does about the nature of the conflict itself. All have validity as explanatory paradigms, but equally, none can capture fully the dynamics of this conflict.

While conscious of such limitations, this collection frames its analyses of the Al-Aqsa intifada within the construct of civil war. With the end of the Cold War, much has been made of the shift in the very nature of ‘civil conflict’. Removed from the exigencies of superpower competition, civil war has become ‘neo-medieval’, where gratuitous violence in failing or failed states is motivated by criminal rewards rather than any overt ideological, let alone political, agenda. The extent to which the Al-Aqsa intifada correlates to either an ‘old’ or ‘new’ definition of a civil war or internecine conflict requires, in the first instance, an elaboration of those self-same definitions.
THE AL-AQSA INTIFADA AS CIVIL WAR

It has been argued that the ‘civil wars’ of the contemporary age are both quantitatively and qualitatively different from the ‘civil wars’ of the past. ‘Old’ civil wars were defined by a clear clash of competing ideological viewpoints seeking to impose their respective normative values over the same society or ethnic group in a given geographical space. Sometimes these wars attracted outside intervention but this did not change the essential dynamic of the conflict. The Spanish Civil War, the Chinese Civil War, the Greek Civil War, and even the Korean and Vietnam wars all exhibited to a greater or lesser degree, such variables. By contrast, the new civil wars, what Donald Snow has referred to as ‘Uncivil Wars’, contain little that is ideological and, by inference, noble.

Oft-cited examples are the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia where the simple pursuit of private gain in the form of controlling access to the raw materials – be it diamonds, timber or other natural commodities – of a failed or failing state deny any ideological motivation to the actions of the protagonists beyond pure greed. Such perceptions are merely reinforced by the arbitrary and savage nature of the violence meted out, including the horrific spectacle of forced amputations on a whole population irrespective of age, race or gender. In short, the main actors in the new civil wars are motivated by little more than greed, with little or no recourse to the need to ameliorate some collective grievance, be it ethnic or ideological.

This clear dichotomy between old and new civil wars has, however, come to be challenged. Stathis Kalyvas has noted that those who impute little political or ideological motivation to combatants in ‘new’ civil wars have failed to appreciate fully the diversity of factors that motivate and propel protagonists to engage in the most savage forms of violence. Kalyvas highlights the work of scholars such as Paul Richards who, contrary to the popular image of the rebels in Sierra Leone as a bunch of ill disciplined thugs bent purely upon terrorising the local populace for personal gain, noted the high level of political consciousness that underpinned their action. As Kalyvas notes, ‘Their ideological motivations are simply not always visible to observers looking for “Western” patterns of allegiance and discourse. They make the flawed assumption that organisations using religious idioms and local cultural practices to mobilise people – rather than easily recognisable universalistic appeals – lack any ideology.’

The ethnocentric prism through which the current taxonomy of ‘civil wars’ is constructed is therefore flawed according to Kalyvas because it simplifies historical precedent and contemporary patterns of civil war. For example, ‘warlords’ are not the latest manifestation of the new civil wars but existed previously in Lebanon and China. Moreover, despite the pejorative connotations of the term, ‘warlords levy taxes, administer justice, maintain
some degree of order, and generally assume the burdens of government in the areas that they control."

In short, the apparent transitory nature of groups that is so often portrayed in the literature concerning 'new' civil wars is often at variance with a reality Western politicians cannot, or will not recognise. This is not to excuse the extreme forms of violence and brutality that such groups inflict upon defenceless populations. Rather it is to highlight that while Western moral sensibilities determine only madness in the behaviour of rebel groups such as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, method can and does determine their bloody actions. The forced amputation of women and children in rural areas between 1995 and 1996 was seen as a form of particularly savage barbarism. In fact, it was a vicious attempt to prevent people coerced into the rebel movement returning to their villages to harvest crops. Once word spread that the rebels would forcibly amputate the limbs of defectors, people gave up trying to return and remained beholden to, if not captives of, the rebel agenda.

To date, the Al-Aqsa intifada has yet to exhibit the brutal extremes of the civil conflicts in West Africa, though incidents such as the lynching of two Israeli reserve soldiers in Ramallah in October 2000 by a Palestinian mob suggest that no conflict that is internecine in nature remains immune from such visceral spectacles. Following on from the arguments of Kalyvas, it is a conflict that demonstrates more continuity than perhaps change in the nature of civil war. It should be noted from the outset that the very term, intifada remains a contested issue.

Aside from its first four months, the current violence bears little resemblance to the mass street demonstrations and stone-throwing that marked the intifada of 1987 to 1993. Indeed, the proliferation of militias under the auspices, though never the full control, of the PNA has resulted in the conflict developing through several consecutive stages: popular uprising in Palestinian areas ‘A’; attacks upon Israeli military targets and settlements in the Occupied Territories and East Jerusalem; attacks upon Israeli civilian targets within the Israel’s pre-1967 border; Israel’s massive military response in areas A and targeted attacks on individuals, infrastructure and symbols deemed responsible for the ongoing violence. To be sure, these periods are not mutually exclusive. For example, targeted assassination has been a constant tool of Israeli policy irrespective of the wider ramifications that this policy invariably incurs. For example, the killing of Israel’s tourism minister, Rehavam Ze’evi, was a direct response from members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to the killing of their leader, Abu Ali Mustafa.

Like ‘old’ civil wars, this conflict has clear ideological and political underpinnings. For the PNA, ending Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land in the West Bank and Gaza remains the common denominator that unites all Palestinian factions. Yet the very fact that we can write of Palestinian
6 THE AL-AQSA INTIFADA

factions also highlights the often fragmented nature of the PNA. Arafat’s
incompetent and often corrupt authority has allowed a myriad of groups and
militias to emerge under enigmatic leaders able and willing to mobilise
support for anti-Israel activities.

Until his arrest in April 2002, the best-known of these leaders was
Marwan Bargouti, the self-proclaimed leader of the *Tanzim* militia in
Ramallah. While Bargouti was at least nominally associated with Arafat’s
own Fatah movement, his appeal on the Palestinian street and the increased
daring of *Tanzim* attacks suggest a comparison with a type of warlordism
emerging. With the infrastructure of the PNA devastated by the ferocity of
Operation ‘Defensive Shield’ in April 2002, warlordism, defined here as the
appeal of a strong individual within geographical confines, appears set to
continue to define the contours of Palestinian politics.

If the emergence of warlords at least defines part of the fragmented
Palestinian approach towards this conflict, definitions for Israelis remain
more oblique yet no less important. Premier Ariel Sharon’s view that
reaching an accommodation with the Palestinians is impossible until ‘they
are badly beaten’ carries an emotive appeal for a nation that perceives itself
to be under siege. 12 The proliferation of car stickers in the spring of 2002
declaring ‘Brother, be strong’, was an open manifestation of an ill-defined,
yet still tangible fear across Israeli society that their very existence was in
peril. The spate of suicide or ‘homicide’ bombings is seen as strategic threat
since, at their very core, lies the denial of Jews as a nation to live in their
own sovereign space even if Israel were to withdraw fully from the
territories captured in and occupied after June 1967.

Such a position sees terrorism as a manifestation of civil war since claim
is made upon all the land and merely serves to act as a rationale for those
on both sides who oppose real territorial compromise on the basis of
ideology, religion, strategy or a combination of all three. Behind such public
expressions of social solidarity, Israelis have difficulty in defining this
conflict, something that negates the formulation and implementation of
coherent policy options. The recent furore over the construction of the
‘security fence’ is the most recent example. As Ze’ev Sternhall has noted,
‘The less a society is convinced of its moral rightness, the less certain it is
about the aims of the war that has been forced upon it by its rulers – and the
more it needs propaganda, pressures and threats.’ 13

Because terrorism remains decentralised and ad hoc, the coherence of
society based around a defined, existential threat has come to be questioned.
Dr Yechiel Klar of Tel Aviv University has defined the conflict as one of
‘Privatised War’. He notes:

`Every individual remains exposed to his own private risk, without a
national framework in whose name the citizens fight, or which


protects us. There is a sense of the privatization of fear, not of any
danger to the nation's existence. In war, there is a goal that unifies; in
our current situation, there is no shared collective goal. [Operation]
Defensive Shield was among other things an attempt to create a sense
of war, but it was a fleeting episode and the attempt did not really
work.\textsuperscript{14}

The use of terror in this inter-communal war contains therefore an essential
paradox. Conventional interstate wars can threaten the survival of the state
as well as the people. But the very idea of the all-powerful state was a
psychological bulwark for the citizen. In the present conflict, the wave of
suicide bombings does not by itself endanger the physical existence of the
state, but it does threaten the existence of each individual. It has become a
war which has exposed the limits of state power against the fragmentary
nature of the PNA, its warlords, and among a Palestinian people who feel
they have little to lose.

Simply put, a cleavage exists between description of the conflict and
prescriptive measures required to ameliorate its worst excesses. The conflict
exhibits clear patterns associated with civil violence but Israel’s response
has varied from treating the violence as simply a manifestation of
criminality, to being a brazen attempt to embroil Israel in a wider \textit{inter}-state
conflict. Conspicuous by its absence has been any appreciation in the
Israeli, or indeed Palestinian, literature of this conflict in terms of an intra-
state conflict with acts of terrorism being its most public manifestation.

It is this particular aspect of the conflict that this collection seeks to
address. It deliberately eschews a hard and fast theoretical framework in
favour of an approach that embraces conceptual flexibility. It examines not
only the internal dynamics that have determined Palestinian and Israeli
attitudes and responses to the current violence but also the response of
surrounding Arab states to a conflict that has posed serious questions
regarding regime legitimacy and stability. Bearing in mind this broad
conceptual approach, these essays aim to examine the following themes:

1. The extent to which this conflict can or should be considered a civil war
or variants thereof.

2. How the use of violence by all parties been conditioned and/or
constrained by the domestic factors pertaining to their societies.

3. How external actors have dealt with the violence internally and how, in
turn, this has impacted upon their relations with Israel and the
Palestinians.

4. What does the conduct and scope of the Al-Aqsa intifada suggest about
the broader issue of state boundaries and state legitimacy in the Middle
East?
5. As a civil conflict, does the Al-Aqsa intifada represent a micro 'clash of civilizations' as well as a clash of national identities?

The above themes are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, some of the issues raised will be more appropriate to particular issue areas or case studies than others. Indeed, it is the intention of the editors to encourage as wide-ranging a debate as possible. By examining the Al-Aqsa intifada as at least constituting a manifestation of a civil war, it is hoped that this collection will contribute to a broader understanding of the role that internecine violence now plays in shaping the scope and direction of both regional and global politics.

NOTES

1. See the interview by Lally Weymouth with Ariel Sharon in Newsweek, 1391/13, 1 April 2002, pp.34-5.
7. Mark A. Heller 'Operation "Defensive Wall": A Change in Israeli Strategy?', Tel Aviv Notes (Tel Aviv University – Jaffee Centre for Strategic Studies/Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies) No.34, 4 April 2002.
10. Ibid. p.105.