



Political Islam Online

The Religious Transformation of the Palestinian Fight



Reading *Nidal Al-Maghrebi's* report from *Gaza* today about a Hamas fighter brought into focus the unspoken and often neglected reality of the fanatically religious transformation of the Palestinian fighters. It is not the ferocity of the battles that make this stage in the conflict more dangerous. Rather, it is the ideological makeover of the fighters that brings chills to most observers analyzing the deteriorating situation. It is ironic to refer almost nostalgically to the days of the intifada when Yasser Arafat was in control and Hillary Clinton placed her now famous kiss on the cheek of his unveiled Christian wife.

Al-Maghrebi recounts the journey account of *Abu Muhammad* as he shouldered his weapon, said farewell to his wife and six children and went to confront the Israeli tanks and planes. In response to his family's objections, he simply said: "Our inability to defeat Israel is not a reason to surrender." He added: "My children and wife are very dear to me... but my reward in heaven and towards my country are dearer." *Al-Maghrebi* begins his story by explaining that for Israel *Abu Muhammad* and his companions are terrorists who hate the Jews, while the fighter considers himself on a divine mission to save his people from the misery inflicted upon them as refugees during the past sixty years.

The writer estimates that there are more than twenty thousand like *Abu-Muhammad* in Gaza. He adds that, with a population of one and a half million living in poor dilapidated conditions in camps, it is easy to understand why it takes very little persuasion for many of them to find a religious motive for sacrificing themselves to kill Israelis. As the psychologist *Fadl Abu Hayn* explains: "the Muslim fighter has two incentives...the first is religious in nature...a reward from God... and the other is social...the appreciation of those being defended." The religious call, many observers believe, was born out of desperation and was an insignificant dimension under Arafat. Today, although Hamas is still disorganized and lacks resources, it has become the *Suni* equivalent of the *Shi'a Hizbullah*.

Abu Muhammad, who escaped from the latest Israeli raid with a broken arm, continued: "If we die before liberating our land, we would not have surrendered; we must show our children that weakness is not an excuse for not fighting." His wife sitting next to him and trying to control her tears replied: "I know that Jihad is a religious duty, but we need you...I need you and your children need you too."

There is no doubt that the secular/political nature of the Palestinian confrontation with Israel is being replaced by a more religious orientation that did not exist under Arafat. Those, such as *Osama bin Laden* and some of the religious conservatives in Israel, who wanted to portray the Palestinian problem as a religious war are, unfortunately, seeing their wish fulfilled in Gaza.

Source: Middle East Online – Nidal Al-Maghrebi – Date: 3/4/2008
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