

Palestinian Martyrdom Operations (*Al-Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiya*) from an Israeli Perspective

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Abstract

The current essay explores the Palestinian martyrdom operations (*Al-Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiya*) from an Israeli Perspective. Israelis characterized the national resistance of the occupation as terrorism and consider all Palestinians as terrorists as well. In spite of the fact that Palestinian martyrdom operations are legitimate means of resistance of the occupation; they are characterized in most cases as terrorists operations. Israel officials' admission realized that is not possible to prevent the carrying out of martyrdom operations, which considered a strategic weapon with no eminent solution. Although there were Israeli voices calling for more drastic and severe measures to curb the martyrdom operations, there were courageous voices that called on their Israeli government to examine its excessive policies against the Palestinians that breed martyrdom operations.

Key words: *Martyrdom, Suicide, Istishhady, Resistance, Terrorism.*

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“I say to the world which is fighting Palestinians and supporting Zionists with money and weapons if martyrdom is terrorism then we are terrorists; if defense of honor is extremism then we are extremists; if jihad against enemies is fundamentalism, then we are fundamentalists”. The Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) Said Al-Hutari, Tel Aviv operation, June 1, 2001.

“It has become a duty to resist the occupation, resistance was never terrorism, it isn't; resistance is to defend your legitimate rights by several methods including martyrdom operations”. The father of the Palestinian female suicide martyr (Istishhadiya) Ayat Al-Akhras, Jerusalem operation, March 29, 2002

The question of Palestinian martyrdom operations (*Al-Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiya*) preoccupied the different Israeli circles; the most experienced intelligence departments and research centers were completely preoccupied by this phenomenon of Palestinian suicide martyrs (*Istishhadiyin*) in order to try to solve its riddle, eliminate it or reduce it.

Between April 1993 and February 2008, the Palestinian resistance factions were able to implement more than 200 qualitative martyrdom operations that rocked Israel and raised a large scale wave of reactions locally and internationally; they constituted a turning point in the history of the Palestinian struggle; it is rare to find a similar phenomenon to this one with this huge number of Palestinian suicide martyrs (*Istishhadiyin*) in any other place in the world. The main goal of this essay is to highlight the Israelis perspectives in the Palestinian Martyrdom Operations (*Al-Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiya*).

Sociologically, one of the important characteristics of culture is that the cultural form the thought and perception which are linked with the social positions and standards in the society while what might come out of the elements in some cultures might not appear in other cultures. This is due to the fact that the same historical factors were not repeated in both. Members in the same society who have the same culture differ in their reactions towards societal positions and issues. The Israelis' perceptions about Palestinian martyrdom operations are different from those of the Palestinians. In spite of the fact that Palestinian martyrdom operations are legitimate means of resistance of occupation, they are characterized in most cases as terrorists operations. The Israelis and the forces supporting them view these operations as terrorist, suicides, fanatics, killers,

criminals while Palestinians consider them a legitimate national struggle and a legitimate right to terminate occupation.

In this context, Israel was ready with the substitute interpretation which pulls from these operations the characteristics of national resistance of occupation and describes it as terrorism and considers all Palestinians as terrorists as well. Then the organized extermination of the Palestinian people at the hands of Israelis becomes a war against terrorism; however, the truth is that Israel this raging entity was originally established on a sea of Palestinian blood in 1948; Israel in the first place is a terrorist made state; the mass massacres which it committed and is still committing in Dir Yassin, Kufr Qasim, Sabra and Shatella, Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron, Jenin camp, old city in Nablus, Rafah, Khan Yunis, Balata, Askar refugee camps make the Palestinian people the terror itself. Consequently, the martyrdom operations are considered a small drop in the ocean of the atrocious Israeli operations against Palestinians (Hussien, 2003). Regarding this point we should take into consideration that society and its culture define the event, probably not the psychological aspects of the suicide. The society decides what is honorable or not? Who are the suicide bombers? Martyrs? Terrorists? (Leenaars & Wenckstern, 2004).

The Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) Said Al-Hutari Tel Aviv operation on 1 June 2001 wrote in his will, “I say to the world which is fighting Palestinians and supporting Zionists with money and weapons if martyrdom is terrorism then we are terrorists; if defense of honor is extremism then we are extremists; if jihad against enemies is fundamentalism, then we are fundamentalists”.

As for the families of the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin), which I concluded from the field interviews, the father of the Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) Mohammed Hassanein, Tel Aviv dual operation on 21 October 2002 said in the same context, “I say to the Zionist enemy that my son is not a terrorist but they are the terrorists and killers; Sharon and his cabinet are fully responsible for all what is taking place because their massacres and terrorism have reflected on all; we are humans and not a flock of goats; they kill every day new victims of children, women and elderly”.

In another case the mother of the Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) Samer Hammad, Tel Aviv operation on 17 April 2006, she said, “My son is not a terrorist; what he did is a heroic act and it is the responsibility of the occupation; I say to the world that occupation is the reason; it does not exclude anybody from its crimes and massacres; my son’s operation does not deserve condemnation but respect and appreciation; we will not be afraid of the occupier and its punishment; the world has to stop taking sides with the occupier; we will not allow anyone to describe Samer as terrorist”.

The Palestinian martyrdom operations caused a large scale controversy in the Israeli security and civil milieus making ministers and high ranking officials in the army wonder about the extent of Israeli ability to last and they considered that the independence war was not over yet.

The Israel officials’ admission indicates that it is not possible to prevent the carrying out of martyrdom operations, in a categorical admission of their incompetence. These operations influenced all aspects of life in Israel starting from the panic which horrified the Israelis in not wandering in public places, taking public transportations, or going to restaurants and night clubs. The percentage of reverse immigration from Israel has risen for the sake of stability and security (Sawahil, 2003).

Ze'ev Schiff, the military analyst in Haaretz newspaper considered the martyrdom operations as a strategic threat with no eminent solution; he indicated that it is a harsh complicated strategic problem, and Israel does not currently have a practical solution to this strategic threat. He agreed with the former director of the Israeli Intelligence Department (Shabbak) Ya’cob Perry who said, “It is the only strategic threat against the State of Israel” (Haaretz, 19/8/2002).

The Israeli political and military leadership does not find a solution to the threats of Palestinian martyrdom operations and it feels embarrassed because of this. The former Israeli Prime Minister Isaac Rabin summarized this incompetence by saying, “What can we do before young men who desire to die”. As for the Israeli police general Inspector Shlomo Aharoniski, he said, “It is not logical to assure our public that we are able to prevent the carrying out of more operations of this kind”. The Minister of Internal Security Ozi Landau said, “We are worried from the suicide bombers threats; we promise our public to take all the required security measures to stop the terrorist

operations of Palestinians; but we are not deceiving ourselves and we are not misguiding the public; we cannot put an end, unfortunately, to these operations; it is possible that there will not be a perfect solution to this problem; the large scale military campaigns and the firm path did not stop these operations” (Amir, 2003).

The martyrdom operations were actually capable of destroying the basis of theory of balance of powers after the suicide martyrs proved that their arm is also capable of reaching sensitive places in the Israeli depth using another kind of balance of horror (Jum’a, 2005).

The qualitative martyrdom operations represented shocking surprises to the Israeli enemy whether in their style or outcomes in different areas. The lesson from these operations was not limited to the size of human losses inflicted on the enemy only but also the scope of the negative spirituals impact it has on its victims and non victims. Although Israel possesses modern and sophisticated military arsenal, its various security services were ineffective in halting martyrdom operations. This was expressed by the suicide martyr (Istishhady) Suliman Tahayna, who carried out a suicide martyrdom operation in Jerusalem on 5 November 1998. Defying Israeli security forces, he said in his will: “If the Palestinian National Authority, Israel, and Clinton can stop me from meeting my Lord and carrying out my martyrdom operation, I tell them go ahead”.

This phenomenon grow among the Palestinian youth following the declaration of Hamas and Jihad leaders that the numbers of suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) are far more than what the movements could cope with. The engagement of Fatah movement along with what it represents of weight and potentials in the Palestinian street into the area of martyrdom operations was a strong shock to the Israelis following the increase of the option of resistance and drop of the share of settlement.; moreover, the Palestinian leftist factions (Popular and Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine) were involved in these operations. This constituted a new challenge for the Israeli security departments which used to believe that the religious motive alone was responsible for the recruitment of suicide martyrs (Amir, 2003).

This proves that the war between Islam and Judaism is not religious. The Palestinian people and resistance factions do not fight the Jews because they are Jews, but because they are occupiers and usurpers. If those occupiers were Muslims, the Palestinian people would also fight them. In this regard, the Israeli writer Aariah Shabit states that,

“The martyrdom operations proved themselves as a very successful weapon in the war against Israel”. He adds that, “There is not any legendary dimension in this explanation; these operations come with political motives since they proved their effectiveness and not with religious ones; they commit suicide because suicide is a tool that enables them to face the absolute superiority of Israel”. However, we should not ignore the suicide martyrs doctrinal environment and the force of faith motive in self sacrifice since it cannot be imagined that a person commits self sacrifice without having religious and faith motives. Moreover, it was found out from the wills of the suicide martyrs from the Palestinian leftist factions who are not really religious as they appeared on tape that they were wrapped by the flag of “No God But Allah; Mohammed is God’s Prophet” and they hold a Holy Quran next to a rifle; they would also perform prayer; their wills are characterized by Islamic address”. In the same point, high ranking official, in the Israeli intelligence Shaul Landau says in this connection that, “We are paying the price for your religious awakening; there is a worrying phenomenon which is the growing phenomenon of going back to religion among Palestinians” (Amir, 2003).

Berko & Erez (2005) reinforced this proposition after their study concluded that in the Palestinian-Israeli context, both secular and religious militant organizations have invoked Islamic texts and symbols on martyrdom and jihad to motivate individuals, and to justify their recruiting and dispatching suicide bombers. In the same point, Kimhi and Even (2004) concluded that the motives behind the Palestinian martyrdom operations were religious, patriotic, and national in addition to other motives like the desire for revenge and Palestinian faction’s exploitation of young people to carry out martyrdom operations.

When women carried out this kind of operations, it constituted another challenge to the Israeli security establishments which realized that they were facing a phenomenon in which all the Palestinian people became young men and women looking for someone who would help him in carrying out these operations after they were fed up with the occupation which made him reach to a point in which they had to make grave sacrifices of lives in order to attain freedom and live decently (Mustafa, 2003; Sawahil, 2003; Jum’a, 2005).

In her will, Darene Abu Aisha who implemented the suicide martyrdom operation at Maccabim settlement checkpoint near Ramallah on 27 February 2002 said, “Because

the role of the Muslim Palestinian woman is equal to that of our mujahidin brothers, I wholeheartedly offer my self for God's sake to retaliate for corpses of our martyred mujahidin, in revenge for the sanctity of our religion and mosques, sacredness of Al Aqsa mosque and Houses of God which were turned into bars in which all that has been forbidden by God (obscenities) are practiced in defiance of our religion and the message of our Prophet Mohammed May God's Peace and Prayer Be Upon Him. The role of the Palestinian woman is no longer limited to grieving over the loss of a father, brother or husband but we will turn our bodies into human bombs that are scattered everywhere in order to wipe out the illusion of the Israeli security. All Zionist mighty aggressors shall know that they are worth nothing to the glory and greatness of our determination and our struggle; the cowardly Sharon shall also know that every Palestinian woman will deliver an army of suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) even if he tried to bury them alive in the wombs of their mothers at the barriers of death. I call on every Muslim and determined fighter who loves freedom and martyrdom to follow this honorable path; the path of Martyrdom and freedom”.

Regarding this point the Israeli editor of Haaretz newspaper Arnon Goler wrote, “The phenomenon of female suicide martyrs” Istishhadiyat” has turned norms upside down; it has created a link with the potential female suicide martyr making out of their recruitment and armament a very complex issue. He added that recruits break the social rule in the Palestinian society because, “They did not ask for the permission of the family” (Abu Ras, 2006).

The political analyst Ronnie Shakid in Yediot Ahronot newspaper describes the martyrdom operations as, “They are a heroic culture which caused a revolution in the Palestinian society since they no longer express despair, disappointment or desire for revenge; in fact, they became operations which brought hope; these operations are strengthening in the heart of Palestinians a firm belief that these are deterrent strategic weapons of Israel which the Palestinian president cannot stop no matter how much he tried.” (Yediot Ahronot, 21/6/2002). In this context, Kimhi and Even (2004) state that the phenomenon of Palestinian suicide martyrs turned into an effective and important political tool in the war between Palestinians and Israel in the present stage; this kind of war became a source of threat to Israel because of the human, material, spiritual losses the inhabitants, society and economy sustain and its influence on the daily life in Israel.

Finally, I would like to mention that the martyrdom operations made the Israeli president Shimon Perez and other high ranking Israeli leaders to consider the martyrdom operations as the most dangerous stage that Israel had ever passed through; this influence started to encourage Israelis to publicly declare the need for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and West Bank, the need to remove all settlements built there and to accept the Palestinian conditions for a permanent solution right after the Palestinian martyrdom operations caused a light earthquake that caused a crack in the social and economic walls in Israel (Dajani, 1998).

Besides, there were voices inside Israel that were calling for more drastic and severe measures to curb the martyrdom operations. One of those was Gideon Ezra, the deputy public security minister who openly on television on August 19, 2001, called on his government to execute the families of Palestinian suicide martyrs. By contrast, there are courageous voices that called on their Israeli government to examine its harsh policies against the Palestinians that breed martyrdom operations. In one case, Rami and Nurit Elhanan lost their 14 year-old-daughter who was killed by a Palestinian suicide martyr (Istishhady) in September 1997. In spite of the tragic loss, the parents became actively involved in peacemaking. They blamed the Israeli occupation calling it “a cancer that is feeding terror” (Ateek, 2002).

To conclude, the martyrdom operations (*Al-Amaliyat Al-Istishhadiya*) have developed within the frame work of the Palestinian resistance to defeat occupation. Accordingly, the resistance strategy holds fast to a fixed title which indicates that as long as there is occupation there is resistance. This simply means its continuation on the long run besides other forms of resistance until the expulsion of occupation.

I can say that martyrdom operations express the Palestinian people’s determination and readiness to make sacrifices; these operations put the country’s interest before that of the individual who gains his identity from his readiness to be a martyr for the sake of God and homeland.

Accordingly, the Palestinian people resistance of occupation is considered a natural response. Martyrdom operations are one of the legitimate resistance means; the Palestinian suicide martyrs (Istishhadiyin) did not come in an arbitrary manner; in fact, the occupation conditions are the main reason behind having such operations. Thus it is illogical to blame the Palestinian people who are the victims for what they are doing?

They are defending themselves. The aggressor is the one who is to be blamed. It is the right of the occupied people in all laws and jurisdictions whether heavenly or earthly, to defend themselves.

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