

Searching for Identity: the Fatah Movement, Islam and the Armed Struggle, 1959-1968

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In recent years, Islam has played an increasingly important role in the discourse of the Fatah movement. This phenomenon is not a new one but rather one that has historical roots. This article explores the Islamic background of the Fatah founding fathers and suggests that the appreciation of their social background and their early military and political experience is crucial to the understanding of later developments in the movement. The article also analyzes the adoption of the armed struggle ideology and its connection to Islam as a means for strengthening public support in Fatah.

From the moment it was established, the "armed struggle" was at the heart of the movement's ideology. The objective of that strategy was to mobilize the masses for the revolution that was to "bring them back to the lost paradise" of pre-1948 Palestine as was often written in the movement's scripts.

Fatah perceives the revolution as a key instrument for creating a new future for the Palestinian people. This is by no means a Marxist-style revolution that strives to eliminate the old socio-political order. Although the term revolution was constantly used, its full meaning remained undefined to the masses.

It should be noted that in the revolutionary discourse of the movement, Islam held and still holds great significance. According to current research about Fatah, the terms "revolution" and "armed struggle" have been used as synonyms. This makes it easier to place these terms in a wider linguistic context which can refer to both national and religious identities.

One could expect that some tension would exist between national and religious identities. However, the two can also coexist. Islam was utilized as an instrument for creating a system of symbols and images. This imagined system combined with the national struggle would fuse the Palestinian past and present, and pave the way to an ideal future. Fatah presents Islam as part of its national character. Religion, integrated as a

sacred symbol into the national culture values, provides a tangible expression to the masses' state of mind. It also provides a moral system that relates to the supreme political objective of liberation and the achievement of independence.