



**Causes of the Palestine-Israel Crisis as Perceived by Israeli Muslims**

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**Abstract**

Generally, a great number of papers, books, theses, scholarly conferences have been dedicated to causes of the Israeli-Arab confrontation, and the problem in question will still be explored in its complexity and diversity. The aforementioned assault, launched by Hamas, once again attracted attention of the world community and of specialists of the domain. The tragedy was followed by unprecedented large-scale rallies supporting Palestinians held in various cities all over the world. In some countries, people were split and confronted each other, whereby some supported the quite legitimate military activities, carried out by Israel, while others, alongside demanding avoidance of innocent victims, appeal against incessant oppression of Palestinian Arabs. Irrespective of the fact that the history of Israel abounds in instances of peaceful cohabitation of Palestinian Arabs and Jews, not only various layers of populations of various countries, but also academic circles frequently posit the theory about the incompatibility of Palestinian Arabs and Jews, having been corroborated by discussions

on demographic, economic and confessional causes. We can in no way accept this attitude; thus, in the present paper, we will do our best to answer the question whether there actually is insurmountable antagonism between Muslim communities and the state in Israel, where is the main watershed in the relationship between the majority and minorities, and, aside already discussed and explored causes, what other factors facilitate intensification of Islamist extremism and what conditions facilitate Muslims' peaceful cohabitation and integration in Israel.

**Keywords:** Israel; Muslims; Bedouins; Druze; Circassians; Hamas.

### **Contents.**

Since the September 13, 1993 Oslo Accord, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Negotiator Mahmoud Abbas signed a Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, Israel accepted the PLO as the representative of the Palestinians, and the PLO renounced terrorism and recognized Israel's right to exist in peace. Also Both sides agreed that a Palestinian Authority would be established and assume governing responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a five-year period (1); As well as in the period of the Second Intifada in 2000-2005, and later, attacks, launched by the Palestine Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades associated with Fatah, have claimed thousands of Israeli lives. The list of victims includes ethnic Jews living outside the country (2). Among the extremist organizations, having become more and more active against Israel striving to protect Palestinian Arabs' rights, Hamas has been particularly vigorous, and, as a result of its victory in the 2006 elections of the Palestinian Legislative Council and following the agreement reached after bloody violence for the division of power, Hamas has been in control of Gaza (3).

With its character, scale and ruthlessness, the October 7, 2023 assault launched by Hamas initiated another unprecedented wave of controversy. The legitimate military response on the part of Israel claims lives of thousands of peaceful inhabitants of Gaza. As for the challenge in point, the entire civilized world is unanimous that the war on terrorism should proceed; however, peaceful and innocent inhabitants should be ultimately safeguarded. Right after the USA vetoed the UN resolution calling for a ceasefire in Gaza, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US ambassador to UN, posted the following statement: “The lives of innocent Palestinians must be protected. The lives of UN personnel and humanitarian workers and journalists must be protected. And we mourn – we mourn the loss of every single innocent life in this crisis.” Michael Link, former UN rapporteur in Palestine, said that the resolution was non-binding, however, “it is a rather accurate barometer of international diplomacy and public opinion about the war in Gaza. The Biden administration does not impose ‘red lines’ on Israel, thus assuring total support for the military campaign carried out by the country. Meanwhile, two US officials told ABC News that the US Administration did their best to persuade Israel to launch smaller-scale offensives and to adhere to more consistent approaches. The Washington Post too published that the Biden Administration called on Israel not to carry a land operation and to replace it with a ‘surgical’ operation (4).

#### **Methodology**

In order to discuss the mentioned issue once again and to answer the raised questions, the materials available in open sources and the book of Hillel Cohen, Associate Professor at the Department of Islam and Middle East Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, *Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Services and the Israeli Arabs*, written based on the documents, preserved at the Archives of the Israeli Ministry of Internal Affairs and later made available for public access, helped me to understand kind of relations between the Muslim and

Jewish population living in Israel. On the basis of comparing and contrasting the materials, I tried to outline the social-political aspects of the life of Sunni and Shiite Arabs as well as of Circassians, non-Arab Muslims of Israel. To what extent they were integrated within the country, what challenges they had to overcome or what kind of support they received from the state. For this, we used further research methods: comparativistics, Case Study, content analysis and intent analysis.

### **Discussion**

For the sake of the aforementioned, we should primarily and briefly address what differences are between Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Arabs. The overwhelming majority of Israeli Arabs are descendants of the Arabs who remained in the country, when the State of Israel was recreated, and automatically became its citizens; they constitute 21% of the country's population. There are Israeli Arabs who refer to themselves as Palestinians; however, they are full-fledged citizens of Israel enjoying the same rights as Jews and Druze; below we will deal with the latter more extensively. Israeli Arabs live in various cities and towns of the country and are not distinguished from ethnic Jews. They are ordinarily treated at shops, malls, and hospitals (a number of nurses are Israeli Arabs); they are represented by political parties in the Knesset.

Palestinian Arabs live in the territory of the Palestinian Authority controlled by the Fatah; others are resident of Gaza being controlled by the terrorist organization (5).

It should also be noted that there is another category of Arabs who, after the annexation of Eastern Jerusalem, did not abandon their habitation, and, according to the censuses, are regarded both Palestinian and Israeli Arabs (6).

Generally, a history of attitudes of Israeli and Palestinian Arabs to the State of Israel has begun since 1948; it is rather multifaceted; the phenomenon has certain undercurrents, dealt with by Hillel Cohen in

the introduction of his book, he notes that the recreation of the State of Israel, contradicting the will of Palestinian Arabs, and the defeat of the neighboring Arab countries in the war generated a hostile environment and distrust between the state and its ethnic Arab citizens. It is true that the authorities had overexpectations about threats from ethnic Arab inhabitants, but they were considered potential fifth columnists and insurgents. Based on the retrospective analysis, it can be stated that Israeli Arabs are of no actual threat to the country since there was a basis to unequivocally adhere to this standpoint. In order to prevent hostile activities and impose a powerful political control on Arab inhabitants, Israeli special services quickly established a network of informers and collaborators in the Arab community, this having become a very effective step with respect to three aspects: tactical, political, and identity-related.

The book also discusses the causes that motivated Arab citizens to support Israel. Primarily, it was individual opportunism, weakness of the Palestinian national movement, strength of the State of Israel, their perception of Israel as a western and contemporary country, rigorous control and supervision on the part of the state, as well as confrontation risks compared with the benefits received from collaboration (7).

Let us turn back to the questions posed in the introduction of the present paper; in order to answer them, we should pay attention to Bedouins inhabiting Negev in the south of Israel, central Israel and in Galilee in the north, having migrated from the Syrian Desert. 90% of the Bedouins inhabiting Negev have migrated from the Hejaz and reside in the vicinity of the cities of Beer Sheva, Arad, Dimona, and Rahat. They have been serving in the Israeli army since 1948, predominantly in intelligence and surveillance squads. After the British Mandate expired, Bedouins supported Israel in the struggle for the recreation of the state, during which they provided the newly established the Israeli Defense Forces with very valuable intelligence

information. It should be noted that, unlike from Israeli Jews, military service is not mandatory for Bedouins. In Galilee, there is a garden and a monument to commemorate the Bedouin soldiers who died for Israel. In 2003, specialized search and rescue units of mainly Bedouin were created. As for land ownership, in most of the Middle Eastern countries, Bedouins do not enjoy the right to own land. In Israel, those having not registered a land may not claim land ownership; however, since the mid-1970s, Israel allowed Bedouins to register their lands, based on which they received the certificates which, in their own turn, became documents of “the right of ownership.” Despite of the aforementioned and with respect to the fact that first 12-year education is free for Bedouin children, that within a generation, illiteracy decreased from 95% to 25%. Since 1998, more and more school graduates receive higher education, and, moreover, the state program has made provisions for a specialized health basket, the minority is not still integrated in the state. In 2000, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Ishmael Khaldi the first Bedouin ambassador to Eritrea. Besides, there is the first high-tech company run by Bedouins.

Based on the October 22 reports, the October 7, 2023 assault claimed the lives of four Bedouin soldiers, and, according to videos disseminated in social networks, the local population of Israel expressed their gratitude to Ashraf, a Bedouin commander, who effectively defended them against the Hamas terrorists (8).

As for the Druze, the minority inhabit territories of various Middle Eastern countries. Irrespective of the fact that their overwhelming majority are Muslims, they constitute a unique ethnic and religious group. The history of their religious off-shoot began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, bringing together elements of Islam, Hinduism, and ancient Greek philosophy. Origins of the said confessional trend are to be sought in the religious and philosophical movement of Ismailism which in its turn has greatly contributed to the formation of the

Fatimid Caliphate in Egypt in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Since 1957, the Druze community has been officially recognized in Israel as an individual identity with their own court (legal issues such as personal status, marriage, divorce, care, adoption) and religious leadership. In 1962, their status was transformed, and, hence, they officially became a distinct ethnic group, and not an Arab Muslim minority; however, the principal distinctive idiom in the Jewish-Arab dichotomy rather greatly questioned the aforementioned status. Culture and language of the Druze are Arabic. In 1948, they opposed the then widespread Arab nationalism, and, since then, they serve in the Israeli army and border police (initially, as volunteers and, later, in accordance with the conscription system). It should necessarily be noted that some Druze took part in the 1936-39 Arab revolt and, in 1948-49, fought against Zionists.

About a million Druze live in Syria and Lebanon; less inhabit in Israel and Jordan. In Israel, they constitute 2% of the entire population and 7.4% of the ethnic Arabs living in this country. They are considered to be a very consolidated community; they take an active part in public life, and mostly live in the north, in Galilee, Karmiel, and the Golan Heights. As for the latter, they are an exception, and most of the Druze inhabiting the Golan Heights either consider themselves Syrians or are not yet certain about their identity; besides, they do not consider themselves citizens of Israel, and, moreover, believe that the Golan Heights belong to Syria.

Druze officers hold high positions in Israeli defense forces, particularly, in Tzahal; however, it should also be noted that, since the Druze have to frequently serve at check-points and other locations where they are inevitably opposed by Palestinian Arabs, the Palestinians inhabiting the west bank of the Jordan river and East Jerusalem are hostile against them. Druze political figures have traditionally been active in Zionist parties such as the left-wing HaAvoda and the right-wing Likud. Generally, Likud has been popular

among Druze. In recent years, Druze established close relationships with relatively newly-founded centrist parties: Kadima and Yisrael Beiteinu. Besides, a fifth of their electorate have been associated with either Arab or Jewish-Arab parties, particularly with the National-Democratic Assembly Balad, which in its turn is a secular Arab nationalist party supporting anti-Zionist programs.

Five basic facts have been known about the Druze:

- 1) Nine of the ten Israeli Druze claim that they have a strong sense of belonging to their own community;
- 2) Less than 1% of the Druze have a spouse or a partner representing another ethnic or confessional community;
- 3) They pay great attention to philosophy and spiritual clearness;
- 4) Their 4% have served in the armed forces, and, based on the data from 2016, there were 15%.
- 5) Like 51% of Israeli Muslims, 45% of Israeli Christians, and 43% Israeli Jews, 42% of the Israeli Druze support the principle of the co-existence of the two states (Israel, with a special status, and Palestine) (9).

Circassians – non-Arab Muslims in Israel. Kfar Kama, one of the two large Circassian villages, is another location of the Arabic-speaking minority, having lived in Israel for the last 150 years, which is situated in Lowe Galilee, along the road between Mount Tabor and the sea of Galilee. In 2022, the United Nations World Tourist Organization recognized it as the “Best Tourism Village,” having distinguished it among 32 villages of 18 countries, Morocco, Italy, Jordan, Mexico, Peru, and Saudi Arabia among them. The Circassians, inhabiting the location, together with those in the village of Rehaniya, north of Safed, are descendants of the ethnic Circassians who, in the late 1870s, were re-settled in Galilee from the Caucasus by the Ottoman Empire following the persecutions and massacre of ethnic Circassians during the 100-year Russo-Circassian war. It should also be



emphasized here that despite the fact that part of the Circassians fought on the side of the Abkhazian separatists in the 1992-93 war in Abkhazia, in 2011 Georgia became the first country to recognize the genocide of the Circassians (10).

Most of them are Muslim, and, like the Druze, a greater part of men of this rather consolidated community serve in the Israeli army. Prior to the 1950s, military service was not mandatory for them. The situation changes after the elders of both villages appealed to the authorities to grant them the right to serve in the armed forces. It was since that period that military conscription became mandatory for Circassians. It should particularly be noted that members of the community hold rather high positions in the Israeli police; however, as a whole, the community remain neutral in conflicts between Palestinian Arabs and the State of Israel.

For many years, the Ministry of Tourism of Israel has supported the aforementioned settlement with a series of reconstructions, thus having managed to preserve the local heritage and attract tourists. Besides, there is the Circassian Museum in the village. "Israel is the only place where you have Circassian names for the streets," says Aibek Napso, director of the Kafr Kama Circassian Heritage Center.

It should also be noted that the education system, independent of the Arab sector since 1976, provided for the transfer of knowledge about their culture to their younger ones. Alongside the Circassian history and traditions, students learn the Adyghe (Circassian) language, Hebrew, Arabic, and English. Circassian youth go to schools of the Municipal Council together with their Jewish peers.

Circassians avoid mixed marriages in order to preserve their cultural identity; however, there still are several dozen Circassians' families with Russians, Ukrainians, and Israeli Jews. Much less are Circassian-Arab mixed families (11).

It can be concluded that, notwithstanding some challenges, Muslim communities in Israel, either Arab or non-Arab, do not have

problems of co-existence with the local Jewish population and the authorities. What distinguishes them from Palestinian Arabs is that they do not have territorial claims to the State of Israel, and, what is important, none of them is controlled by political and religious organizations, as well as does not have politically motivated allies outside the country. It is true that the question of Palestinian statehood have repeatedly been not only on the agenda of Israel and Palestine but also of the international community, and the problem is point will probably somehow solved, but with respect to the fact that there are a lot of people among residents of Gaza who seek jobs and subsistence in Israel and frequently find them, it may ne stated that problems of inhabitants of Palestine and Gaza can be solved in a more or less peaceful way, provided that these two enclaves will not be used by various extremist groups, funded from outside the country, for their own political and economic aims, specifically, those such as Fatah, as it was once, and Hamas, as it is in our days.

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