Digital Activism in Perspective: Palestinian Resistance via Social Media

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Abstract

Social media has concurrently unified and fractured the Palestinian people. It has facilitated international condemnation of Israeli occupation but also has fueled violence and sectarian conflict. Pro-Palestinian activists continue to pursue Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) efforts and work with Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) professionals to further develop an Internet-based presence and distribute information using social media and new platforms. If, however, the Palestinian resistance movement is to succeed, it must come to terms with the emancipatory and simultaneously contradictory effects of social media.

Keywords: Palestine, Social Media, Human Rights, Digital Activism.

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Political activism manifests itself through a broad spectrum of tactics and strategies. In the wake of the 2011 Arab uprisings, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has witnessed the dissolution of authoritative regimes in addition to significant allowances and changes in overarching institutional structures. Within context of the 2011 uprisings and subsequent political changes seen in the region, this paper will explore the modern dimensions of political activism with respect to the Palestinian resistance movement. Facilitated by social media, the Palestinians have newly developed a distinct awareness that political activism and prolonged resistance can amount to tangible change. This essay will address whether social media platforms, and by extension the movements such platforms help to foster, serve to either enhance or constrain the Palestinian objective

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for recognition and autonomy within the state of Israel and the international community. If the Palestinian resistance movement is to succeed, it must come to terms with the emancipative and simultaneously confounding effects of social media.

The movement for Palestinian recognition and autonomy has been an arduous and controversial issue for many decades. Since the declaration of the state of Israel in 1948, the movement has manifested itself in a variety of ways, both through civil disobedience and active resistance. Although it is with prudence that the necessary context is provided as the nature of this conflict is grounded in historical narrative, because this paper focuses primarily on the effects of social media, it will be limited in scope to recent events. In the sections that follow, we will first define digital political activism and social media in terms of both effectiveness and limits. The essay's focus will then shift to the way in which the Palestinians have used social media to advance their struggles toward gaining autonomy and statehood. We conclude by examining the conflicting role that new communication technologies play in social movements and national struggles for freedom and independence.

Modern Activism and Social Media Explained

Modern activism is generally understood as the broadly-based use of direct, often contentious action, such as a demonstration, strike, or boycott in opposition to the government or in support of a particular cause. In this paper, we focus on modern activism as a form of peaceful resistance while deploying new communication technologies such as social media. Although there is no one standard definition of social media, a broadly-based understanding of social media encompasses the way in which new technological tools provide "a two-way street that gives us the ability to communicate and share our thoughts with others."[1] New communication tools have facilitated collective online communications, providing interactions between individuals and groups, as well as across the borders, including content-sharing and collaboration on wide-ranging activities.

Different types of social media—such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, Google, Wikipedia, LinkedIn, among others—have significantly contributed to the construction of forums and information

sharing sites among a wide variety of individuals, groups, and communities, while also shrinking the distance between and/or among the people. New technological mediums have empowered the younger generations to participated in and shape the public discourse of politics. Additionally, they have made the individuals not only the consumers but also the producers of content by posting commentary, views, and images on web blogs.

Online activism and citizen journalism—both of which are facilitated by social media—tend to frame perceptions of uprisings and violence while also providing ideas, interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and digital networks. Social media, as such, has fed television networks and global media as it has become immensely difficult to trust the veracity of information and multiple sources from which much information is drawn. During the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings, according to one observer: "Western media relied heavily for information and sources upon activists they came to trust, thus acting as megaphones for one side of a complex war."[2]

Significantly missing in the flurry of coverage of the Arab Spring uprisings has been a more considered assessment of the role of emotion, solidarity and online activism. Especially noteworthy is the extent to which these uprisings have been fueled by a demographic surge of young people unable to find employment and frustrated by the lack of freedom. It is worth noting that modern technologies of communication and social media entail both opportunities and constraints. They are crucial to organizing, instigating, and upholding non-violent movements aimed at seeking representation, democracy, and human dignity.

On the flip side, online activism is unlikely to turn into a visionary platform unless it can generate momentum in the streets. Online activism alone lacks the necessary venom to put an end to authoritarianism if it is not buttressed by building trust and coalitions on the ground. The power of social media to transform political systems is blown widely out of proportion. Social media and other modern technologies alone cannot bring about democratic governance and change. These mediums can hold ruling elites and governments accountable to the general public only if there is a degree of freedom that allows social activism. Social media without human action is bereft of what it takes to prompt a truly revolutionary change.

Messages posted to social networking sites alone cannot lead to formidable and sustainable change unless they are followed up by action on the ground. There is no evidence that social media and information communications technologies (ICTs) could foster enduring movements or robust political parties capable of presenting a sustained challenge to long-established regimes or governing parties. These same tools can enhance the surveillance and coercive capabilities of authoritarian states.[3]

An Historical Overview

With respect to the contrasting narratives regarding the rights of Palestinians and Israelis, there is little denying that the genesis of this conflict is the direct result of mismanagement of this region by the former colonial powers. In the wake of WWI and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, a series of moves were made that have come to shape today's current political crisis. In order to unravel the intents and purposes of Palestinian resistance, one cannot discount the historical underpinnings that gives legitimacy to their cause.

Prior to the creation of a state, the region that constitutes modern Israel was known as Palestine. The demography of this region was largely non-Jewish, and it can be said that the population had a distinctly Arab identity.[4] The concluding days of WWI would mark an integral shift in the organization of this region. Correspondence between two major regional powers, British High Commissioner Henry McMahon and Sharif Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashimi would serve as one of the first of the many points of contention for the discussion going forward.

In short, an agreement between the British colonial forces and Sharif Hussein was made that would guarantee the Sharif Hussein's influence and control of Arab territories if he were to declare allegiance to the British forces trying to overthrow the Ottoman Empire. The Arab world, thanks to these correspondences, would ally with the British with the explicit hope of attaining autonomous and sovereign authority over their region. These correspondences would serve as a background to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 where the British made secret arrangements with the nations of France and Russia as to how the region was to be divided. Curiously, Hussein ibn Ali al-Hashimi, Arab leaders, and de facto the Palestinians were absent from these negotiations and were not included in the arrangement.

Furthermore, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 explicitly stated that a homeland for the Jews to be created in the territory of Palestine that would protect and ensure the rights of all persons within the territory. It is with prudence to note that the declaration makes two distinctions, first that the state created would be for the Jewish people and second that the state would ensure the rights and protections of all persons within the territory. This declaration thus explicitly recognizes and guarantees the Arab-Palestinian population rights and protections, presumably the same provisions that would extend to those citizens of the new Jewish state. The announcement was contentious in the Arab world for it was assumed that under the Hussein-McMahon correspondence, the Arabs would have control over the Arab region, including Palestine after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. However as this was not the case, the aforementioned series of betrayals and dishonesty would function as the source of great distrust and disdain amongst the Arab-Palestinian population for decades to come.

Israel's declaration of statehood on May 14, 1948 would also trigger the 1948 Arab-Israeli War the following day. This was a war fought between the newly founded Israel and an Arab-coalition consisting of Egypt, Transjordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon, along with other smaller contingents from Saudi Arabia. It is important to note that prior to the war, on November 29, 1947, UN Resolution 181 passed providing 56% of the land of Palestine to Israel, and 42% of the land to the Palestinians with the remaining 2% under international supervision. The Palestinians would vehemently reject this resolution, and would come to regret the rejection of this compromise in the coming years. Those who were left would face significant hurdles for recognition in the new state of Israel.

This historical narrative functions as the background for today's current conflict. It serves to codify Israel as a distinctly Jewish state and to form the foundation of Jewish national identity. According to historian Benny Morris, "by the end of 1947 the Palestinians had a healthy and demoralizing respect for the Yishuv's military power."[5] It would also mark the genesis of the Palestinian diaspora and their subsequent political battle with Israel. The consequences of the 1948 war would prove dire for the Arabs, as approximately 726,000 Palestinians residing in Palestine would either flee or were expelled prior to, during, or immediately after the war. This number would rise

by approximately 500,000 Palestinian refugees in the 1967 War Israel that was launched against Egypt and Jordan.

The 1967 War would also serve to strain relations between Palestinians and Israelis further because it brought to light new questions for the Israeli government, namely what to do with the new territory and people they have acquired? If Israel were to annex these territories, then all the people, Palestinians included, would become party to the state of Israel and gain citizenship as had been granted in 1949. Rather than annex the territories, thereby conferring citizenship on the Palestinians, Israeli leaders declared the newly acquired region an occupied territory under international law.

Currently, it is estimated that there are 7.2 million Palestinian refugees worldwide with approximately 4.3 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants who are registered with the United Nations as having been displaced from the territory during the 1948 War. Another 500,000 and their descendants are found to be internally displaced within Israel.[6] One of the largest points of contention that should be addressed is the fact that for many of those Palestinian refugees, there exists few practical mechanisms by which to return home. Legally, according to UN Resolution 194 "... [Palestinian] refugees wishing to return to their homes … should be permitted to do so."[7] Furthermore, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that "No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of the right to enter his own country."[8]

Although Jews from all over the world can enter Israel under the "Law of Return", this has not been extended to the Palestinian population and has become a source of international criticism toward Israel. This resolution was followed by the UN Resolution 242, where the government of Israel had hoped to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement, but because the Arab world and the Palestinians had rejected it, this proved to be impactful for negotiations going forward as the rejection meant little Palestinian representation in terms of diplomacy.

Modern-Day Resistance

Given the aforementioned political history of the Palestinian people, it should come as no surprise that confrontations between

Israelis and Palestinians have become commonplace. The first Intifada (1987-1993) is a prime example of civil disobedience as seen through mass public demonstrations against Israel's occupation of Palestinian lands. This, however, grew into a more violent resistance movement that culminated in the death of over 1,000 Palestinians over the course of five years. Notably, this mass resistance was the first of its kind seen in Israel. It was a distinctly loosely organized grassroots resistance that was comprised of many civil society organizations, union groups, and ordinary Palestinians who would no longer stand for the structural and institutional oppression and occupation of their territory.[9] This resistance movement, as one expert put it, represented a way for the Palestinians living under occupation to refuse to participate in their own suffering and maltreatment: "[i]t was, for those who lived through it, an experience of radical solidarity."[10]

This form of resistance for the Palestinians was the result of decades of passivity that had not proven useful for the recognition of their demands for autonomy. Following this first Intifada, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) officially recognized the state of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA/PA) was established. In return, the Palestinians were given limited autonomy in parts of the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as codified through negotiations under the Oslo Accords.[11] Consequently, these acts of civil disobedience and armed resistance proved to the Palestinian population that tangible results could be achieved through organized and sustained activism. It was only through this sustained resistance that the Palestinians were able to establish a unified voice of resistance through both the PA and PLO for the existing structures that permeate the reality of many Palestinians do not readily accommodate Palestinian demands.

To the extent that Israeli politics is primarily focused on the maintenance of Jewish statehood and autonomy, there has been little room made for Palestinian voices. It was the massive community involvement in the first Intifada that imbued the Palestinians with a renewed sense of solidarity and drive for political activism. It is worth noting that during the first Intifada human rights NGOs assisted many Palestinian patients cross checkpoints to reach hospitals, provided traumatized children with psychological support, located thousands of political prisoners whose whereabouts were unknown, and even

pressured the military to lift a curfew. They nevertheless had no effect on the occupation's structure and failed to fundamentally change the routine of domination. At the end, as one analyst has pointed out, even though the first Intifada led to massive global human rights support and became a prominent topic of discourse, it failed to alter the asymmetry of power in the region.[12]

A second, similarly organized Palestinian uprising protesting Israeli occupation erupted during 2000-2005 period. Known as the al-Aqsa Intifada, this was a distinctly more tumultuous uprising that was entirely different from the grassroots activism of the previous Intifada, as this was one which commanded a heavier military response by Israeli defense forces and coincided with contrasting narratives. Ignited by a controversial visit by then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, the Palestinian population felt that Israel was being purposefully provocative. Temple Mount represents one of the most holy sites for the Abrahamic traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, though Ariel Sharon's visit alongside the Likud and riot police forces indicated Israel's threat perception.

To better understand the nature of this controversial visit, it is important to recall that Sharon had played a key and questionable role in Israel politics for several decades before his ascendancy to the position of leader of the Likud Party in 2000. He had a convoluted history of dealing with the Palestinian people, largely due to his role in the siege of Beirut in the early 1980s in which Sharon worked closely with Bashir Gemayel, a rising political figure in Lebanon's Maronite community. Gemayel hoped to forge an alliance with the Israelis, using their power to defeat both the Palestinians and Syrians and to form a Lebanese state dominated by the Maronites. The alliance paved the way for the subsequent Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982.[13]

Sharon, for his part, saw the Phalange as an instrument for furthering Israel's security interests on its northern border. During the first half of 1982, he held a number of secret meetings with Bashir aimed at forging an Israeli-Lebanese Christian alliance that could drive the PLO and the Syrians out of Lebanon. Consequently, when he visited the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in on September 28, 2000, Sharon was accompanied by a significant armed security contingent.

Israeli Arabs rioted in response to his visit, prompting further unrest throughout the West Bank and Gaza.[14] The ensuing second Intifada led to an Islamization of Palestinian politics, rendering common the coordination between Hamas and secular militia.[15]

Additionally, Sharon's visit was the catalyst that spurred the unwinding of the Oslo peace process. It is important to bear in mind that the question of settlements was left out of the Oslo Accords. That explains why the Palestinians, disillusioned by the ongoing military occupation and the seemingly ever-expanding settlements, have lost faith in Israel's intention to hold to its end of the bargain.[16] An all-too-familiar scenario ensued: "Palestinians rioted, Israel responded, deaths resulted, the voices of moderation were subdued, and the position of the 'hard liners' in each camp strengthened."[17]

Some observers have also indicated that the second Intifada was already in motion and that the Prime Minister's visit to Temple Mount provided not only adequate cover for the armed resistance but also appropriate justification for the Ariel Sharon's security detail.[18] Different narratives on the causes of the second Intifada notwithstanding, it is difficult to discount the violence that took place in this resistance characterized by the heavy handed military response of the IDF, and the use of firebombs and suicide attacks by Palestinian forces.

The Violent Resistance

The second Intifada (2000-2005) was a momentous resistance against Israeli occupation with serious implications for the Palestinian resistance movement. During this period, over 3000 Palestinians and 1000 Israelis were killed in the conflict.[19] At the core of this new wave of uprising, as experts remind us, was the Palestinian reaction to the continuous Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the incessant expansion of settlements, and the inability or unwillingness of outside powers to mediate and stop the conflict. The Palestinians' frustration was manifested in the way they saw Sharon's visit to the Haram al-Sharif not just as "affront to one of the most important symbols of their nationality but also as an insult to Islam."[20]

Moreover, the proliferation of Israeli military checkpoints and the growing confiscation of land increased Palestinians' sense of dispossession and deprivation.[21] Most notably, the major difference

between the two Intifadas was the relative militarization of the second one. Militant Islamic groups (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) intensified their suicide bombing campaigns and were even joined by some elements of the Palestinian security forces. For their parts, Israelis escalated their use of deadly and more heavily mechanized forces. Worse yet, Israelis imposed an internal closure on the West Bank, preventing Palestinians from leaving their communities and effectively blocking all forms of internal commerce. This caused widespread economic disaster throughout the occupied territories.[22]

This uprising was aggressively suppressed and led to the creation of the "West Bank Barrier," a separation wall that came only to further widen the distance between the Palestinians and Israelis. This wall, in the eyes of many Palestinians, constituted a grave violation of their right to travel freely within their territory and to racial segregation and, arguably, apartheid. The separation wall, writes one expert, has strangled the Palestinian society in the West Bank and forced many into poverty. The north part of the West Bank, where many Palestinians work, has experienced more than a 65 percent decline in its agricultural sector since the completion of the first phase of the Wall.[23] Further, the wall has led to the decline in production, employment, and loss of access to water wells located on the western side of this divider.[24] Also less reported are the effects of the wall on biodiversity, wildlife, and the environment. There is no denying the fact that the socioeconomic conditions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip are a consequence of the occupation. The rise of Hamas and its election victory in January 2006 were directly related to the high level of corruption in the Palestinian Authority (PA) emanating since the 1993 Oslo Accords that focused solely on isolating Hamas at the cost of other more significant considerations.[25]

A recent study on Palestine, which contains useful and resonant observations, illustrates the degree to which the signing of the Oslo Accords has been accompanied or followed by corruption within the PA leadership structure. After years of resistance and national struggles for the liberation of the Palestine, the PLO inadvertently gave up the prospects of statehood in return for municipal rule over selected Palestinian cities during the course of the Oslo Accords. Once in partial control of these cities, the PA became so enamored with holding the power and wielding municipal governance that it

gave up its aspirations of statehood—a legitimate claim and longing that was "diverted, distorted, and subverted."[26] The notion that occupation is temporary and can be reversed is at best naïve. The fact remains that "the Occupied Territories aren't just occupied. They are divided, controlled, kept down."[27]

A similar point of the view, albeit from a different perspective, is expressed by those scholars who argue that the two-state solution and the outdated notions of self-determination are likely to ignore the deplorable, asymmetrical binational realities created by decades of the Israeli policy of building illegal settlements in the West Bank. The new and emerging realities—that is, the inextricably linked aspirations, rights, and historical memories of the Jews and the Palestinians—tend to favor integration, joint habitation, and mutual legitimacy rather than segregation, denial, and separation.[28] Yet the continued state-sanctioned system of Jewish privilege in the State of Israel and the lack of a broadly-based and credible popular support for joint Arab-Jewish political movements and organizations that advocate integrative visions and mobilize significant constituencies to advocate such solutions reveal the weakest links of this solution.[29]

Israeli authorities, for their part, have made every possible effort to foil the Palestinian state-building plans. They argued that this separation wall was built to ensure security of the state and act as a barrier toward terrorism.[30] Its construction meant the destruction and displacement of thousands of Palestinians, much to the Palestinian and international community's chagrin. It is also important to note that many sections of the 440-mile wall extends significantly into Palestinian territories on the West Bank, has been deemed illegal under international law according to the International Court of Justice and also condemned by the United Nations General Assembly. [31]

The conflict continued until the *Sharm El-Sheikh Summit* on February 8, 2005 where both sides of the conflict would agree to ceasefire. Further implications of this brand of Palestinian resistance led to an intensified Israeli security apparatus, travel restrictions on Palestinians and a greater distrust of the Palestinian population by Israelis, further entrenching their cause. Although both sides of the conflict suffered immense casualties, there were still positive outcomes of this movement that would serve to index the efficacy of armed resistance. As a product of the movement, the Palestinians were

able to gain autonomy in the Gaza Strip as denoted by the withdrawal of Israeli forces and transfer of control to the Palestinians.

The growing gap between the PA in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, as well as the receding prospects of a regional settlement of the conflict, led to a widespread frustration among the Palestinians with the peace process and continuing Jewish colonization. This level of frustration, experts predict, is likely culminate into a third Palestinian Intifada on the West Bank.[32] Moreover, the 2011 democratic uprisings in the Arab world, as well as Hamas's ongoing defiance of Israel, are likely to encourage another Palestinian uprising in the West Bank, which has remained relatively calm for more than a decade.[33]

A Digital Resistance

The omnipresence of Palestinian resistance is deeply rooted within the structural and institutional oppression by the state of Israel. Passivity on behalf of the Palestinian people could no longer be the norm. Shortly after the second Intifada, there was the worldwide explosion of social media usage facilitated by advances in information communication technology (ICTs). Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube were adopted, weaponized and propagandized by the Palestinian resistance movement and simultaneously used by the Israeli government to counter the new, digital dimension of activism. Social media and ICTs have the trait of being especially pervasive, capable of both penetrating and diffusing ideas across borders, effectively eliminating the role of borders and traditional media. The unique effect of social media, facilitated by ICTs is such that what comes to inform the political narratives and online exports are often organically formed and share similar characteristics.

> Universal ideas in the culture, ideas concerning equality, consistency, equal protection of the laws, justice, liberty, freedom of movement, freedom of speech and association … tend to socialize conflict. These conflicts tend to make conflicts contagious; they invite outside intervention in conflict and form the basis of appeals to public authority for the redress of private grievances.[34]

The events that transpired in the Arab world over the course of the 2011 uprisings has proved that social media can function as a tool facilitating change; however, it would be insufficient to credit this alone, as social media still requires physical representation on the ground for any movement to arise. Social media provided the Palestinians a valuable tool with which to effectively organize and disseminate ideas, though a bigger question emerges: to what effect has social media aided and facilitated Palestinian activism? What role has it played for the Palestinians? What effect has the Arab Uprisings, within context of social media, had on the Palestinian resistance movement, and most importantly, does it serve to enhance or constrain the movement?

According to one source, "Social media and the internet [act as] an engine of discourse with democratizing powers."[35] As exemplified by the popular uprisings fueled by ICTs seen in many Arab countries (such as Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, Bahrain) in which protesters demanded a more representative democracy, social media does have democratic leanings. However, scholarly opinion does vary greatly on the extent to which that social media has played a major role. Briefly noted in the following paragraphs are examples of social media trends that have come to inform and fuel the Palestinian movements.

The collapse and failure of the Oslo Accords prompted Palestinian civil society groups to consider a paradigm shift in their resistance strategy by taking ownership over their destiny and not simply rely on outside actors, stakeholders, and interest groups. This shift led to a variety of new grassroots movements aimed at drastically shifting the locus of control for Palestinians away from externally driven forces to a major internally driven engagement with their future.[36] One such movement that has gained significant traction in recent years has been the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS), which is, in short, an international campaign aimed at increasing the economic and political pressure to address the concerns of Palestinians. The BDS movement focuses specifically on concerns involving the cessation of Israeli occupation and settlement building, equality and equity for the Palestinian people, and the acknowledgement for the right of return and recognition of the 7.3 million Palestinian refugees worldwide.[37] It is through the promotion of Palestinian rights over the internet platform that this movement has received such wide support within

the international community, including but not limited to governments, political parties, trade unions and educational institutions. Some notable examples include the Green Party of Canada, University of California and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.[38]

Increasingly, social media has also facilitated a rise in youth activism. Of which, Janaa Jihad is a prime example. Janaa Jihad, a 10 year old Palestinian activist gained recognition for her contributions in documenting the uptick in violence in 2015. Janaa Jihad took on the role as an independent journalist and used a camcorder to record and upload video portraying the day to day reality of Palestinian life on the ground. Her videos depicting the heavy handed tactics of Israeli Defense Force (IDF) soldiers and systemic oppression in Palestinian territories galvanized the Palestinians and built solidarity from a grassroots level, facilitated by platforms like Facebook and YouTube.[39] In addition to citizen journalism, social media has also attracted artists and activists to voice their concerns of political oppression. Activist, musician and rapper Mohammad Assaf created a music video uploaded to YouTube entitled *Dami Falasteeni*, translated as "My Blood is Palestinian," which had been viewed over four-million times in the height of the 2015 Arab-Israeli violence. In his music video, he explicitly claims Palestine as home for Palestinians, essentially using YouTube as a platform to export politically charged content encouraging solidarity amongst Palestinians and from the international community.[40] These individuals are just a small representation of the hundreds of independent digital activists, each of whom have their own following.

As social media is readily accessible, cost-efficient, and provides some measure of anonymity, it has acted as the modern medium by which activists engage in countering overarching power structures. There are factions within the movement, however, that are more radical or extremist in their approach and use these platforms to push a political agenda. Such examples include the *Quds News Network*, *Shebab News Agency,* and *Shebab Student Union*.[41] The more radical groups have the similar goal of recognition and autonomy as much of the Palestinian population, albeit their strategies of engagement and rhetoric are not always indicative of establishing peace, security and/or are inherently anti-Semitic. As such, though groups such as

these have thousands of supporters, it has served to constrain the Palestinian resistance through the promotion of violence and armed resistance towards Israel and towards Jewish persons. If the goal of autonomy is to be realized, the most crucial component would be to first ensure security of all parties involved. The inability to do so discourages cooperation and enhances a more aggressive Israeli security apparatus.

Externally, the spillover effects social media has also constrained the movement. Namely, ISIS' YouTube video entitled "*Slaughter the Jews*" has been accredited with the increase in violent attacks against Jewish persons. This media, spread widely amongst the Palestinian populace thanks to the ready access of user generated media content, both promoted violence and acted as an instructional video on how to most efficiently kill those of Jewish heritage or ancestry. As ISIS in recent years has become a top security concern for many Western countries in the wake of Arab Spring, the very existence of this video constituted a threat to the Israel's Jewish population. This threat was consequently met with heightened security in Palestinian territories and a shift in rhetoric from the Israeli authorities who would use security concerns as a cover for systemic abuse of Palestinian rights.

A weaponized social media has only added new dimensions that confound the Palestinian resistance movement. On the one hand, the rise in digital activism allows for the Palestinian cause to be heard on a larger platform. Greater participation on social media is distinctly political and propagandized and thus it has facilitated the uprising's trajectory by amplifying the resistance. Digital activism via social media has the ability to readily share ideas, images and information while encouraging marginalized communities to participate and voice their opinion, and most importantly, it provides room for an organically formed 'leaderless revolution.' Increased awareness leads to increasingly effective grassroots campaigns, concessions made by Israeli authorities, and international condemnation of occupation and settlements.

Though social media has provided opportunities for activists to call for solidarity, it has simultaneously acted to fracture unity and has led to a rise in conflict and violence. As indicated by the more radical trends for recognition in social media interfaces, the promotion of violence and anti-Semitic rhetoric of various networking groups has

encouraged a series of individual attacks on Israeli citizens and IDF, most notably in the 2015 unrest. It has also factionalized the Palestinian population between those who are more moderate and those who lean radical. And furthermore, such calls to violence have split Palestinians politics between Hamas and Fatah and between the secular and Islamist factions. As a result of this, the Israeli security forces are required to address new security concerns and have responded in kind with greater internet surveillance and has similarly weaponized social media as a tool of oppression.[42] In citing social media as a platform for terrorism, the Israeli authorities have crafted policies aimed at censoring political activism via social media claiming that it incites violence, and then uses "incitement" as legally sufficient cause for the arrest of political dissenters and those who express their grievances openly.

Whether or not social media has served to enhance or constrain the Palestinian resistance movement is still up for debate; however, it is fair to say that it has done both. On the one hand it has raised awareness, but on the other it has heightened issues of security and thus facilitated conflict. As such, "one cannot understand the role of social media in collective action without first taking into account the political environment in which they operate."[43] The political context that exists within the state of Israel is complex and informed by a myriad of contrasting narratives. The effects of social media and its efficacy relative to the movement is informed by differing realities, and deeply intertwined with each respective individual's cultural and political identity. Unfortunately, as Orit Perlov, a social media analyst and former advisor to Israel's Ambassador at Large states, "The only place that voices of unemployment, poverty, occupation and abuses can be heard is on social media…we cannot resolve the issue of incitement without first addressing these concerns. Failure to do so doesn't resolve the issue, it only worsens it." [44]

What Lies Ahead

For the Palestinians, sustained resistance is not only a natural response to systemic oppression and lack of political autonomy or authority, but also it functions as a call for recognition in their ancestral homeland. They are self-determined and are addressing

hurdles to socioeconomic and political fulfillment. For the Israelis, the resistance presents grave security concerns for the maintenance and security of the state and thus feel compelled to maintain the status quo ante by refusing to grant significant institutional and structural allowances to the increasingly volatile Palestinian population.

A major take-away from this essay is that social media has simultaneously unified and fractured the Palestinian people. It has facilitated international condemnation of Israeli occupation but also has fueled violence and sectarian conflict. Pro-Palestinian activists should continue to pursue BDS efforts and work with ICT professionals to further develop an Internet-based presence and distribute information using social media and new platforms. If, however, the Palestinian resistance movement is to succeed, it must come to terms with the emancipatory and simultaneously confounding effects of social media.

Activists and political dissidents will continue to use social media as a platform to address their grievances, whereas political institutions and security forces will continue to monitor the omnipresent threat that social media presents. Even in light of considerable concessions or political redress for the Palestinian people, social media will remain as powerful force for communicating and organizing a more egalitarian and equitable future. It has become a pervasive and potent force in the modern dimension of political activism but should not be singularly credited for facilitating change.

Activism and human rights are certain to contribute to change, but the fact remains that we cannot fully forecast the direction of the change in the post-Arab Spring uprisings era. The real question is: How big of a role did social media and the Internet play in the 2011 Arab awakening? Insurgencies in today's context have depended and continue to rely on ICTs for the timing and logistics of protests. Having an active online civil society today has become a critical factor enabling positive social change, although other scholars notably agree that the internet and mobile phones have yet to cause a single democratic revolution.[45] Effective and positive change requires active engagement and with that as a tactic, the effect of social media can manifest itself with great diversity and to numerous strategies. Social media merely functions as a tool that enables, but it is the very content of what it enables that will come to determine the narrative of resistance.

NOTES

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