

Intifada (Israeli Perspective)

The outbreak of the Intifada

On December 8, 1987 an Israeli truck hit a Palestinian car in the Gaza strip, killing four of its passengers. The Palestinians claimed that it was a deliberate attack, and described it as cold-blooded murder. During the funeral crowds of people stormed the IDF compound in Gaza and threw rocks. The disturbances continued the next day and in the days following. This event is considered to be the beginning of the Palestinian war, called the Intifada [literally, *shaking*].

At the beginning the Intifada was characterized by: throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at IDF soldiers and vehicles; large public gatherings opposite IDF forces in the Gaza strip; blocking roads; capturing weapons; and other daily aggressive actions. The uprising in Gaza quickly gathered support from Palestinians in Judea and Samaria who, in any case, were at the boiling point (for example, in the Balata refugee camp near Shechem [Nablus] rebellions took place even before the Intifada.)



Representative scenes of the beginning of the Intifada.

Israel, Jordan and even the PLO were surprised by the Intifada, and each in its own way developed its approach to this new phenomenon.

The IDF was forced to overhaul its policies and rethink the conduct of soldiers in the occupied territories. The army was not equipped to contend with enormous popular demonstrations, flying stones and Molotov cocktails. The Palestinians (including teenagers and children) demonstrated great courage attacking soldiers in the street, in armored vehicles and in military installations.

The surprise was so great that the IDF found no suitable response to this type of unconventional warfare. The soldiers found it difficult to use force against children, men and women who fought with stones as weapons, and they found themselves in difficult situations – attacked, surrounded, wounded, and sometimes helpless.

At first IDF tactics called for using a great deal of force to hit the demonstrators. The army distributed truncheons to the soldiers, who used them as weapons of defense and deterrence. This policy resulted in a number of terrible incidents of gratuitous violence which grew out of anger and frustration and resulted in many Palestinian wounded suffering from broken bones.

In many instances junior officers joined the soldiers in unnecessary beatings. It was not clear when, who and for what reasons it was permitted to beat people. ...Reports came in from the field that even people in their homes were being beaten, for no reason – even entire families.

Z. Schiff and E. Ya'ari, *Intifada* page 146

Later on the IDF modified the orders to beat people, and limited the use of force, although throughout the world, and even in Israel there was severe criticism of the policy of force and the brutality of IDF soldiers against the Palestinians.

From the outset the Intifada took on the reputation of being a civil revolt against an occupying power.

The uprisings grew from below: In the alleys of refugee camps, among Palestinian youth, in university classrooms and high schools, among those who worked in Israel, and those who were released from Israeli prisons, among the entire people...the uprising took on a decidedly revolutionary character. The revolution was not planned, and it exploded suddenly like a volcano.

Z. Schiff and E. Ya'ari, *Intifada* page 43

The Israelis

- * The Intifada, which came as a complete surprise, harmed the Israeli feeling of superiority over the Palestinians
- * The Intifada sparked a storm of dissension in Israeli society about the methods and ethics of warfare.
- * The split widened between those who supported a territorial compromise and the supporters of the Greater Land of Israel whose slogan was "not one inch."

Israel and the Palestinians

For the first time the two peoples were positioned opposite each other as two partners who must solve the conflict between them. The Intifada sparked dialogue between the two groups which resulted in signing the Oslo Agreement.

Source: Learning Each Other's

Narrative: Palestinians and Israelis: Peace Research Institute in the Middle East

Historical