

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY IN THE CONTEXT OF "ARAB SPRING" (2011–2012)

ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆ ՀԱՐԳԱՑՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ ՊԱՂԵՍՏԻՆԻ ԻՆՔՆԱՎԱՐՈՒԹՅՈՒՆՈՒՄ «ԱՐԱՐԱԿԱՆ ԳԱՐՆԱՆ» ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՈՒՄ (2011–2012 ԹԹ.)

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИЕ СОБЫТИЯ В ПАЛЕСТИНСКОЙ АВТОНОМИИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ «АРАБСКОЙ ВЕСНЫ» (2011–2012 ГГ.)

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Abstract – The article examines the political developments in Palestine in the context of the "Arab Spring". The Middle East peace settlement was influenced by the shift in the region's power dynamics and the emergence of new key players. The revolutionary wave of the "Arab Spring" led to significant changes in the ruling elites and domestic policies in several countries in the Arab world. Meanwhile, despite well-coordinated protest waves and demonstrations, the Palestinian Authority escaped being toppled. The "Palestinian Spring" soon subsided; however, the implementation of political and socioeconomic reforms, as well as the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, remained essentially unchanged. The Arab Spring intensified foreign policy initiatives: Fatah chose the diplomatic path, seeking to raise Palestine's status in the UN, while Hamas reorganized its network of external allies, leaving Damascus and strengthening ties with Egypt and Qatar. At the same time, protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip showed that the Oslo Accords were no longer perceived as a relevant and effective basis for continuing the peace process with Israel. Thus, the Arab Spring was not a time of revolutionary change for Palestine, but a period of consolidating losses and maintaining the political status quo resulting in inertia within the Palestinian political system and leaving public expectations for fundamental change unfulfilled.

Ամփոփում – Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են Պաղեստինում տեղի ունեցած քաղաքական զարգացումները «արաբական գարնան» համատեքստում: Տարածաշրջանում ուժերի հարաբերակցության փոփոխությունը և նոր առանցքային դերակատարների ի հայտ գալը ներազդեցին մերձավորարևելյան խաղաղ կարգավորման վրա: «Արաբական գարնան» հեղափոխական ալիքն իշխող էլիտաների կամ ներքին քաղաքականության էական փոփոխություններ առաջացրեց Արաբական աշխարհի մի շարք երկրներում: Սակայն Պաղեստինի ինքնավարությանը հաջողվեց զերծ մնալ քաղաքական էլիտայի տապալումից՝ չնայած կազմակերպված բողոքի ալիքներին և հանրահավաքներին: «Արաբական գարնան» ալիքը Պաղեստինյան ինքնավարությունում շուտով մարեց, սակայն նշանակալի և շարունակական փոփոխություններ տեղի չունեցան սոցիալ-տնտեսական, քաղաքական ու ինստիտուցիոնալ բարեփոխումների իրականացման և պաղեստինյան երկու հիմնական քաղաքական ուժերի՝ աշխարհիկ բնույթ ունեցող Ֆաթհի ու արմատական իսլամիստական դիրքորոշմամբ Համասի հաշտեցման հարցերում: «Արաբական գարնան» ազդեցությամբ ակտիվացան արտաքին քաղաքական նախաձեռնությունները. Ֆաթհը որդեգրեց դիվանագիտական ուղի՝ փորձելով բարձրացնել Պաղեստինի կարգավիճակը ՄԱԿ-ում, իսկ Համասը վերադասավորեց իր արտաքին դաշնակիցների ցանցը՝ հեռանալով Դամասկոսից և սերտացնելով կապերը Եգիպտոսի և Կատարի հետ: Միևնույն ժամանակ, Արևմտյան ափին և Գազայում տեղի ունեցած բողոքի ակցիաները վկայեցին, որ Օսլոյի համաձայնագրերն այլևս ընկալելի չեն որպես արդիական և արդյունավետ հիմք՝ Իսրայելի հետ խաղաղության գործընթացը շարունակելու համար: Այսպիսով, արաբական գարունը Պաղեստինի համար դարձավ ոչ թե համակարգային վերափոխումների, այլ քաղաքական կայունության պահպանման և գոյություն ունեցող ճգնաժամերի ամրագրման ջրջան, որի հետևանքով պաղեստինյան քաղաքական համակարգում պահպանվեց իներտություն, և հիմնարար փոփոխությունների վերաբերյալ հասարակական սպասումները մնացին չիրականացած:

Аннотация – В статье рассматриваются политические события в Палестине в контексте «арабской весны». Изменение динамики сил на Ближнем Востоке и появление новых ключевых акторов оказали влияние на мирное урегулирование ситуации. Революционная волна «арабской весны» привела к значительным изменениям в правящих элитах или внутренней политике в ряде стран арабского мира. В то же время Палестинской автономии удалось избежать свержения политической элиты, несмотря на организованные протесты и митинги. «Палестинская весна» вскоре утихла, в результате, однако, никаких существенных изменений в проведении необходимых социально-экономических, политических и институциональных реформ или в вопросе примирения между ФАТХ и ХАМАС не произошло. Под воздействием «арабской весны» активизировались внешнеполитические инициативы: ФАТХ выбрал дипломатический путь, стремясь повысить статус Палестины в ООН, в то время как ХАМАС реорганизовал сеть своих внешних союзников, покинув Дамаск и укрепив связи с Египтом и Катаром. Одновременно акции протеста на Западном берегу и в секторе Газа свидетельствовали о том, что соглашения Осло уже не воспринимаются как актуальная и эффективная основа для продолжения мирного процесса с Израилем. Таким образом, «арабская весна» стала для Палестины не временем революционных перемен, а периодом закрепления утрат и сохранения политического статус-кво, в результате чего в палестинской политической системе сохранилась инерция, а общественные ожидания фундаментальных изменений остались нереализованными.

Keywords – "Arab Spring", Palestin, Israel, conflict, Fatah–Hamas.

Հիմնաբառեր – «արաբական գարուն», Պաղեստին, Իսրայել, հակամարտություն, Ֆաթհ-Համաս:
 Ключевые слова – «арабская весна», Палестина, Израиль, конфликт, ФАТХ-ХАМАС.

Introduction

The Palestinian issue is one of the most complex and multifaceted conflicts in the modern world, continually attracting the attention of both international powers and the public. The lack of independent statehood for Palestine, the ongoing occupation of its territories by Israel, and the deepening socio-economic and internal political crises have significantly hindered the normal functioning of the Palestinian Authority and the prospects for sustainable development.

In 2010, the revolutionary wave of the "Arab Spring" that emerged in the Middle East and North Africa shook not only the region but also had a global impact generating great enthusiasm among Palestinian youth. Palestinians were hopeful that the revolutions taking place in the Arab world would also have a positive impact on the Palestinian issue. They believed that emerging regional powers would consistently support them in their struggle for independence, and that the events taking place would encourage Fatah and Hamas to overcome their differences, directing all their potential to the fight against the Israeli occupation.

This analysis is grounded in the theoretical perspectives of Political Opportunity Structure (POS) theory and Hybrid Regime theory, particularly focusing on authoritarian resilience. Originating in the field of social movement studies, the Political Opportunity Structure theory posits that protest movements are more likely to arise and succeed when the political environment presents certain openings, such as divisions among elites, reduced repression, or increased external support (Tarrow 2011, 166).

In the case of Palestine, despite the Arab Spring inspiring mass protests across the Arab world, several limiting factors constrained the Palestinian territories. These included the division between Fatah and Hamas, which fragmented the political landscape and hindered unified mobilization, the lack of sovereignty under Israeli occupation, which imposed structural limitations on both political organization and popular resistance, and the absence of elite splits, as both ruling parties collaborated to suppress dissent and maintain the status quo. These conditions created a closed political opportunity structure, which helps explain why the March 15 Movement and other grassroots initiatives ultimately failed to bring about systemic change.

While the Palestinian Authority is not a fully sovereign state, its internal governance structure functions as a hybrid regime, a system that combines formal democratic elements (elections, institutions) with authoritarian practices (repression, patronage, and cooptation).

Building on the work of Levitsky and Way, this framework helps explain the PA's ability to survive public protest without institutional reform, rely on internation-

al donor support rather than domestic legitimacy and use security forces and party networks to neutralize opposition (Levitsky and Way 2002, 52–55).

The Arab Spring did not lead to the collapse of the PA or Hamas governance structures. Instead, both authorities exhibited regime durability, adapting through selective repression, rhetorical reformism, and diplomatic maneuvering.

The first chapter of the article explores the internal problems of the Palestinian Authority during the Arab Spring period, focusing on political stagnation, delayed elections, human rights violations, economic decline, and deep-rooted divisions between Fatah and Hamas. These systemic issues formed the background against which protest movements emerged.

The second chapter examines the protest wave of 2011–2012, particularly the March 15 Movement and youth-led initiatives calling for national unity and reform. It also discusses Egypt and Qatar's mediation efforts, including the Cairo and Doha agreements, which aimed to reconcile Fatah and Hamas. Despite initial momentum, internal mistrust and external opposition hindered the implementation of these efforts. Focusing on the nature of the demonstrations, this part analyzes the mobilization strategies, political demands, social composition, and limited scope of the protests. It highlights how both Fatah and Hamas responded with repressive tactics, and how the protests, while inspired by regional revolutions, failed to challenge the prevailing political order due to fragmentation and occupation constraints.

The third chapter explores how the Arab Spring reshaped Palestinian political strategy by intensifying factional shifts in foreign policy and prompting efforts to legitimize authority through international platforms like the UN. It highlights Hamas's strengthened ties with Egypt and the broader Sunni Arab world, contrasting with Fatah's focus on statehood recognition.

Overall, this article explores the political developments within the Palestinian Authority during the Arab Spring by examining the internal structural crises, protest dynamics, attempted reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, and the evolving foreign policy strategies of both factions. Drawing on theories of political opportunity structures, hybrid regimes, and conflict governance, the study argues that while the Arab Spring momentarily energized Palestinian political discourse, it ultimately reinforced existing divisions and institutional stagnation. The subsequent sections analyze these developments in detail, tracing how this pivotal period shaped the political trajectories of the West Bank and Gaza and contributed to the fragmentation of the Palestinian national project

Protest Mobilization and Reconciliation Attempts during the Arab Spring

The Arab Spring, which began in early 2011, sparked a wave of protests and demands for reform throughout the Arab world. In the Palestinian territories this regional momentum was evident in increasing public dissatisfaction with political stagnation, socio-economic struggles and the widening divide between Fatah and

Hamas (Amour 2018, 156). During the mass demonstrations of 2011–2012, Palestinian protesters sought to encourage political reform and promote national reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. They demanded improvements in the socio-economic conditions within the Palestinian Authority better functioning of its security structures, a resolution to the conflict with Israel, and the establishment of a Palestinian state (Amour 2018, 156).

It is important to note that the Palestinian protesters did not seek to overthrow the government or change the political system, rather, they believed that Israel was the primary cause of their suffering (Burton 2011, 172).

The first wave of discontent began in January 2011, when news agencies Al Jazeera and The Guardian published the "Palestinian Papers". These papers contained over 1,600 secret documents related to the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that had taken place between 1999 and 2010 (Arshad 2011, 2). The documents revealed the outcomes of the unsuccessful negotiations held in Annapolis in 2008, where Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The records indicated that Abbas was willing to make significant concessions in exchange for peace (Summary of Olmert's "Package" Offer to Abu Mazen 2008, 1).

According to declassified documents, the Palestinian Authority had agreed to transfer over to Israel all of the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, including disputed areas on the city's outskirts developed since 1967, to Israel (Hanieh 2001, 82). The resolution of the Temple Mount issue, which is home to holy sites for Muslims, Jews, and Christians, was delayed. Consequently, these documents indicate that Israel retained 6.8% of the West Bank, where Jewish settlements are located, in exchange for 5.5% of its territory and a corridor linking the West Bank to the Gaza Strip (Zayani 2013, 23–24).

Although the Palestinian authorities rejected the documents as inauthentic, several negotiation rounds included the same points outlined in them. U.S. President Bill Clinton first introduced these principles in 2000, and many considered them the most viable framework for achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

The unresolved conflict with Israel has significantly impacted the socio-economic development of the Palestinian Authority. After the establishment of the Palestinian Authority between 1994 and 1999, there was noticeable GDP growth. However, the outbreak of the "Al-Aqsa Intifada" and the subsequent rise of Hamas's sole rule in the Gaza Strip sharply diminished financial flows to the region.

The term "intifada", which translates from Arabic as "rising", "shock", or "liberation", refers to an organized uprising in the context of the ongoing struggle between Palestinians and Israelis. The "Al-Aqsa Intifada", also known as the "Second Intifada", was an armed uprising by Palestinians against Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that began on September 28, 2000.

GDP growth was unstable, which resulted in high levels of unemployment and poverty. Economic development in both regions of the Palestinian Authority progres-

sed slowly (Christophersen, Høigilt and Tiltne 2012, 5). Many young people believed that to secure a job within the state system, they needed "wasta" – personal connections with those in power.

There were significant shortcomings in political freedoms and human rights. The 2011 annual report from the international human rights organization Amnesty International indicated that both Fatah and Hamas severely restricted freedom of expression, persecuted journalists, bloggers, and dissidents, and intervened in the operations of non-governmental organizations. The report highlighted that political arrests had reached alarming levels (Amnesty International Report 2011, 66).

The executive (presidential) and legislative (Palestinian Legislative Council) bodies of the Palestinian Authority had not had legal status since 2010, as their mandates ended (Parliamentary elections have not been held since 2006, and presidential elections had not taken place since 2005, Samson 2013, 5, Darweish 2013, 164). A significant reason for the delay in both parliamentary and presidential elections was the ongoing national conflict between Fatah and Hamas. Tensions between these two movements intensified following Hamas's significant victory in the January 2006 parliamentary elections. The internal division that arose in 2006–2007 led to armed clashes and the establishment of two separate enclaves in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The call for national reconciliation thus highlighted the need for a revival of Palestinian political systems and progress in the socio-economic realm (Amour 2018, 162).

Dynamics and Characteristics of the 2011–2012 Protest Movements

The driving force behind the series of protests in the Palestinian Authority and the Gaza Strip was the youth. The "March 15 Movement", inspired by the Arab Spring, organized the demonstrations. From the first day, young activists in the movement publicly presented their list of demands.

The wave of protests began in 2011, specifically on March 15, with events taking place in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem simultaneously. Thousands of Palestinians, predominantly secular youth, took to the streets, utilizing social media and traditional media to call for an end to the conflict between Fatah and Hamas, an end to the Israeli occupation, and improved living conditions (Høigilt 2013, 343–344). Both Fatah and Hamas faced criticism for prioritizing their own interests over the national interests of the Palestinians.

The March 15 Movement comprised student and women's rights organizations, which highlighted issues related to the violation of women's rights. Importantly, the movement demanded the restoration of the Palestinian Legislative Council, which had been elected in January 2006 but had become paralyzed due to the ongoing conflict between Fatah and Hamas (Pratt 2012, 7).

The protests in the Gaza Strip were met with severe brutality from Hamas, while Fatah responded similarly in the West Bank. However, the political changes in

the region resulting from the Arab revolutions compelled both Palestinian factions to seek new avenues for dialogue (Dessi 2012, 8).

The following day of the demonstrations, on March 16, Mahmoud Abbas expressed his willingness to meet with representatives from Hamas. On March 17, officials from both movements convened in Nablus to discuss the possibility of resuming bilateral contacts (Brom 2011, 61). By April 27, the parties had reached an agreement on reconciliation in Cairo.

Egypt played a crucial role in the developments concerning the Palestinian territories. The revolution that took place in Egypt on February 12, 2011, created a new dynamic in both the country's domestic affairs and its foreign policy. Historically, Egypt has been a significant player in Palestinian issues, serving as the main ally of Israel and the United States within the Arab world. Additionally, Egypt assisted Israel during its operations in 2007. After Hamas seized power in June 2011, Israel intensified its economic and diplomatic blockade of the Gaza Strip, leading to the closure of the Rafah crossing on the Palestinian-Egyptian border. However, following the revolution in Egypt, the new leadership expressed a desire to strengthen ties with the Palestinians and to facilitate reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah (El-Bey D., "New Face New Ideas", *Al-Ahram Weekly*).

For Fatah, particularly for Mahmoud Abbas, the ousting of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak signified the loss of a dependable ally in Cairo. This situation necessitated the revival of reconciliation efforts with Hamas.

Additionally, the worsening domestic political situation in Syria raised doubts about the stability of Hamas's close ties with President Bashar al-Assad's government. Consequently, Hamas deemed it advantageous to strengthen its relationships with the Sunni Islamist forces that had recently come to power in Egypt.

On May 4, 2011, the new Egyptian authorities facilitated an agreement for reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. The two primary factions expressed their commitment to organizing new elections, which would lead to the establishment of a Palestinian Legislative Council and a Palestinian National Council. These councils would include representatives from all Palestinian political groups, as well as those involved in presidential elections (Beinin J.B. "The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Arab Awakening", *MERIP*).

The agreement between Fatah and Hamas aimed to establish a transitional government comprising entirely non-partisan members, thereby facilitating long-term parliamentary elections in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (International Crisis Group 2011, 2). However, it soon became apparent that implementing this agreement was not viable. The two factions failed to implement their confidence-building measures, particularly the release of political prisoners, a critical component of the agreement. Additionally, significant disagreements surfaced regarding the appointment of the prime minister for the transitional government. Fatah insisted that Salam Fayyad, the current prime minister of the Palestinian Authority,

should retain the position. In contrast, Hamas argued that Fayyad was antagonistic towards their party and responsible for the arrest of thousands of Hamas supporters, allegedly with encouragement from Tel Aviv. There were also substantial differences between Fatah and Hamas concerning the recognition of the Oslo Accords, financial matters, and control over security forces (Weiner 1999, 240).

Israel expressed its dissatisfaction with the agreement. Additionally, Israel insisted that the Palestinian Authority must ensure continued international aid, which was being directly hindered by the reconciliation efforts. Although the EU and the US opposed Israel's drastic measures, they also reiterated that any future government should adhere to the principles set by the Quartet. This Quartet, comprised of the US, EU, Russia, and the UN, would only cooperate with a Palestinian Authority government that recognizes the state of Israel, renounces violence, and accepts the agreements between Palestinians and Israelis (Tocci 2011, 4; International Crisis Group 2011, 3).

The protests unfolded in several phases. On May 15, 2011, thousands of Palestinian refugees in Syria and Lebanon crossed the Israeli defense border in the Golan Heights in an attempt to seize it. This mass, non-violent action by Palestinian refugees, demanding the right to return to their homeland, marked a significant event in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict during the "Arab Spring". As a result of these demonstrations, more than a dozen Palestinian protesters were killed by Israeli security forces.

In the Palestinian territories, the March 15 Movement coordinated its actions with the Palestinian diaspora and participated in protests along the Israeli borders. In the Gaza Strip, around 500 to 600 people took part in the demonstration, while approximately 1,000 people participated in the West Bank. The organizers referred to their actions as a "march of return" to the occupied homeland. Israeli military forces and Palestinian security personnel worked to prevent attempts to breach the security wall. Additionally, another clash occurred on the Syrian-Israeli border on June 5, but it also ended in failure (Gunning, Baron 2013, 178–182). According to various sources, the border riots involved not only Palestinian opposition organizations but also the Syrian authorities. Additionally, Fatah and Hamas supporters were mobilized through social networks and activist efforts.

Negotiations between Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Meshaal, the leader of Hamas's political wing, resumed on February 6, 2012, in Doha with mediation from the Qatari authorities. The Doha Declaration stated that Abbas would assume the position of Prime Minister of the Palestinian Authority. It outlined that the new government should consist of "independent representatives" responsible for overseeing the reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip (Doha Declaration signed between Hamas and Fatah, 2012). However, the Declaration was not implemented, as both movements encountered several external and internal challenges, which led to delays in the reconciliation process and the signing of an agreement.

Mahmoud Abbas faced significant pressure from the United States and Israel to suspend negotiations with Hamas and delay reconciliation efforts. The Obama administration, in particular, pressured Abbas to keep Salam Fayyad as prime minister, as Fayyad was seen as pro-Western and cooperative. The administration warned that failure to do so might result in political and financial sanctions (Amayreh K., "Hamas-Fatah Discord on Fayyad Persists", Miftah). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated that peace could be achieved with either Hamas or Israel, but not both simultaneously; the decision was left to the Palestinian side (Al Jazeera, "Abbas to Head Palestinian Unity Government"). Meanwhile, the Hamas leadership chose to wait until the Muslim Brotherhood consolidated its power in Egypt. The election of their candidate, Muhammad Morsi, as president in June 2012 bolstered the position of Palestinian Islamists in negotiations with Fatah.

The next wave of protests occurred in September 2012, primarily focused on high prices and rising unemployment. Demonstrators called for the lifting of economic restrictions imposed by the Paris Protocol.

However, the protests did not result in the lifting of the Paris Protocol, leading to increased public resentment against the Palestinian Authority. To address the growing unrest, President Abbas dismissed Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for failing to meet his targets and for allowing the crisis to escalate (Sherwood H., "US-backed Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad resigns", The Guardian).

Impact of the Arab Spring on Palestinian Political Strategy

The wave of protests prompted the two Palestinian factions to concentrate on foreign policy. The lack of clear progress in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations posed a threat to Mahmoud Abbas's legitimacy, highlighting a stagnation in Palestinian domestic politics. In September 2010 the leader of the Palestinian Authority submitted a request for UN membership. This issue took on special significance for the authorities in the autonomy during the period leading up to the "Arab Spring" as they sought to bolster their legitimacy and address growing discontent. Their strategy aimed to shift the population's focus away from internal issues and redirect anger towards Israel and the United States, both of which opposed the Palestinian Authority's unilateral actions.

At the September 2011 session of the UN General Assembly, member states discussed Palestine's application for UN membership.

Under the UN Charter, the Security Council first reviews a membership application and must approve it with at least 9 out of 15 votes, including the support of all five permanent members. The United States vetoed Palestine's application, preventing it from moving forward (Alcaro, Dessi 2011, 5).

On 29 November 2012, the UN General Assembly debated Palestine's status and adopted Resolution 67/19, recognizing Palestine as a non-member observer state. The resolution passed with 138 votes in favor, 9 against, and 41 abstentions.

Although the European Union generally acts as a unified bloc in foreign policy matters, it failed to reach consensus: 14 member states voted in favor, 12 abstained, and only the Czech Republic voted against the resolution (UN General Assembly, Status of Palestine in the United Nations, Resolution 67/19, UN Doc. A/RES/67/19, General Assembly Votes Overwhelmingly to Accord Palestine 'Non-Member Observer State' Status in the United Nations', UN Doc. GA/11317).

The Hamas leadership felt encouraged by the changes occurring in the region. They expressed satisfaction with the change of government in Egypt and other countries, hoping that the rise of Islamic forces in Arab nations would strengthen their movement, which had previously been constrained by the collaboration between the Damascus-Tehran axis (International Crisis Group 2011, 3).

The overthrow of the Hosni Mubarak regime and the election victory of Muhammad Morsi marked a new era of cooperation between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The Palestinian issue was prominently featured in the documents of the Muslim Brotherhood and its political arm, the Freedom and Justice Party. Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood shared a common ideological perspective and aligned traditional positions, reflecting public demand.

These changes necessitated a restructuring of the movement's ideology, traditional views, public appeal, and foreign policy. In 2012, Hamas established an office in Cairo, and high-ranking representatives of the movement visited the city multiple times. Muhammad Morsi also met with Khaled Mashaal, and the visa requirements for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were eliminated. An agreement was reached with Egypt to open the Rafah crossing, which aimed to alleviate the international blockade of Gaza. The peak of support for Hamas occurred in 2012 when several high-ranking Arab officials, including Egyptian Prime Minister Hisham Qandil, visited Gaza. This visit granted Hamas new legitimacy both in the Gaza Strip and in the broader Middle East. However, this support diminished following the overthrow of Muhammad Morsi in July 2013.

As internal political instability in Syria deepened and the Arab League temporarily suspended the country from the organization, Hamas's political bureau, which had been based in Damascus since 1999 under the leadership of Khaled Mashaal, relocated to Qatar (Akram F., "Hamas Leader Abandons Longtime Base in Damascus", The New York Times). The Arab Spring compelled Hamas's leadership to distance itself from its previous cooperation with the Damascus-Tehran axis and to express solidarity with the Sunni Arab world.

The Arab Spring had a negative impact on the Palestinian-Israeli peace process. Instead of fostering progress, the overthrow of authoritarian regimes in several Arab countries led to the rise of anti-Zionist, Islamist radicals. These new leaders rejected the Oslo Accords and called for a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict that involved the international community and a new format for direct negotiations with Israel.

Palestine's status as a non-member observer state at the UN has further complicated the already tense peace negotiation process between the parties involved. There has been a growing sentiment in Arab political and intellectual circles that the Oslo Accords have effectively lost their relevance and are considered "dead" documents. This perspective is particularly significant given that, at the time the agreements were made, they were met with more enthusiasm in the Arab world than in Israeli society.

Conclusions

During the 2011–2012 "Arab Spring", there was a revival of social and political activity within the Palestinian Authority, influenced by both internal factors and regional events. The "March 15 Movement" emerged as a bold initiative; however, it was weak and fragmented, resulting in no significant changes within the Authority. The movement struggled to garner support from the middle class and intellectuals, which hindered its ability to mount a consistent challenge against the political elite. The actions of the Palestinian demonstrators were limited and temporary, as they avoided confrontations with the security forces of Fatah and Hamas, whose rule was often harsh and oppressive, and they also steered clear of the Israeli armed forces.

To analyze the development of the Arab Spring in the Palestinian Authority, it's essential to consider several factors. Unlike protests in other Arab countries, the protests in Palestine did not aim to seize power. This distinction highlights the unique closed political opportunity structure present in the Palestinian context. According to Political Opportunity Structure (POS) theory, protest movements are more likely to succeed when there are divisions among elites, reduced repression, or external support. However, in Palestine, the cohesion between Fatah and Hamas, coupled with the ongoing Israeli occupation and repression of dissent, along with limited international encouragement for popular mobilization had significantly constrained the potential for transformative collective action. The absence of divisions within the political leadership meant that protesters lacked institutional allies, and the geopolitical environment did not create conditions favorable for structural reform.

Furthermore, the political climate in Palestine was shaped by the experiences of the two intifadas between 1987–1991 and 2000–2004. Following these uprisings, the Palestinian Authority found itself in a political crisis, lacking viable alternatives among its political elites. Rather than challenging the political situation, many Palestinians chose to disengage from politics altogether. Their priorities shifted away from public and political engagement, focusing instead on personal life and social status to address their own needs.

Additionally, the harsh policies of the right-wing Israeli government, coupled with regional risks and international pressure on Palestinian leadership, further suppressed public discontent.

The primary reason for the internal challenges faced by the Palestinians was not the actions of the Fatah or Hamas governments, but rather Israel's occupation, which has long disrupted daily life and isolated Palestine from the rest of the world. Consequently, Fatah's governance in the West Bank and Hamas's influence in the Gaza Strip remained unchanged. Efforts to reconcile the two groups, due to various internal and external factors, were ultimately destined to fail. As a result, both Palestinian political factions, unable to bridge their divide channelled the wave of Palestinian protests towards Israel, believing that the root cause of their failures and hardships was solely the policies implemented by Israel, which received considerable support from the West.

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