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THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT AND TODAY'S OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

By

Charles R. Cassidy

Major, USMC

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: _____

3 May 2010

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Abstract

Current analysis indicates the U.S. military does not likely have a thorough understanding of how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict relates to the operational environment despite its influence on Arab and Islamic culture and its exploitation by extremist movements. Consequently, today's military is not able to effectively leverage this sensitive cultural issue to assist in gaining the vital trust and support of the people who make up the pivotal neutral population in what amounts to a global counter-insurgency against Islamic extremism. By demonstrating a fundamental knowledge and understanding of how this conflict fits into Arab and Muslim cultures, military leaders will be more effective at everything from tribal engagement to coalition building and diplomacy. This paper provides a basis for why more aggressive study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a logical next step to improving overall cultural awareness within the U.S. military. The bottom line is that the military can no longer seemingly ignore this particular aspect of Arab and Islamic history if it truly wants to be more culturally aware. The operational commander has the ability to influence this by providing specific guidance and resourcing to the training and education pipelines that feed his forces. By doing so, the military will gain a more complete understanding of the cultural dynamics that are influenced by this conflict from which to better shape the operational environment.

Introduction

Military professionals take many considerations into account attempting to understand today's operational environment in the war against Islamic extremism. The threat imposed by militant Islamists coupled with the complexities of the operational environment requires today's military to think well beyond merely understanding enemy orders of battle and weapons characteristics. Since the terror attacks of 2001, the U.S. military has adapted to this complex and dynamic environment. Professional education programs, military training, and scholarly journals alike are full of the latest studies, assessments, and recommendations on terrorism, technological innovation, cultural awareness, and counterinsurgency doctrine. However, the U.S. military pays little attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in its pursuit of improving its level of cultural awareness. This essay addresses this controversial topic as it relates to the military's analysis and understanding of the operational environment.

This paper specifically sets out to answer three questions to assist the military professional gain a fuller understanding of how this conflict impacts the operational environment in order make better decisions and recommendations in support of operational and strategic objectives. It first addresses whether the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a significant or pertinent factor that must be considered in analyzing today's operational environment. It then investigates how the conflict is used by Islamic extremist movements. Finally, it looks at whether the U.S. military needs to more thoroughly address this issue at the operational level of war and how to do so.

The conclusions drawn from researching these three fundamental questions produced the thesis of this paper, which is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs to be more aggressively studied by military professionals because it is an often neglected aspect of cultural awareness vital to fully understanding today's operational environment. More specifically, the research validates that the conflict is a legitimate aspect of Arab and non-Arab Muslim culture that routinely shapes the operational environment. As part of culture, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict serves as a catalyst for both unification and destabilization throughout the world. The conflict influences decision making and public opinion, and is routinely leveraged and exploited by nation states and extremist groups alike. The benefit of fully understanding how this conflict impacts the modern operational environment applies equally to the tactical as it does to the operational and strategic levels of war. By demonstrating a fundamental knowledge and understanding of how this conflict fits into Arab and Muslim cultures, military leaders will be more effective at everything from tribal engagement to coalition building and diplomacy.

Setting the Stage

To fully understand how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influences today's operational environment, it is imperative to first understand some of the conflict's roots. Palestine was home to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike throughout history. For centuries Jews and Muslims were generally tolerant of each other; more so than Christians were towards either of the former.[1] The origins of the modern conflict between Arabs and Jews can be traced back to the 19th century with the rise of the Zionist movement.[2] Growing Jewish nationalism

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[1] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian* Conflict, 12.
[2] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, xiii.

and the spread of anti-Semitism in Europe resulted in the Zionist movement to create an

independent Jewish state in Palestine.[3] Throughout the 19th and into the 20th century, Jewish

immigration into Palestine clashed with emerging Palestinian Arab nationalism primarily due

to land encroachment.[4] Resonating across these nationalistic territorial disputes were

religious claims by both parties that attempted to justify their respective rights to occupy the

territory. This unique blend of competing interests involving nationalism, land, and religion

provided the underlying foundation of the conflict. However, to gain a more complete

understanding of the contemporary conflict, one must look to the events that shaped it in the

aftermath of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire.

Following World War I, the Middle East was divided into independent Arab states, areas under British control, and areas under either British or French mandate as depicted in figure 1. Arabs felt betrayed by the carving up and colonization of their lands by the European powers.[5] This partitioning of Arab land was counter to the expectations of Arab leaders who sought to gain Arab

Figure 1. Mid-East Mandates (reprinted from Tavelvice Travelogue, "Blame the British and French for Today's Mahem in the Middle East.") http://travelogue.travelvice.com/israel/blame-the-british-and-french-for-todays-mayhem-in-the-middle-east/ (accessed 25 April 2010).

independence in exchange for their alliance based on prior negotiations with the British.[6]

This was further complicated by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which essentially

legitimized the Zionist movement and laid the groundwork for establishing a Jewish national

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[3] Ibid., 5.
[4] Ibid., 5.
[5] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 8.
[6] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 25.

home in Palestine.[7] The seeds of discontent were sown that united Arabs around the plight of

the Palestinians. British attempts to placate both parties and diffuse growing tensions proved

fruitless during the ensuing years. Jewish immigration into the region continued and with it,

tensions escalated into violence. This escalation culminated with the Arab Revolt in 1936

and by 1938 all hope of Arabs and Jews living together in a single Palestinian state were

gone.[8] Hostilities flared between Arabs and Jews, and attacks targeted the besieged British

landlords as well. Unable to resolve the conflict internally, the British invited the

international community to intervene. In 1947 the United Nations (UN) General Assembly

passed resolution 181 calling for an end to the British mandate and partitioning of Palestine

into a two state territory with Jerusalem remaining under

international trusteeship as depicted in figure 2.[9]

On the eve of expiration of the British mandate

over Palestine, Israel declared its independence and

sovereignty over the land it was designated in the UN

resolution. Condemning Israel's declaration of

statehood, Arab armies from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria,

Jordan, and Iraq occupied the territory partitioned by the

UN resolution for the Palestinian state. The result was

Figure 2. UN Partition Plan (reprinted from Stephan Gowen, "Israel Defined." http://gowans.wordpress.com/2009/01/07/israel-defined/ (accessed 25 April 2010).

the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The armistices that ended the conflict resulted in Israeli control

of over seventy-five percent of the entire Palestinian territory, Egypt in control of the Gaza

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[7] Ibid., 27.
[8] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 27-28.
[9] Ibid., 48.

strip, and Jordan annexing East Jerusalem and the West Bank as depicted in figure 3.[10]   The

cost of the war to the Palestinians was severe. They still did not have a state to call their own

and the conflict turned roughly seventy percent of the Palestinian population into refugees.[11]

The Arab defeat also had far reaching implications throughout the Arab community that

spanned the plight of the Palestinians.

The Arab world was not pleased with the results of the Arab-Israeli war. Numerous coups occurred and internal turmoil soon preoccupied many of the fledgling Arab states.[12] Consequently, the Palestinian issue took a back seat throughout much of the Arab world and Palestinian self-reliance emerged in response to the lack of support from the
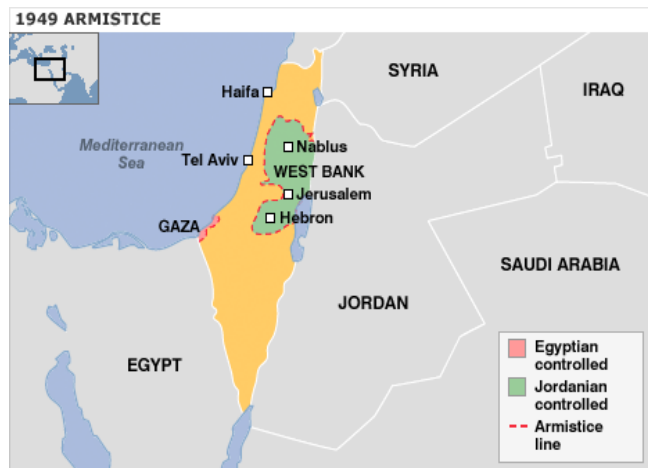

Figure 3. 1949 Armistice Line. (reprinted from BBC News. "Middle East Conflict: History in Maps." http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7380642.stm **(accessed 25 April 2010).**

Arab community.[13] Small guerrilla cells such as Fatah emerged building off of the Algerian

example that self-reliance was the key to liberation and with the intent of generating popular

support to coerce the Arab world into fighting Israel.[14] In 1964, concerned over the

Palestinian feeling of alienation, Arab governments formed the Palestinian Liberation

Organization (PLO) marking a critical first step by establishing the first formal political

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[10] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 11.
[11] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 58.
[12] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 12.
[13] Ibid., 74.
[14] Ibid., 74.

structure representing the Palestinians.[15] Unfortunately, this failed to avert the next large

scale confrontation with Israel.

The 6-Day War of 1967 resulted from building tensions due to guerrilla actions by

Palestinian militant groups, cross border confrontations with Syria, and Egyptian military

posturing.[16] On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike that quickly crippled its

Arab enemies and resulted in the seizure of the Sinai, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Golan Heights,

and East Jerusalem. Israel tripled the territory under its control securing its hold on all of

Palestine as depicted in figure 4. However, only East Jerusalem and a few surrounding areas

were officially assimilated into Israel; the rest was merely occupied to allegedly prevent the

large population of Arabs from gaining citizenship and the corresponding right to vote.[17] As

before, the war added significantly to the Palestinian refugee issue and set the groundwork

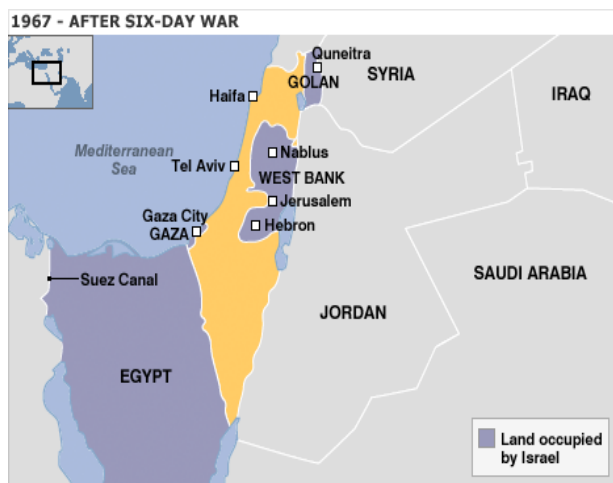for the establishment of the controversial Israel settlements in the occupied territories.

Figure 4. Israeli Territory After the Six-Day War. (reprinted from BBC News, "Middle East Conflict: History in Maps." http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7380642.stm (accessed 25 April 2010).

Following the 6-Day War, the international community again engaged in an attempt to end the conflict in the Middle East. The UN passed Security Council Resolution 242 which provided a framework of negotiation. It sought to achieve conflict resolution in what became

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[15] Ibid., 74.

[16] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 94-96.

[17] Ibid., 102.

known as its "land for peace" formula.[18] The framework essentially called for a settlement to

the refugee situation and for Israel to withdraw from territories seized in 1967 in return for

Arab states to end their declared state of belligerency with Israel and recognize its right to

exist in peace.[19] Palestinians dismissed the plan outright and it took several years before

Israel accepted the resolution; but the resolution eventually laid the foundation that provided

the framework for Israel to establish some form of peace with all but one of its neighbors.[20]

The outcome of the 6-Day War also prompted several Arab leaders to adjust their perspective

and seek a more pragmatic resolution to the conflict.[21]

Following the death of Egyptian President Nasser in 1970, the new president, Anwar

Sadat, emerged as one of those leaders taking a more pragmatic approach to the conflict. His

goal was peace, realizing that continued war with Israel would only bring hardship and

instability to his people. He also understood there was no incentive for Israel to accept peace

accords given their previously demonstrated military might. With the assistance of Syria,

Egypt launched a daring plan to weaken Israel in an effort to bring them to the negotiating

table. Ironically, Anwar Sadat essentially intended to start a war to make peace.[22]

On October 6, 1973 the combined Egyptian and Syrian attack initiated what is

commonly referred to as the Yon Kippur War. Israel was initially shocked by the attack and

narrowly averted a disaster. In the end, the war resulted in no real territorial exchanges

between the belligerents and led to another UN resolution calling for negotiations. However,

[18] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 22.
[19] Ibid., 22.
[20] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 103-104.
[21] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 22.
[22] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 115-117.

the conflict achieved its ultimate objective from the Arab perspective; Israel now considered Egyptian peace proposals seriously.[23]

In the wake of the 1973 war, building pressure from extreme Zionists led to the establishment of the first Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank in 1975.[24] However, the possibility of peace crept forward due to gradual warming towards the two-state solution within the Arab community. Then in 1977, Egyptian president Anwar Sadat made another radical move towards peace by traveling to Israel and addressing the Israeli government to express his desires for peace in the region.[25] Subsequent US intervention in the form of the Camp David Accords resulted in Egypt and Israel signing a peace treaty in March of 1978. The fragile first steps were taken; but they also had a destabilizing effect within the Arab community. President Sadat incorrectly assumed Arab governments would follow Egypt's example; instead his actions only angered the Arab world.[26]

Significantly complicating the delicacy of the peace process was the Palestinian popular uprising, otherwise known as the *Intifada,* which began in 1987 and lasted until roughly 1992. It was spurred by Israel's "iron fist" approach to maintaining civil order in the West Bank.[27] The *Intifada* provided a fertile environment for the spread of militant Islam which had previously emerged during the Iranian revolution of 1979.[28] This rise of militant Islam brought a divergence of principles between the relatively secular PLO and various

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[23] Ibid., 119.
[24] Ibid., 127.
[25] Ibid., 131.
[26] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 29.
[27] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 144-145.
[28] Ibid., 163.

militant Islamist groups such as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah and severely threatened the precarious peace process that was slowly inching its way forward.[29]

Although still plagued with sporadic and often intense periods of violence, gradual concessions by both Arabs and Israelis resulted in incremental peace developments. In 1988, the PLO made a historic move by formally renouncing violence as a means to end this conflict, recognizing Israel's right to exist in its pre-1967 borders, and accepting prior UN resolutions. Subsequent moves lead to the Declaration of Principles and the Oslo Accords of 1993 which formally established mutual recognition of both Israeli and PLO political legitimacy.[30] The accords further outlined a five-year plan for Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza strip and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to manage affairs within the areas they would control. The Oslo II Accords in 1995 furthered the peace process by dividing the West Bank into three zones formally delineating respective areas of control between Israel and PNA. The accords did not formally address the contentious issues of Jerusalem, refugees, water, or settlements; but they marked a starting point from which both sides saw a new era of hope emerging.[31]

As of today, although both sides acknowledge the viability of a two-state solution and the others right to existence, varying tensions remain within both camps focused primarily around territory, Israeli settlements, and refugees. This brief historical review in no way serves to give a detailed or complete accounting of all the various personalities, events, and movements that shaped the conflict. However, it should provide a backdrop to assist in understanding how the nature of the conflict changed over the last several decades from what

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[29] Ibid., 163-164.
[30] Lesch, *Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 84.
[31] Ross, *Teach Yourself the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 179-180.

was once an Arab-Israeli confrontation to the more modern and accepted Israeli-Palestinian

conflict of today.

The Conflict and Today's Operational Environment

To understand why the conflict must be more aggressively studied by today's

military; the first question that must be addressed is how the conflict influences today's

operational environment. History demonstrates that the conflict once served as a strong

unifying force throughout the Arab world. However, the views and perspectives of the

conflict underwent many changes not only within the Arab world, but also in Israel and the

international community. What was once universally considered the Arab-Israeli conflict is

now commonly accepted as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A logical conclusion from this

aspect alone can lead to the assessment that the conflict is now only a localized affair that

does not impact the global security environment. However, this perspective is not

completely accurate. General David Petraeus succinctly captures how the Israeli-Palestinian

conflict influences the larger operational environment in a recent testimony before the U.S.

Senate Armed Services Committee in March 2010. He states:

> The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S.
> favoritism for Israel. Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength
> and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in the AOR and
> weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world. Meanwhile, al-
> Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support. The
> conflict also gives Iran influence in the Arab world through its clients, Lebanese
> Hezbollah and Hamas.[32]

General Petraeus' conclusions are likely drawn from understanding the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict's influence upon Arab and Islamic cultures. A public opinion poll

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[32] Petraeus, "Testimony," 12.

conducted by Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development in 2009 demonstrates how predominantly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resonates throughout culture. The survey was conducted in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and UAE and included a population of 4,087 persons.[33] When asked how important the Palestinian issue is in their priorities, the survey concluded that 38% of population ranked it their most important priority; 76% ranked it as one of their top 3 priorities; and 99% ranked it as one of their top 5 priorities.[34] The assessment that the conflict permeates global Arab and Islamic cultures is further demonstrated by findings in a Pew Research Center study published in February 2010. This study indicates widespread negative opinion of Jews by both non-Palestinian Arab countries and by Muslim Asian countries.[35]

The fact that there is no universally accepted narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also demonstrates the conflict's influence on culture. For example, from the Israeli perspective, the 1948-49 war is known as a war of independence; to the Arab world, this period in history is more readily referred to as the catastrophe.[36] Similarly, what are commonly referred to as the 1963 Six-Day War and the 1973 Yom Kippur War by Israel and western cultures are known to the Arab world as the June War and the Ramadan War respectively.[37] What is important about these and numerous other examples is that they are not merely diverging semantics. They demonstrate how people's interpretation of the conflict becomes part of their respective cultures. One parallel example would be to look at

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[33] Telhami, *2009 Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey*, 3.
[34] Ibid., 27.
[35] Pew, *Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders; Mixed Views of Hamas and Hezbollah in Largely Muslim Nations*, 23.
[36] Doctor Heidi Lane (Professor Naval War College), in discussion with the author, 26 March 2010.
[37] Lane, discussion.

the way the American Civil War influences U.S. culture.[38] To this day, it can be argued that diverging interpretations of this historic U.S. conflict still shape aspects of U.S. culture in various populations throughout the country.

The habitual use of the conflict as a political instrument is yet another example of how the conflict permeates both Arab and non-Arab Muslim culture. Throughout its evolution, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict became a religiously charged issue used to seek legitimacy and influence by Arab and non-Arab nations alike. The Palestinian issue was framed as a religious conflict within which Islam was used as an ideology to mobilize people against a common enemy; in this case Israel. In this regard, the conflict draws upon traditional or historic perspectives of Islamic persecution by western societies dating back to the Crusades. Within this religious ideological framework, Israel became a convenient scapegoat to Arab nations to assist achieving domestic legitimacy and distracting attention from other internal issues.[39] In many ways, it is analogous to Nazi Germany's casting of the Jews to identify a common threat in support of an ideological belief in a superior race.

The analysis concludes that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs to be considered in understanding the operational environment because it is an influential factor in Arab and non-Arab Muslim cultures alike. It is relevant for the same reasons that cultural awareness training invests in understanding various language, social, and religious customs and nuances. Understanding culture is pivotal in conducting effective counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations. Cultural awareness assists military professionals in assessing, planning, and executing population centric operations. General Stanley McChrystal stresses

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[38] Lane, discussion.
[39] Eid, "The Role of Islam in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," 1-9.

12

the imperative of understanding the cultural aspect of the operational environment in his

commander's guidance on counterinsurgency and stability operations. He specifically

highlights winning will be a function of "operating in a way that respects their culture and

religion".[40]

The next question to be addressed is how the conflict is used by extremist groups

within the operational environment. The February 2010 Pew Research Center study also

indicates that a majority of Muslim populations do not support extremist Islamic groups such

as Hamas and Hezbollah and confidence in Usama bin Laden is decreasing within Muslim

publics.[41] However, as previously discussed, the plight of the Palestinians influences both

Arab and Islamic cultures. Consequently, the conflict readily impacts popular opinion and

decision making of key leaders at all levels. This is precisely the aspect exploited by Islamist

groups to gain and leverage local, regional, and even global influence. The conflict can even

be considered a critical requirement or capability if one subscribes to the argument that

popular support for the global caliphate is a potential al-Qaeda center of gravity.

There are numerous examples of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict being used by

extremist groups to support ideology, recruit, and promote instability in support of their

objectives. For example, the conflict appears in al-Qaeda messages from both Usama bin

Ladin and Shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri. In a 2004 video-taped speech sent to Aljazeera, bin

Ladin urges anti-Americanism tying it to the anti-Israeli beliefs prevalent in Arab and

Muslim culture.[42] Similarly, the transcript of a 2006 al-Zawahiri tape is rich with Israeli-

Palestinian rhetoric. Zawahiri uses the religious ideology of the conflict to unite and

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[40] Commander, ISAF, *ISAF Commanders Counterinsurgency Guidance,* 1.
[41] Pew, *Little Enthusiasm for Many Muslim Leaders; Mixed Views of Hamas and Hezbollah in Largely Muslim Nations*, 1-2.
[42] Bin Ladin, "Strategy of Attrition," 1-2.

generate popular support against the West. It is an impressive recruiting pitch building upon the cultural impact of the conflict. He uses historical references such as the Balfour Declaration and the Oslo accords and uses words such as "factual realities" in presenting his argument.[43] Both examples clearly demonstrate how the conflict is used in the information domain to influence the critical neutral population of what can be considered a global insurgency. Furthermore, the emphasis on specific historical aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to influence the masses is precisely why military leaders at all levels must understand how and why this conflict influences Arab and Muslim cultures. Perhaps nothing better exemplifies the importance of the conflict to al-Qaeda grand strategy than their attack on Hamas for joining the political process in Palestine. As former CIA officer and White House advisor Bruce Riedel points out, this reveals a potential vulnerability in al-Qaeda and confirms "the Palestinian cause is the centerpiece of al-Qaeda's narrative of Western Crusader aggression against the umma."[44]

Besides being a popular instrument used to recruit by militant Islamists, the sensitivity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict throughout the Middle-East is often exploited to create or maintain instability. The most illustrative example highlighting how the conflict was used to shape the operational environment was during the Gulf War of 1991. Iraqi attempts to provoke Israeli retaliation had severe implications. Israeli intervention would have severely threatened the coalition that relied heavily on Arab participation in the region.

After analyzing how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influences culture and is used by extremist groups, the final question deals with whether the U.S. military gives it appropriate

[43] Zawahiri, "Realities of the Conflict Between Islam and Unbelief," 1-11.
[44] Riedel, "The Return of the Knights: al Qaeda and the Fruits of Middle East Disorder," 115-117.

consideration in assessing and understanding the operational environment. Since the terror attacks of 2001 and widespread emergence of Islamic extremism, the military has become attuned to the need to be more culturally aware in order to be most effective in the practice of irregular warfare. It established various training programs targeting language, local customs, and religious awareness to better prepare its warriors to operate in asymmetric environments. Unfortunately, the role the Israeli-Palestinian conflict plays is often overlooked in this cultural training regime. As a result, military leaders likely only possess superficial knowledge of the conflict and its linkages to the current operational environment.

Two principle findings support this conclusion. The first is a review of curriculum at three of the military service command and staff colleges. Of the three service schools examined, only the Marine Corps command and staff college provides formal curriculum to the entire student population dedicated to studying the history and nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict; and it did so starting this year in response to student requests.[45] The Army command and staff college looks at certain aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict such as the Israeli-Hezbollah war of 2002. However, it appears as a case study geared at the tactical level of warfare focusing on the perspective of the conventional vs. non-state actor or armed groups.[46] Similarly, the Naval Command and Staff College offers no formal instruction on the conflict in its core curriculum. With the exception of the Marine Corps curriculum, evidence suggests unless a student takes an elective that deals specifically with the conflict or region, they will not receive any formal education on this important topic influences the operational environment.

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[45] Streusand, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 225.

[46] Daniel Ward, (Chief of Curriculum, U.S. Army Command and General Staff School), telephone calls with the author on 2 March and 25 March 2010.

The second finding comes from a survey conducted at the Naval War College. It demonstrates a relative limited awareness of the conflict and more importantly, an almost universal desire by the military to know more. The survey was given to a random population of over seventy
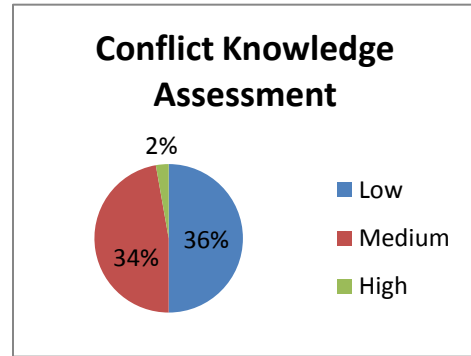

Conflict Knowledge Assessment

- Low
- Medium
- High

2%
36%
34%

Figure 5. Naval War College Survey Results.

Naval War College command and staff students from all services. As figure 5 illustrates, it concluded that roughly only two percent of the student population had what could be considered a detailed understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. [47] The remainder of the population was essentially split between having only a rudimentary to a moderate understanding. The survey also concluded that military professionals themselves nearly unanimously believe the topic is worth study and that they desired to have a more thorough understanding of how it impacts today's environment. The survey was unsophisticated and limited in scope. However, it clearly indicates a relatively limited understanding of the conflict and overriding desire to know more by a cross section of mid-level military professionals.

The result of researching these three questions indicates that the military must gain a greater understanding of how this controversial conflict relates to their respective operational areas to be most effective in maintaining popular support, delegitimizing extremist

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[47] In order to establish a common definition of what constituted the varying levels of understanding, the survey was framed using the following parameters: <u>Low</u> - You have a basic understanding that a conflict exists between belligerents over territorial rights to the Holy Land. <u>Medium</u> - You have a good understanding of the nature and extent of conflict between the belligerents to include its root causes; key events, groups, and individuals associated with the conflict; and current issues at play that preclude conflict termination. <u>High</u> - You can discuss nature and extent of the conflict in detail to include its root causes; key events, dates, and individuals throughout its timeline; current issues that preclude conflict termination; and its role in modern threat environment.

propaganda and rhetoric, and shaping the operational environment. By doing so, military leaders gain a greater ability to influence tactical, operational, and even strategic objectives. The next step is to assess what can be done to remedy this apparent shortcoming in professional development and combat readiness of the U.S. military.

Moving Forward and the Way Ahead

As this paper illustrates, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a legitimate aspect of cultural awareness largely overlooked by the U.S. military in understanding the operational environment. The issue is not how the conflict must be resolved at the national strategic level, but rather what the military needs to know about it. Therefore, the U.S. military must first embrace the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a factor that shapes Arab and Islamic culture. Then the U.S. military must incorporate the conflict into exiting training and education efforts in order to better understand and shape the operational environment.

The operational commander has the ability to influence this initiative by directing specific training to occur. The bottom line is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict needs to be formally studied in order to gain an appreciation of its historical significance and influence on culture. This can be accomplished within the existing framework of professional education. In some regards, it is already being done as previously noted in the initiative by the Marine Corps to incorporate the study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict into the formal curriculum for all students attending Marine Corps command and staff college. This is exactly what needs to occur across all of the service institutions within both the intermediate and top level programs. It should not be a topic addressed only in electives programs or chance seminar discussions. Nor should segments of the conflict be used as case studies

from which only to draw tactical lessons. The military professional must have the conflict presented holistically so they can draw conclusions to be incorporated into the contemporary environment.

In addition to improving education about the conflict, training should also be focused directly at the tactical level. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be incorporated into the cultural awareness training provided during typical pre-deployment training packages. This training would be tailored to how the conflict relates to specific geographic regions in which the deployment is occurring. Military leaders with an understanding of how this conflict impacts the operational environment would be able to develop training objectives in coordination with regional experts tailored to the force and the operational objectives. At a minimum, this training should include an overview that frames the history and nature of the struggle, how it impacts Arab and Islamic culture, and how it shapes Arab and Islamic perspectives towards the west. Additional training may be provided to designated personal on how the conflict shapes decision making and opinion, how it is exploited by extremists, and what the implications of the conflict are within the specific geographic region. All of this training can be nested within the existing cultural awareness training that provides language, customs and courtesies, and other cultural nuances that already exist in most unit pre-deployment programs.

Counter Point and Conclusions

The logical counterargument to this discussion is that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a factor that shapes the operational environment. Specifically, some might say that it does not influence culture to the extent that merits the investment of time and resources by

the military. This is a reasonable perspective when considering the points made by Dr. Emile A. Nakhleh, a former professor and department chair at St. Mary's College who later went on to retire from the CIA as a senior intelligence officer and director of the Political Islam Strategic Analysis Program. In an article published in *Parameters, Journal of the US Army War College,* Dr. Nakhleh presents opposing arguments regarding the centrality of the Palestinian conflict relative to overall instability in the Middle East. Dr. Nakhleh argues instability is endemic and driven by economic interests, intrinsically fragile regimes, serious gaps between the people and their leaders, and socio-cultural-religious pressures induced by modernization.[48] Further he states that the Palestinian conflict "is only one ingredient among many in the Middle East, so that a resolution of their plight will have only a marginal effect on the internal stability of states in the region".[49] In this regard, one may develop an argument that the conflict is only a tangential issue loosely influencing culture and not a critical factor in shaping the operational environment.

This argument is very credible if one only looks at it from the perspective of the conflicts existence as a catalyst for instability. If conflict resolution occurs, something else will take its place to be leveraged or exploited for various social or political reasons. However, like the Crusades are often used in extremist rhetoric calling attention to the plight of Islam against western aggression, it is likely that the plight of the Palestinians will be used in the same regard. One must remember that the military necessity of understanding culture and society is driven by the need to develop an understanding of the environment. In the asymmetrical fight of counterinsurgency, this understanding provides a means to gain the trust of the people who live and operate within this environment. If the Israeli-Palestinian

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[48] Nakhleh, "The Palestine Conflict and US Strategic Interests in the Persian Gulf," 71.
[49] Ibid: 76.

conflict ceases to be a common issue throughout Arab and Islamic cultures and something else emerges as Dr. Nakhleh's article alludes to, then the military should similarly attempt to wrap its arms around that as well. Similarly, it doesn't absolve the military from understanding how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict emerged and influenced culture because it will likely still be used by extremist groups as they use the Crusades today.

This paper provides the basis for why more aggressive study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a logical next step to improve the overall cultural awareness within today's military. The military can no longer seemingly ignore this aspect of Arab and Islamic history if it truly wants to be more culturally aware. Current analysis indicates that the military does not likely have a thorough understanding of how the conflict relates to the operational environment despite its influence on Arab and Islamic culture and its exploitation by extremist movements. Consequently, today's war fighters are not able to most effectively leverage this sensitive cultural issue to assist in gaining the vital trust and support of the people who make up the pivotal neutral population in the global counter-insurgency against Islamic extremism. The operational commander has the ability to influence this by providing specific guidance and resourcing to the training and education pipelines that feed the operating forces. By doing so, the military gains a more complete understanding of the cultural dynamics that are influenced by this controversial conflict from which to shape the operational environment.

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