

Islam in the Palestinian Uprising

by [Robert Satloff \(/experts/robert-satloff\)](#)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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"Activist Islam" has emerged as a critical new force in the Palestinian uprising and a new wild card in the intra-Palestinian debate over the political direction the ten-month old revolt should take. The recent publication of the Islamic Resistance Movement's covenant, which brooks no compromise with Israel, is but the most visible evidence of a new force in Palestinian politics distinguished by its fundamentalist, organized and often violent character.

Islamic activism was, in many ways, the spark that ignited the Palestinian uprising and one of the principal engines that maintained it. It provided a simple and recognizable vocabulary that could appeal to the masses of Palestinians untouched by the rhetoric and ideology of long-standing nationalist groups. In so doing, it mobilized large numbers of Palestinians who had heretofore never participated in any sort of political activity.

In the long term, the emergence of Islamic activists as powerful actors inside the territories threatens to move the Palestinian political debate even further away from reconciliation with Israel. To most Islamic activists "a two-state solution" is -- at most -- an element of a "strategy of phases" leading to the dismantling of Israel. For some of them even discussion of a "two-state solution" is a moot point. Indeed, much like the emphasis of Israel's religious-nationalists on the right of Jews to settle in the West Bank, Islamic activists uniformly list "repatriation" -- the right to return to homes and land inside the Green Line -- as their non-negotiable chief demand.

This is as much reflective of the ideology of Islamic activism, in which there is no room for Jewish sovereignty in Muslim land. But it is also a reflection of demographics -- the central role played by residents of refugee camps involved in the Islamic movement, especially in Gaza. For them the establishment of an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, and the repudiation of irredentist claims to pre-1967 Israel, is no victory. The greater the role of Islamic activists in the daily confrontation against Israeli rule in the territories, the more difficult it will be in the future to separate tactics from the Islamic activists' strategic vision of a "Zionist-free" Palestine.

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