



The Mercy Seminar 2025, Term III.4

Opening Comments

Last week, we looked at the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, proclaimed from Algiers on November 15, 1988. As we saw, that document makes its case for Palestinian statehood on the basis of international law and international rights. After forty years of continual rejection by the Palestinians, the Declaration proclaims the acceptance of UN General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947 to warrant its legitimacy, which directly entails the recognition of the legitimacy of the Jewish state of Israel.

Despite the historical injustice inflicted on the Palestinian Arab people resulting in their dispersion and depriving them of their right to self-determination, following upon U.N. General Assembly Resolution 181 (1947), which partitioned Palestine into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, yet it is this Resolution that still provides those conditions of international legitimacy that ensure the right of the Palestinian Arab people to sovereignty.

The Declaration also renounces the use of violence and terror as methods of resistance, and proclaims the ideal of peaceful coexistence in Palestine, which it calls the land of peace and love. Its repeated references to Temple, Church, and Mosque reveal that it envisions a secular Palestinian state building on “Palestine's age-old spiritual and civilizational heritage of tolerance and religious coexistence.” The Declaration also reveals the three non-negotiables of Palestinian independence: the right to independence and sovereignty, the right of return, and Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. As Darwish says in his commemoration of the Nakba: the PLO has “obtained recognition from the international community for the Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and the right of return as anchors to secure us against the gales of loss and denial. Above all, Jerusalem, more than a right, is the soul of our being and the essence of harmony.” This directly entails ending the occupation of the territories captured by Israel in the 1967 war, including east Jerusalem. As of September, 2025, 157 of the 193 nations who are members of the UN have recognized the State of Palestine, as defined by the Declaration of Independence. However, the reality of the State of Palestine has yet to be established.

The covenant we are reading tonight was promulgated on August 18, 1988, three months before the Palestinian Declaration of Independence, by the Islamic Resistance Movement, whose Arabic acronym is HAMAS, which also means strength, bravery and zeal in Arabic. If the Palestinian Declaration of Independence makes its case on the basis of the political and national identity of the Palestinian Arab people and their historic relation to the land of Palestine, the Covenant of Hamas makes its claim on the basis of Islam, which is not surprising given that Hamas is the Palestinian wing of

the Muslim Brotherhood, which started in Egypt in 1928. The ideal of the Muslim Brotherhood, and hence of Hamas, is to extend the role and guidance of Islam to every aspect of life in Palestine, including “culture, creed, politics, economics, education, society, justice and judgement, the spreading of Islam, education, art, information, science of the occult and conversion to Islam.” This agenda is meant to undo the ideological invasion of Palestine that has taken place from the West and the East, which laid the foundation for the Crusades of the Middle Ages, and culminated in the Zionist invasion of Palestine in the twentieth century. Hence the educational mission of Hamas is quite extensive: “It is important that basic changes be made in the school curriculum, to cleanse it of the traces of ideological invasion that affected it as a result of the orientalist and missionaries who infiltrated the region following the defeat of the Crusaders at the hands of Salah el-Din (Saladin).”

The Covenant quotes a mission statement of the Muslim Brotherhood to make its own mission clear: “Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Koran its constitution: Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes.” The objective in the resistance struggle against the Israel and Zionism is “to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine.” This is necessary according to the Covenant because Palestine is an “Islamic Waqf,” which is a perpetual endowment or grant. This claim is an innovation of Hamas, as Islam has never spoken of nationalism in terms of the concept of Waqf, but for Hamas, this means that Palestine can only be occupied by Muslims, and all other people on the land are enemies of Islam who must be driven off. “Nothing in nationalism is more significant or deeper than in the case when an enemy should tread Moslem land. Resisting and quelling the enemy become the individual duty of every Moslem, male or female.”

This means that every Palestinian Muslim, every Arab Muslim, and every Muslim anywhere in the world, has a religious obligation to participate in Jihad against the State of Israel until it is entirely driven off the land of Palestine. “Since this is the case, liberation of Palestine is then an individual duty for every Moslem wherever he may be. On this basis, the problem should be viewed. This should be realized by every Moslem.” This is why Hamas rejects the international peace process that ultimately led to the Oslo Accords. “There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are all a waste of time and vain endeavors.” The educational efforts of the Muslim Brotherhood should involve teaching every Muslim why he or she should engage in Jihad against Israel until Palestine is entirely liberated.

The day that enemies usurp part of Moslem land, Jihad becomes the individual duty of every Moslem. In face of the Jews' usurpation of Palestine, it is compulsory that the banner of Jihad be raised. To do this requires the diffusion of Islamic consciousness among the masses, both on the regional, Arab and Islamic levels. It is necessary to instill the spirit of Jihad in the heart of the nation so that they would confront the enemies and join the ranks of the fighters.

This is why the Covenant repeatedly turns to the Crusades, as it sees Zionism as a continuation of the Crusades, which can only be defeated by united Muslim Jihad, as took place under the leadership of Saladin: “the Moslems were able to retrieve the land only when they stood under the wing of their

religious banner, united their word, hallowed the name of Allah and surged out fighting under the leadership of Salah ed-Din al-Ayyubi. They fought for almost twenty years and at the end the Crusaders were defeated and Palestine was liberated. This is the only way to liberate Palestine. There is no doubt about the testimony of history.”

Since the issue of Palestinian nationalism is seen as essential to the religious creed of Muslims, it can only be properly addressed if the struggle with Zionism is seen in religious terms by every Muslim, and not in secular political terms as appeared to be the case with the PLO. Hence, even though the Covenant sees the PLO as kindred spirits in their resistance to Zionism, the Covenant insists that Islam is central to the struggle: “we are unable to exchange the present or future Islamic Palestine with the secular idea. The Islamic nature of Palestine is part of our religion and whoever takes his religion lightly is a loser.” The Covenant is also quite scathing with regard to the peace treaties that Arab and Muslim countries have made with Israel, beginning with Egypt under Anwar Sadat. “Leaving the circle of struggle with Zionism is high treason, and cursed be he who does that. There is no way out except by concentrating all powers and energies to face this Nazi, vicious Tatar invasion. The alternative is loss of one's country, the dispersion of citizens, the spread of vice on earth and the destruction of religious values.” Indeed, Zionism is portrayed not only as a threat to the Palestinian people, but as a threat to Islamic civilization as a whole.

The Zionist invasion is a vicious invasion. It does not refrain from resorting to all methods, using all evil and contemptible ways to achieve its end. It relies greatly in its infiltration and espionage operations on the secret organizations it gave rise to, such as the Freemasons, The Rotary and Lions clubs, and other sabotage groups. All these organizations, whether secret or open, work in the interest of Zionism and according to its instructions. They aim at undermining societies, destroying values, corrupting consciences, deteriorating character and annihilating Islam. It is behind the drug trade and alcoholism in all its kinds so as to facilitate its control and expansion.

I will conclude with the comments made by Ismael Haniyeh on October 7, 2023, which reiterated the objective of Hamas to expel Israel from the whole of Palestine. ““Our objective is clear: we want to liberate our land, our holy sites, our Al-Aqsa mosque, our prisoners. We have no hesitation about this. This is the goal that is worthy of this battle, worthy of this heroism, worthy of this courage.” He also reiterates its opposition to all peace treaties with Israel by Arab countries. “All the normalization and recognition processes, all the agreements that have been signed [with Israel] can never put an end to this battle.”