



# PERSPECTIVES

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## Afghanistan and Its Implications for Israel and the Palestinians

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The Palestinian cheers over the “Afghan *mujahedeen* victory over the American Crusaders” create the impression that in their view, the Taliban are a worthy model to follow to eliminate the “Zionist occupation.” However, a crumbling Lebanon, a Gaza Strip plagued by poverty and unemployment, and Afghanistan itself, now under Taliban rule, do not indicate the success of the Islamic model. What the Palestinians need is not a new model of “armed struggle” but a reconciliation with the existence of Israel while striving for a sustainable peace settlement that will ensure security, prosperity, and respect for mutual rights.

In May 2000, following massive pressure from left-wing organizations and after failing to reach an agreement with Syria and Hezbollah, PM Ehud Barak ordered the hasty withdrawal of the IDF from south Lebanon. Israel’s local ally—the South Lebanese Army, the establishment and maintenance of which had cost millions of dollars—collapsed and was unable to hold out against Hezbollah. Eighteen years of Israeli military presence ended in a frightened and confused retreat.

These events greatly influenced the head of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat (as well as the other Palestinian terrorist organizations), who saw it as confirmation of the *mukwama* (resistance) view that only a determined “armed struggle” (i.e., terrorism) could lead to achievements against Israel. Barak had no chance of reaching an agreement with Arafat, and the July 2000 Camp David Conference, mediated by President Clinton, ended in a shambles. It was followed two months later by the eruption of a four-year-long war of terror (euphemized as the “al-Aqsa Intifada”). The lessons of the Lebanon flight were perfectly clear to the Palestinian terrorist organizations.

The events of recent weeks in Afghanistan strongly resemble Israel's exit from Lebanon. The Taliban's terrorist-supporting, extremist Islamist regime, which nurtured and protected al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden at the time of the 9/11 attacks and has not changed its position since, has regained control of Afghanistan, with ISIS marking the US withdrawal in a series of bloody terrorist attacks.

According to Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas's political bureau, once Israel has completely evacuated all of the West Bank, Hamas will take it over and establish a Palestinian Islamic State there. In his view, Israeli localities in the West Bank are the main obstacle to the establishment of such a state, as they could lead to Israel's annexation of the region or large parts of it. This would grant Israel permanent borders, cut off the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, and split the Palestinian people.

If Israel wants to survive, it must recognize Hamas's aspirations and strengthen its West Bank towns and villages. They are the main factor that can prevent an eventual humiliating withdrawal along the lines of those in Lebanon and Afghanistan.

Palestinian cheers over the "Afghan *mujahedeen* victory over the American crusaders" suggest that in their view, the Taliban model is the one to emulate if they are to finally eliminate the "Zionist occupation" after decades of "armed struggle." However, the crumbling state of Lebanon, the poverty and unemployment plaguing the Gaza Strip, and the instant rolling back by the Taliban of Westernizing reforms in Afghanistan do not indicate that the Islamic model is a success. What the Palestinians need is not a new model of "armed struggle" but a reconciliation with the existence of Israel while striving for a sustainable peace settlement that will ensure security, prosperity, and respect for mutual rights.

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