

Abstract

The Jenin Refugee Camp Battle (1-12 April 2002) is considered one of the most important events in contemporary Palestinian history, for this moment symbolizes steadfastness and victory and represents the first episode of triumph from within the belly the beast—in Palestine—from the time of the Nakba in 1948 where the state of Israel defeated Palestine and interrupted Palestinians from achieving their own modern nation-state.

The importance of this study stems from three factors. *First*, this thesis is a primary source that is inherently attached to the events of the battle, as the author is a refugee who was a principle actor in the battle. The author was subsequently imprisoned by the Israelis, and later became a Palestinian Legislative Council member, elected while in prison. Released after eight years, the author continues to participate in the on-going Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation, of which this thesis is a part. *Second*, this thesis is a rare study that not only summarizes the events of the battle, but also provides a rare, self-reflective analysis of lessons from the battle, both strategic and political. *Third*, through this in-depth political, military and cultural analysis of the battle, voice is given to the revival of the possibilities embedded within the choice of armed struggle. Though the traditional historiography of modern Palestine would have it that the path of armed struggle ended in massive defeat for the Palestinians, this thesis offers a contrary analysis showing that armed struggle is still very much a valid choice in light of the (1) official and obvious failure in the negotiations path and (2) severe limits to so-called civil resistance, which has of late gained great currency in academic and political circles.

The main problematic of this thesis explores the question of what is the historical, military and political uniqueness of the Jenin Refugee Camp Battle fought in the spring of 2002. It aims at cleansing the narrative of the battle from the myths and historical paradoxes that resulted from a dearth of sources and the fabrications that have surrounded the story since it began. This study explores four minor questions: (1) what is the historical background that provoked targeting Jenin refugee camp considering the social and cultural make-up of the inhabitants of the camp? (2) What is the odyssey of resistance that became a national, regional and international model of resisting occupation? (3) What are the factors and frameworks of understanding the concept of victory considering the imbalanced political and military situation within the Palestinian condition? (4) What is the impact of Jenin Refugee Camp Battle on the political, military and cultural imagination in the Palestinian, Israeli, Arab, and international spheres?

The main argument (hypothesis) of this thesis is that victory was achieved because of three main factors that are a direct product of contemporary Palestinian history. *First*, as refugees who were driven from their homes twice within two generations, those who were in the camp at the time of the battle, armed and otherwise, believed that there was no choice but to defend the camp and remain there as they would not be made into refugees for a third time. *Second*, the freedom fighters were among the residents of the camp, and therefore the entire camp fostered and supported the resistance throughout the battle. *Finally*, the unity that was achieved among national and Islamic factions allowed the formation of the leadership of this popular battle. The factions were united under one military commandship, forming a collective and united “war room.” This united leadership in the camp gained support from the Palestinian political leadership under the late president Yasser Arafat, as well as regional and international support from the movements and masses that believe in armed struggle against colonialism and the colonial army’s massive imbalance of military power.

The uniqueness of this thesis has much to do with its author’s primary political and military status within Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the Palestinian Liberation Movement (*Fateh*), Palestinian political prisoners movement and a Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member. This status provided

the author with both oral and written sources related to the battle in three phases: the actual battle, the subsequent access he achieved in prison among other veterans of the battle, and the academic training that enabled him to put this experience within its scholarly form in this thesis. All of this led to what the thesis describes as the “methodology of fire,” which combines both theory and practice at once.

As for the structure of the thesis, it divided into five main chapters in addition to the introduction and conclusion and appendixes:

Chapter One: Introductions to the Battle of Jenin Refugee Camp: Questions of Resistance and Questions of Writing. This chapter provides a general introduction to the historical and academic context of the Jenin Refugee Camp Battle.

Chapter Two: Jenin Refugee Camp in its Palestinian Context. This chapter provides a comprehensive survey to Jenin refugee camp in Palestine considering four main fields: historical, social, military and political.

Chapter Three: The Preparation for the Battle, the Map and the Battlefield. This chapter describes the atmosphere that preceded the battle in its political and military context, in addition to a detailed outline of the formation of the “War Room” of the camp and drawing out of the battle plans.

Chapter Four: “The Formation and the Myth:” the Battle Diaries. This chapter narrates the daily resistance battle from 1 April to 12 April 2002.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Critical Remarks. This chapter reflects on the lessons learned from the battle both on political and military levels in addition to advocating for the possibilities of armed struggle using this battle as a paradigm that can be cloned in the larger Palestinian struggle against Zionist-Israeli settler-colonialism.

