Rebel Power

Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win

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Contents

CHAPTER 1

Power, Violence, and Victory

Zohra Drif, Leila Khaled, Gerry Adams, and Yoske Nachmias all wanted the same thing—a state for their people to call their own—and they all played a prominent role in the struggle to achieve it. Yet when I was interviewing Zohra Drif a stone's throw from the Milk Bar she had bombed in Algiers, discussing Leila Khaled's hijackings and struggle for Palestinian rights in a refugee camp, walking next to Gerry Adams in one of multiple competing Irish republican marches to Bodenstown, and talking with Yoske Nachmias about facing his own brother in a firefight while aboard the *Altalena* off the Tel Aviv coast, I was struck by how different the outcomes were for their nations and the organizations of which they were a part.

Zohra Drif helped achieve an independent Algeria in 1962, and her Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) rules the country to this day. In contrast, Leila Khaled and her fellow Palestinians still do not have a state, and her Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) finds itself on the margins of the enduring Palestinian national movement. Gerry Adams and Yoske Nachmias face mixed outcomes. Although Adams finds himself at the head of Sinn Féin, a powerful political party with the potential to become the largest in Ireland, he has been unable to bring Northern Ireland into the Republic. Nachmias celebrated the independence of Israel in 1948, but his Irgun was repressed and disbanded by its Zionist rival, and its affiliated party was excluded from power for three decades.

What explains this variation in outcomes? Why did some national movements achieve states while others did not? And what explains the accompanying variation in behavior, in that all four of these groups differed in their use and support of violent and nonviolent tactics across time and space? These are not simply historical puzzles; they are at the forefront of politics today.

Gaza has experienced a significant crackdown on cross-border violence into Israel and the Egyptian Sinai over the past five years. Members of the PFLP have been detained; members of Jaish al-Islam who took Western

CHAPTER 2

Why National Movements Compete, Fight, and Win

The structure of the international system is driven by the number of great powers, the structure of party systems is driven by the number of effective parties, and the structure of movement systems is driven by the number of significant groups.[1] This basic but overlooked fact suggests that the most neglected aspect of movement structure—power—is also the most crucial.[2] In fact, the internal balance of power is the most significant variable driving group behavior and movement outcomes.

The structure of a national movement is first defined by the number of significant groups it contains because the most powerful groups play the dominant role in campaign dynamics and outcomes. The structure of the international system is based on the United States and China, not Belize and Luxembourg; the structure of the U.S. party system is based on the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, not the Modern Whig Party and the Socialist Party; and the structure of a national movement such as that of the Palestinians is based on Fatah and Hamas, not the Palestinian Arab Front and the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front. Even though some movements experience brief periods when the unorganized grassroots or weaker organizations may appear to be taking the lead—as in the Russian Revolution or the First Intifada—strong organizations such as the Bolshevik Party or Fatah soon (re)gain control over the less organized masses and the movement itself.

As Giovanni Sartori notes, "If we resort to counting, we should know how to count."[3] The problem with the current ubiquitous approach to conceptualizing movement fragmentation is that it simply adds up the total number of all groups regardless of size, even though many of them do not "count" for movement dynamics and outcomes. Adding ten groups of ten people each to a national movement is likely to have no impact, whereas adding one group of 10,000 people is likely to significantly alter the behavior of other groups and the outcome of their movement. Furthermore, measuring fragmentation based on the number of significant groups yields far more

CHAPTER 3

The Palestinian National Movement

The Sisyphean Tragedy of Fragmentation

> Better a thousand enemies outside the tent than one within.
>
> —Arab proverb

In addition to puzzles of group behavior involving Hamas, Fatah, and the PFLP noted in chapter 1, there are recurring patterns in dynamics and outcome.[1] In Gaza in 2012 and 2014, rockets were launched toward neighboring Israeli towns amid increasing Israeli airstrikes, leading to more conflict in the territory. In Ramallah, Palestinian youths camped out in Manara Square on hunger strike, claiming that they would not leave until Fatah and Hamas held unity talks because their continued infighting had held back the Palestinian cause. And across the West Bank, Gaza, and the diaspora, debates raged among Palestinian organizations and civilians over the wisdom of negotiating with the Israelis or of using violence or civil resistance against them, as groups differed over whether to actively support, defer, or attempt to spoil the next round of talks.

The remarkable thing about these stories is not how unique they are but, rather, how seamlessly all of them would fit into a description of the Palestinian national movement at almost any time in the past fifty years. The rockets launched by small groups in Gaza to increase their domestic support or spark a larger conflict—while Hamas dithered over whether to restrain the violence or escalate it—evoke memories of the conflict in southern Lebanon in the 1980s. During the "artillery war," weaker Palestinian groups sent rockets into northern Israel as Fatah, then the leader in the region, debated whether to enforce a cease-fire or take the lead in strikes on the central adversary of the national movement. The calls for unity on the lips of youths today were once spoken by Mufti Haj Amin al-Husseini, Yasser

CHAPTER 4

The Zionist Movement

Victory Hanging in the Balance

> Why was the Second Temple destroyed? Because of sinat chinam, senseless hatred of one Jew for another.
>
> —Talmud, Yoma 9b

In June 1948, the *Altalena* arrived off the coast of Tel Aviv carrying a massive Zionist arms shipment of 5,000 rifles, 250 machine guns, and 5 million bullets, the exact items that David Ben-Gurion, Zionist leader, had noted one month earlier would be essential to defeating the Palestinians and their Arab allies. Instead of offloading the sorely needed weapons and using them in the ongoing war for the future of the state of Israel, the newly formed Israel Defense Forces (IDF) sunk the *Altalena* on Ben-Gurion's orders.[1] Why did the nascent Israeli army use its only heavy gun battery not to bombard enemy Arab forces but, rather, to sink the Zionist ship while most of the arms were still on it? Were not those weapons the exact thing that Ben-Gurion claimed the Zionists needed to win the war for their state?[2]

And how exactly did the Zionists win that war anyway, given that they lacked certain advantages that existing theories suggest are essential to victory? In the period just before and after the sinking of the *Altalena*, how was it that a Zionist population that owned 7% of the Palestine Mandate and represented 37% of its population was given 55% of the territory by the United Nations and then proceeded to defeat a Palestinian national movement that was backed by a population twice that size that also controlled more territory, held the high ground, and was supported by significant armies from five neighboring Arab states?

The answer to these puzzles demonstrates the explanatory power of Movement Structure Theory. From the perspective of Ben-Gurion and Mapai (his political party), the most important consideration was not the total strength of the Zionist movement and the Israeli state but, rather, the

CHAPTER 5

The Algerian National Movement

The Long, Bloody March to Hegemony

> The FLN is your front; its victory is your victory.
>
> — Proclamation of the Front de Libération Nationale, November 1, 1954

The Palestinians in the 1960s were perhaps most inspired by the Algerian national movement,[1] which also had ties to the broader Arab national movement and found success just a few years before the founding of the PLO and the launch of the armed struggle by Fatah. Like the Palestinian movement, the Algerian national movement presents puzzles that confound existing scholarship. First, why did the Algerian People's Party–Mouvement pour le Triomphe des Libertés Démocratiques (PPA/MTLD) initiate a nationalist uprising in 1945, only to condemn the initiation of another uprising in 1954, despite the fact that the group had the same leader and the same ideology during both periods? Second, why did the former uprising fail but the latter one succeed, despite the fact that the former occurred when the movement was more united, had fewer groups, and experienced greater total movement strength? Third, if the post–World War II norm of decolonization drove Algerian independence, why was the United Nations unable to pass a resolution supporting self-determination for Algeria—let alone independence—in 1956? And why did French leaders maintain that "L'Algerie c'est la France" and try numerous times to fragment the Algerian national movement and thwart its independence, only to give in by 1962?

These central developments in the Algerian national movement run directly against the predictions of existing theories, and in this chapter, I demonstrate that they can be distinctly explained by MST. What changed for the PPA/MTLD from 1945 to 1954 was the position of the group in the movement hierarchy as it rose from challenger to leader. This shifted the PPA/MTLD from a risk-acceptant group seeking to initiate attacks against the

CHAPTER 6

The Irish National Movement

Where You Stand Depends on Where You Sit

> Any practical statesman will, under duress, swallow a dozen oaths to get his hand on the driving wheel.
>
> —George Bernard Shaw, 1921

The Irish national movement has a long history of ideological and geographical division between nationalists and republicans, north and south.[1] Nationalists generally accepted moderate concessions toward independence via elections and negotiations, whereas republicans generally demanded a more robust version of independence and were more willing to take up arms to achieve it. As one former member of the republican wing noted, "The [nationalist] SDLP's national aspirations were the same, but their tactics and pacing were different."[2] This suggests that ideology drives action, which poses a puzzle: Why has every significant republican group—including Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, and Sinn Féin, the three largest political parties in Ireland today—negotiated, restrained violence, and agreed to concessions short of its intended goal? Surely those are the actions of nationalists, not republicans. Second, the greatest success of the Irish national movement—the creation of the Irish Free State in 1921–1922—led to a geographical division when Northern Ireland remained in the United Kingdom, which set off a struggle for its inclusion in the Irish Republic that continues to this day. Why would the movement have been more successful in the 1920s, at the height of colonialism, than in the past four decades of the post-colonial period?

MST helps us understand the clockwork-like actions of republican groups that escalated violence, shunned elections, and denounced negotiated compromise while challengers only to then shun violence, participate in elections, and negotiate compromises after they became the leader or hegemon. Despite their intense criticism of each other, this is the story of the

CHAPTER 7

The Politics of National Movements and the Future of Rebel Power

In national movements—as in international relations, democratic politics, and economic markets—the number and strength of the actors explain the greatest variation in behavior and outcome. International systems, party systems, and markets are labeled unipolar or multipolar, one-party or multiparty, and monopoly or oligopoly, respectively. This simple variable drives the level of competition and the strategic outcome, be it war and peace, public policy, or prices and profits. The same is true for national movements, whose actors share a common strategic goal of statehood but whose groups compete with each other over which one will lead the new state and reap the associated private benefits of office, wealth, and status. As with theories of democracy, capitalism, and natural selection—in which actors seeking to maximize private goods such as votes, wealth, and progeny often end up maximizing political, economic, and social public goods—MST offers a parsimonious explanation of how and when selfish actions by nationalist groups can generate collectively beneficial outcomes for national movements.

When a political candidate or a sports team is up by thirty points in the polls or on the scoreboard, it pursues low-risk, low-reward, low-variance strategies to maintain its lead. The candidate and team play various versions of "prevent defense": the candidate avoids debates with other candidates, the team holds the ball and runs the clock, and both stick to a basic message to prevent their opponents from making any large, swift gains to unseat them while they push to end the competition as soon as possible. The candidate or team that is trailing by thirty points does just the opposite, pursuing high-risk, high-reward, high-variance strategies to try and change its position and lengthen the game. They both throw literal and figurative "Hail Mary" passes: the candidate takes extreme positions to outbid and grab headlines while aggressively targeting the leader to spark debate, and