The Intifada 1987-1990

In December 1987, collective Palestinian frustration erupted in the popular uprising against Israeli rule known as the Intifada, or “shaking off.” At first a spontaneous outburst, the Intifada developed into a well-organized rebellion. Masses of civilians attacked Israeli troops with stones, axes, Molotov cocktails, hand grenades, and firearms supplied by Fatah, killing and wounding soldiers and civilians. Israeli troops, trained for combat, were not prepared to fight this kind of war. Amid confusing directives, some abuses occurred.

The Intifada petered out by 1990, with most of its leadership arrested. Nonetheless, it had a tremendous impact on Israeli public opinion and policymaking throughout the ensuing decade. While many Israelis were outraged by the Palestinian violence and angered by the danger Israeli soldiers encountered in the territories, the Intifada intensified the Israeli longing for normalcy and an end to the conflict, creating consensus for the peace negotiations of the 1990s.

For the Palestinians, the Intifada created a new cadre of leadership based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These youths were supporters of the PLO leadership in Tunis, but did not consider themselves accountable to it. Many of the youths most active in the Intifada later became officials in the Palestinian Authority.