

Keffiyeh: A Political Symbol of Violence

Keffiyehs in History

- Today's keffiyeh is an Arab iteration of an older, common Middle Eastern head covering, the Jewish sudra. Bedouin Arab tribes first wore the keffiyeh as protection from the sun and to cover the mouth during dust storms.
- During the 1936-39 Arab Revolt against British-ruled Mandatory Palestine, Arab militants used the keffiyeh for disguise while attacking British troops. A Revolt leader in keffiyeh arrested by British police:



- In the 1950s, black-and-white keffiyehs became associated with Palestinians when British General John Glubb ordered Palestinians in the Arab Legion wear it to distinguish them from Jordanians, who wore red-and-white keffiyehs.

Association with Violence & Terrorism

- The keffiyeh grew as a symbol of Palestinian violent "resistance" after the West Bank and Gaza Strip, where many Palestinian live, fell to Israel in the 1967 war.
- Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasir Arafat introduced Western audiences to the black-and-white keffiyeh by wearing one during his 1974 United Nations speech. He typically draped it in the shape of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip.



- In 1969, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) member Laila Khaled, wore a keffiyeh when she hijacked an American TWA airplane. PFLP, a U.S.-designated terrorist organization, seeks Israel's destruction. Khaled's keffiyeh-clad image has become popularized in global protests.



- In 2021, Hamas tried to ban the keffiyeh because of its association with political rival Fatah. Still, some Palestinians wore one while participating in the Hamas-led attack on Israel on October 7, 2023.
- On their Facebook pages, employees of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA) featured images of keffiyehs interwoven with tools of violence -- a machine gun and knife:



- In an attempt to win acceptance of the keffiyeh as a benign and inherently Palestinian cultural symbol, pro-Palestinian activists have conjured special meaning in its appearance -- its black stripes mimicking merchant trade routes traversing British Mandatory Palestine, its fishnet design representing Palestinian proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, and its curved lines symbolizing roots of Palestinian-harvested olive trees.

A Divisive and Provocative Tool That Instills Fear and Insecurity

- The keffiyeh today is a prop to display solidarity with Palestinians, defy authority, and even protest white "supremacy." A Georgia school teacher who wore one on the anniversary of Hamas's October 7 attack to "elevate the perspectives of marginalized communities" was reprimanded for causing some students to feel unsafe.
- For some, there is nothing else a keffiyeh represents than a symbol of terror, having been worn by perpetrators of the October 7 attack and popularized by Arafat, the founding father of Palestinian terrorism.
- Protestors in keffiyehs imply support for Hamas, Hezbollah, and other terrorist groups that seek the destruction of Israel, the ancestral home of the Jewish people. Some add the groups' headbands, understanding fully what such groups want (Israel's destruction) and how they aim to achieve it (through violence).
- Keffiyeh-wearers from Gaza to Iran to European capitals shout contemporary blood libels, calling Israel and its backers "racist," "colonialists," and "genocidal."
- Rather than a cultural symbol, the keffiyeh has always been tied to and used to represent terrorism and violence, especially targeting Jews. It is the modern-day and socially acceptable Nazi swastika.