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Non-State Peace Spoilers

and the Middle East Peace Efforts

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About the Research

This paper examines the possible impact of local and regional Islamic movements committed to preventing or spoiling by terror any settlement between Israel and the PLO. In particular, it considers their potential impact both on the intended Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and, following the death of Arafat, on the possible renewal of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations along the Road Map.

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Executive Summary

This paper examines the possible impact of local and regional Islamic movements committed to preventing or spoiling by terror any settlement between Israel and the PLO. In particular, it considers their potential impact both on the intended Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and, following the death of Arafat, on the possible renewal of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations along the Road Map.

While the role of the local Fatah-based militia groups that emerged after October 2000—the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and the Popular Resistance Committees—receives some attention, the main focus of the paper is on the Palestinian Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, including not only their local activities, but also their regional affiliations. Considered as well are the direct political and military links these movements maintain with Syria and Iran and, more closely, with the Shi'ite Lebanese Hizballah movement, which operates both as a semi-independent Lebanese entity and as a conduit for Iranian and Syrian influence in Palestinian affairs. Together, these actors form a cross-national political and operational network effectively ready to spoil any Israeli-Palestinian attempt at returning to diplomacy. Though local Palestinian actors cannot be perceived as fully subordinated to their state patrons, in the absence of an effective Palestinian government, deep social and political fragmentation, and the chaotic state of civil and security matters, local groups tend to be more dependent than ever on outside funds and political support. This renders regional actors further capable of undermining intra-Palestinian and Israeli-Palestinian understandings.

Both at a regional and local level, the Islamic opposition perceives the Israeli decision on unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip as a victory of the Palestinian armed struggle, for which it claims credit. Hamas and other *jihad* movements thus insist that Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip should be complete and involve no Palestinian compromises such as cease-fire during or after the Israeli disengagement. At the same time, they demand that Israel stop its incursions into the Gaza Strip as well as its pursuit and targeted killing of political and military figures of these movements.

At a local level, the intended Israeli disengagement has raised the question of Fatah-Hamas power-sharing in the Gaza Strip on the "day after," which both organizations recognize as a crucial intra-Palestinian matter. For all practical purposes, Hamas holds the key for any future Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process. While Fatah possesses a much larger armed force than Hamas, the latter's consent and cooperation is indispensable for securing legitimate and stable future government in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, even a tacit coalition between the new PA leadership and Hamas could effectively deter other groups from challenging the rules set by such partnership.

Consistent with its policy throughout the Oslo process, however, Hamas prefers "representation without participation:" in all likelihood it will not seek official power or participation in the PA or any new administration of the Gaza Strip, especially if the Israeli disengagement entails Palestinian commitment not to wage violence from the Gaza Strip.

Hence, Hamas is willing to accept a temporary "relaxation" (*tahdi`a*) of violence against Israel in order to facilitate the implementation of the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip and reap its political benefits in the Palestinian arena, but insists on keeping the military option open. Hamas is thus not likely to disrupt the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip or challenge the new PA leader, Mahmud Abbas, as long as the latter reckons with its strong popular position and interest in shaping the social and political life of the Palestinian population. In the short-term, these interests can be summed up as conducting transparent elections to local government, changing the election system for the Legislative Council and incorporating Hamas adherents into the bureaucracy and security services. This position allows Hamas to keep all

options open as it plays watchdog over the PA's relations with Israel and retains the flexibility to determine the timing for military action if needed.

Thus, Hamas leaders have announced their intention to join the PLO and take part in the upcoming general elections for the Legislative Council due in July 2005, and the movement is adamant that the system of elections be changed (from purely regional to regional-proportional) to ensure that they are substantially represented. While the movement has substantially broadened its popular support in the Gaza Strip during the al-Aqsa Intifada, its status in the West Bank is relatively weaker. Nonetheless, Hamas's participation and significant achievements in partial rounds of the municipal election held in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since December 2004 are likely to convince the movement's leaders of their ability at least to constitute a significant opposition to the PA and at best, even to defeat Fatah.

Even in the best scenario of a Fatah-Hamas cease-fire and power-sharing in the Gaza Strip following the Israeli withdrawal, it is inconceivable that Gaza Strip militants will remain silent while Israel is still occupying major Palestinian lands and population, or preventing progress towards Palestinian statehood.

Israel can help strengthen the new PLO/PA leadership by military self-restraint, release of prisoners, withdrawal from Palestinian cities, easing the movement of people and goods and maintaining coordination and constructive cooperation. The new leadership might, in turn, be more conducive to institutional reforms and non-violent conduct toward Israel. On the other hand, the new PA leadership may be wary of adopting such policies, due to a fear that they may weaken its legitimacy, especially in view of Arafat's legacy. Already, the new Palestinian leadership has begun showing impatience, demanding an early return to negotiations over the permanent settlement issues.

Hence, despite the new atmosphere of Israel-PA partnership and resumption of the security coordination, relations with Israel remain fragile, while Hamas remains a potential ally for the PA leadership in case of the latter's fallout with Israel and a weakening of its public position. Indeed, despite Abbas's stated opposition to the strategy of violence against Israel, he has shown no signs of flexibility on the basic goals of a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza

Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital, sovereignty over the Temple Mount and resolution of the refugee problem according to UN Resolution 194.

There should be no illusion that the new Palestinian leadership will be willing to—or capable of —imposing law and order on the opposition groups, even in a Gaza Strip empty of Israelis. In addition, without reforms within Fatah, the generational competition and the revolutionary spirit that nurtured violence among the movement's younger members will continue undermining the "old guard."

Given the difficulties of the Israeli political system in processing the unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and especially the idea of displacement of Jewish settlements—particularly in view of the efforts to mitigate the trauma for the Israeli right-wing by amplified efforts at settlement between Jerusalem and Ma`ale Adumim—the foreseeable future is likely to witness intervals of low-level of violence, or even cease-fire periods, rather than an end to the armed conflict.

Moreover, the mode of implementation intended for the disengagement—in four stages, each conditional on a government decision—may become a prescription for procrastination on the Israeli part and serve as pretext for conducting terrorist attacks from and within Gaza Strip as a means of expediting the implementation. Such attacks are bound to complicate the Israeli decision-making process on the disengagement if not to foil it altogether, unless substantial progress is made along the lines of President Bush's 'Roadmap.'

Introduction

This paper focuses on the impact of Palestinian and regional Islamic peace spoilers of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. While the term "peace spoilers"[1] refers mainly to groups and movements that undermine settlements in intra-state ethnic conflicts, in this paper the term refers to a host of actors, states and non-states alike, which, forming a loose ideological and operative cross-national coalition, have been rejecting the Middle East peace process for a variety of particular interests. The term also covers a spectrum of activities, such as state provision of political sanctuary, financial and military support to opposition groups involved in political mobilization, popular agitation and military operations.

The main state actors involved in spoiling the peace process are Iran and Syria. Both have been operating through a number of non-state proxies/clients, particularly the Lebanese militant Shi`ite Hizballah and the Palestinian Islamic groups. Yet, while Iran's policy in this respect—sponsored by the clerical establishment—has been linked to a religious ideology of Islamic militancy and hostility towards Israel and partly linked to domestic power struggles, Syria's motivation has been primarily pragmatic, intended to pressure Israel into capitulating on its claims over the Golan Heights.

1 See for example: Stephen J. Stedman, "Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes," *International Security*, 22 (1997): 2; Suzanne Werner, "The Precarious Nature of Peace: Resolving the Issues, Enforcing the Settlement, and Renegotiating the Terms," *American Journal of Political Science*, 43 (1999): 3.

This paper assumes that the collaboration among regional and local Palestinian actors represents a temporary convergence of interests rather than agreement on final goals. In this context non-state actors should not be perceived as entirely subordinated to state patrons Syria and Iran. Rather, the motivation and capabilities of these peace spoilers are shaped by conditions and circumstances prevailing in the Palestinian arena.

Against this backdrop the paper analyzes the origins, organizational structures and political behavior of three main Palestinian groups: the Hamas movement, the Islamic Jihad and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. In addition, the paper discusses Hizballah's interests and potential threat in the context of an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. While the main emphasis is on Hizballah's overall inside impact, this paper also reviews its regional links to both state and non-state actors, as this linkage is a major element in spoiling peace efforts.

Although the Islamic Palestinian groups are not alone in rejecting the Oslo process and peace negotiations with Israel—secular nationalist groups have also played a role in this respect—they have clearly constituted the core of the inside armed opposition to the process throughout the 1990s and the al-Aqsa Intifada. Moreover, their militancy and terrorist operations have become a role model for other groups, including dissidents from the mainstream movement of Fatah. During the al-Aqsa Intifada, many of these dissidents, operating under an ostensibly defined organization such as the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades or as individuals, were apparently encouraged by high-ranking figures within Fatah to adopt modes of violence similar to those of the Islamic groups. The Hamas movement thus receives the most attention in this paper, proportionate to what this author believes is its key role in any future development in the Palestinian territories.

Much of the Palestinian determination to continue the armed struggle against Israel despite the staggering cost it has claimed from most members of this community can be explained in terms of rage against the continued Israeli domination and determination to avenge casualties at the hands of Israel since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada. This paper, however, takes the view that Palestinian individual and group violence emanates also from deep and continuous economic depression that in turn aggravates processes of social

disintegration and anomie, the PA's mismanagement and poor governance, and deep inter-factional as well as intra-factional rivalries, especially evident within Fatah.

Finally, and in view of the Israeli government's intention to disengage unilaterally from the Gaza Strip as a whole, the paper endeavors to evaluate the possible responses and political behavior of these groups toward the Israeli plan before and during the implementation of disengagement, as well as in its aftermath.

1 Hamas[2]

Historical Background

Hamas, (Arabic: enthusiasm, zeal; but also an acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*—the Islamic Resistance Movement) was founded on 15 December 1987, a few days after the beginning of the Palestinian uprising (intifada). Publicly, Hamas came onto the scene in August 1988, with the first publication of the movement's charter. Hamas emerged from the Muslim Brotherhood Society (henceforth, 'the MB'), the Egyptian Sunni Islamist movement founded in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, a chapter of which was established in Mandatory Palestine in 1945. In keeping with the tradition of the mother movement in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood in the occupied territories placed much emphasis on charity work, becoming deeply involved in Islamic-related social, medical and educational services. This policy served to attract wide popular support and channel funds into the organization. The main strategy of the MB was thus aimed at bringing about a change in society by action from below—preaching and teaching Islam (*da'wa*) as the primary way of reshaping society into a true Islamic community that would fully submit to the rule of God and Islamic Law (*shari'a*).

Especially in the post-1967 Gaza Strip under Israeli military government, these

2 This chapter is based mainly on: Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

activities developed quickly under the leadership of Ahmad Yassin after a long period of repression and stagnation under Egyptian rule. Not only in the Gaza Strip, but throughout the Occupied Territories, the MB movement increasingly became the preferred choice of public action for many Palestinians in the Occupied Territories due to regional events such as the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Islamic resistance to the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan, and the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon. The rapid expansion of the Islamic movement in this period was illustrated in the growth of the number of mosques, which between 1967-1986, nearly doubled from 77 to 150, rising to 200 by 1989. Mosques were the focal institution of MB activities, around which systems of communal services, including welfare, education, health and other functions, were established. The communal services were initially based on self-supported charity (*zakah*) and, in the course of time, on direct financial aid from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and on funds raised among Palestinians in Europe and the United States. Most of the new mosques were private, independent of the existing administration of Islamic endowments (*awqaf*) controlled by the Israeli Civil Administration. By the mid-1980s, the MB had manifested a discernible measure of penetration into various public institutions, primarily professional associations and university student organizations; in the Gaza Strip, its center of activity was the Islamic University in Gaza.

The 1970s and early 1980s also witnessed a growing process of institutionalization and the expansion of the movement's constituency and activities, culminating in the establishment of the Islamic Association (*al-jam`iyya al-Islamiyya*) in 1973, and of the Islamic Center (*al-Mujamma` al-Islami*) in 1978, after attaining the legal approval of the Israeli military government. The Islamic Center became the movement's main headquarters from which it administered a host of social services and communal activities in the Gaza Strip. The *Mujamma`* comprised seven committees, representing the main fields of its religious and social activity: preaching and guidance, welfare, education, charity, health, sport and conciliation. Although the activities of the *Mujamma`* did not encompass all MB groups in the Gaza Strip, by the late 1970s its scope of activities and organization made it the spearhead of the MB's mainstream in the Gaza Strip.

Until the early 1980s the movement was engaged primarily in social-communal activities. Its expansion, especially among the devastated population in the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip, led to its growing penetration into public and professional associations as well as religious institutions of higher education. Furthermore, the movement soon became engaged in a struggle for power and control of public institutions and organizations with the Palestinian national-secular movements, especially Fatah. As of 1983 the Islamic movement began preparing itself for the use of arms, though it refrained from armed activities against Israel until after the eruption of the first Intifada in December 1987.

The eruption of the Intifada, led at first by the secular Palestinian factions, caught the Islamic movement unprepared. The movement, at the time external to the PLO, was confronted with a dilemma: refraining from participation in popular protest and violent activities could harm the movement's public position and result in the abandonment of the young generation, which yearned to take part in these activities. At the same time, a shift to direct political and violent action could bring disaster upon the movement's system of social institutions and services, the most valuable and vulnerable component of its existence.

The solution took shape gradually through an effort to compartmentalize, separating the movement's social and cultural operations from its military activities. Hamas was designated as the political branch of the MB movement, charged with conducting protest strikes and demonstrations, as well as violent activities, and was meant to remain separate from the civic, communal activities. As such, Hamas was not intended to replace the Islamic movement, though in the course of time, it came to lead and encompass all other Islamic activities.

Ideologically, Hamas's act of joining the political-military struggle against Israel entailed the incorporation into the group's ideology of Palestinian nationalism, which had previously been rejected by the MB in the Gaza Strip as an unreligious, near blasphemous manifestation. The decision of Yassin and his lieutenants to transform the movement into a political and armed organization, which was to take a growing part in the armed struggle against Israel, enabled the Islamic movement to establish itself as an autonomous popular movement

that challenged the mainstream Fatah organization. Hamas also refused to join the "Unified Command" of the Intifada, which was comprised of the main national-secular Palestinian organizations and led by Fatah. Instead, Hamas adopted an independent line in shaping the public agenda by publishing its own series of leaflets and schedules for strike days, demonstrations, and political conduct. Furthermore, Hamas persisted in rejecting the pressures exerted by the mainstream Palestinian group of Fatah to join the PLO, presenting itself not only as the main opposition movement in the Palestinian political arena but also as an Islamic-national alternative to the PLO itself.

The activities of Hamas during the first year of the Intifada assumed an increasingly violent nature, including attacks on military and civilian targets and the kidnapping and murder of soldiers, and gradually expanded from the Gaza Strip to Israel and the West Bank. From the outset, both the military and political activities of Hamas were shaped by the competition with the other militant groups in Palestinian society over public support and legitimacy. This necessitated constant operational daring, technical innovation and dedication in order to succeed where others had failed. At the military level, 1992 indicated a significant escalation of violence with the founding of an inside military apparatus under the title "The Battalions of `Izz al-Din al-Qassam" under the leadership of Walid `Aqel. In the coming years Hamas continually escalated its violence, including the proliferated knifing of Jews in urban centers, car bombings, and as of 1994, suicide bombings. The Madrid peace talks and the Oslo Accords, growing Israeli repression, especially the deportation of 425 Islamist activists to Lebanon in late December 1992, and the impact of the Syria-Iran-Hizballah triangle, all instigated this military escalation.

Hamas adopted the principle of *jihad*, in its defensive interpretation,[3] as the sole strategy for the liberation of Palestine. The principle of *jihad* not only became the movement's strongest instrument of mass mobilization and legitimization, but also served it in exploiting religious zeal for recruiting volunteers for suicide terrorist missions against Israeli targets. Indeed, Hamas emerged from the

3 See below, Ch. 2, for an elaboration on the distinction between offensive and defensive *jihad*, and its application in the Palestinian context.

Intifada as a moral and political challenge to the secular-nationalist Palestinian national movement embodied by the PLO and especially its mainstream organization, Yasser Arafat's Fatah. The PLO's supervision of and official backing for the participation of a Palestinian delegation from the Occupied Territories in the Madrid Peace Conference became a major issue in Hamas's propaganda against its secular nemesis.

Since the conclusion of the Israel-PLO Oslo Agreement in September 1993, Hamas has become the leading opposition and a serious threat to the peace process. Hamas viewed the PLO-Israel accords and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) as a major threat to its existence. Already before the PA came into being, Hamas began preparing its members for the future by designing a new policy of escalated violence against Israel on the one hand, and maximum avoidance of infighting with the PA and its apparatuses on the other.

Relations between the PA and Hamas fluctuated along with the peace process with Israel. Hamas seized on situations of diplomatic deadlock and military assassinations of Palestinian leaders and other forms of aggression against Palestinians by Israel (including the initiation of new major construction projects in East Jerusalem) to publicly justify an escalation of violence, despite its cost in terms of Israeli collective punitive measures. In February-March 1996, Hamas was behind a series of suicide bombing operations that shocked Israel, leading to the PA's first massive clampdown on Hamas. A few hundred of the movement's military and political leaders were arrested, though many of them were released after various periods in prison as a means of pressuring Israel during the stalemated negotiations prior to the Wye Memorandum of October 1998. All prisoners were let out during the first few months of the al-Aqsa Intifada.

Contrary to what is commonly believed, the years 1997-99 under Netanyahu's government, which overlapped with these events, were characterized by close security coordination between Israel and the PA, indicated in a decreased scope of violent operations against Israel. Although by late 1997 Sheikh Yassin had been released from prison and was again leading the movement, these years witnessed the assassination of almost all of the leading figures of Hamas's military apparatus, `Izz al-Din al-Qassam, clearly the result of security cooperation between Israel and the PA. This, together with the expulsion of

Hamas's leadership and headquarters from Jordan in 1999, weakened Hamas in general and the outside leadership in particular.

The outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000 presented Hamas with a golden opportunity to return to center stage by exploiting the tide of violence and massive Palestinian casualties at the hands of the Israeli army. The resumption of the strategy of suicide bombings against civilian Israeli targets at an unprecedented scope awarded Hamas such popular prestige that the younger Fatah leadership felt obliged to follow suit in order to preserve its popularity and prevent Hamas from appearing as the only relevant political group in the Palestinian arena. The inter-factional competition became a stumbling block to the US efforts at reaching a cease-fire, especially after it became clear that the PA itself was involved in encouraging violent activities by al-Aqsa Brigade members and individuals of the PA security apparatuses. The involvement of the PA's highest echelons in sponsoring violence became particularly clear with the interception by Israel in January 2002 of the Carin-A, a cargo ship carrying tons of weapons purchased from Iran and destined for the PA, to which Arafat denied any connection despite clear evidence accepted by the Americans.

Ideology and Political Conduct

Hamas's charter, published in August 1988, tacitly portrayed the movement as a moral and political alternative to the PLO. The Islamic Charter defined Hamas as an Islamic Palestinian movement whose ultimate aim was to apply the rule of Islam over Palestine as a whole, from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. The Charter defined this land as an eternal Islamic endowment (*waqf*) that could not be compromised in any way and under any circumstances. As mentioned, Hamas adopted the principle of *jihad* as the only means of liberating Palestine from the hands of Israel, portrayed as the enemy of God (Allah) and Islam.

Despite its intransigent political platform, Hamas's social origins and practical political conduct showed that the movement was also capable of legitimizing tactical deviations and departures from established beliefs and principles due to

outside threats or cost/benefit calculations. Indeed, the movement's strategy regarding the scope and timing of employing violence, its debate on participation in the general elections held in January 1996, and Hamas's repeated commitment to avoiding infighting with rival Palestinian factions and the PA, all evinced a strong capacity for self-restraint and rational behavior. It is in this vein that in mid-1995 many of Hamas's leaders adopted the idea of truce (*hudna*) with Israel for an indefinite time provided that Israel returned to the pre-1967 armistice lines and dismantle all Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories.

In all the above issues Hamas manifested keen concern about and attention to the masses' social and political expectations and needs. Indeed, being first and foremost a social movement, Hamas remained closely linked to its actual and potential constituency, namely, the poor and the devastated, for the most part residents of the refugee camps. At the same time, the competition with Fatah (and later, with the PA) forced Hamas to press its own agenda and priorities, even when they were less popular, mainly due to their costly results in the form of Israeli military retaliations, closures and loss of employment opportunities. This explains the relatively huge propaganda effort that the movement invested in justifying and legitimizing its activities through the system of spokesmen, printed (including leaflets) and electronic media, and sophisticated argumentation on religious and cost/benefit grounds.

During the first Intifada this concern was reflected in the decisions to limit the number of strike days and demonstrations, and to keep school children out of the popular activities. Similarly, understanding and anticipating the repercussions of their violence against Israelis, Hamas, by and large, maintained a strategy of implementing its military operations in proximity to events, which could justify "in kind" retaliation by "the Palestinian people."[4]

The internal debate that preceded the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) and president of the PA in January 1996 was another example of

4 This began with the massacre conducted by an Israeli settler at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron (February 1994), which was later invoked to justify five future suicide bombings.

pragmatism and rational calculation of possible cost/benefit. In this case, deep differences between pros and cons led Hamas to a decision to officially refrain from participation in the elections but to practically encourage its supporters to cast their votes, which resulted in the election of five (six by other accounts) independent candidates identified as Islamists (one of them—`Imad Falluji—joined the PA Cabinet). The aftermath of these elections witnessed the establishment of the National Islamic Salvation Party as a Hamas front-organization. Though the party never got off the ground, its establishment represented an interest in political mobilization of non-Islamists by entering the political arena under a cover name, which would exempt the movement from direct responsibility for political failures and government persecution.[5]

Additionally, it laid the groundwork for participation in another round of elections in the future.

During the 1990s Hamas never concealed its aspiration to take part in the administration, including the PA's security organizations, though without being officially represented in its political institutions, as this would indicate acceptance of the Oslo process. It is against this backdrop that the movement repeatedly called for elections for the municipal authorities and local councils, believing that they could win support due to their clean-handed public image and experience in managing and providing communal services, as opposed to the corrupt image of the PA.[6] Hence, Hamas welcomed the decision by Fatah's Central Committee in September 2004 to hold elections for local government councils, and acted in an orderly manner to secure the registration of the eligible voters among its followers.

Indeed, Hamas scored an impressive achievement in the municipal elections held in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in December 2004 and January 2005,

5 The idea of establishing a "front" organization seems to have followed the communist strategy of "national front" (favoring alignment with non-communists), which was prevalent in post-WWII Europe and the Middle East in the 1950s. The strategy of political mobilization by an Islamic "national," "salvation" or "action" front was adopted successfully by Islamists in Sudan, Algeria and Jordan.

6 Islamic movements in other locations, such as in Turkey, Algeria and Jordan, scored sweeping victories in elections to municipal and local councils. In Algeria and Turkey this victory preceded a similar success at the national level.

respectively. In the West Bank Hamas won 35.6 percent of the votes (compared to 44.4 won by Fatah) and took over 13 localities out of 26. In the Gaza Strip Hamas defeated Fatah, receiving 75 seats out of 118 and winning 7 out of 10 municipal and local councils.[7] In another round of municipal elections held in early May 2005 for 84 local government councils, Hamas took 27 local and municipal councils compared to 33 taken by Fatah (23 councils were taken by independent candidates). Hamas's most salient victories were scored in the towns and refugee camps in the Gaza Strip as well as in a few towns in the West Bank, most notably Qalqilia, where Hamas took all the council seats. The movement's political achievement is all the more impressive in light of the fact that the municipalities and local councils won represent over 60 percent of the total population of the villages and towns included in this round of elections.[8]

Leadership and Command Structure

The emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the 1967 War had much to do with Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's leadership, activities and dedication to the mission of developing an Islamic society in the spirit and pattern of the MB. In late 1987, he founded Hamas with some of his disciples and was from that time considered its spiritual leader though he carried no religious scholarly degree as an `aalim or sheikh. Yassin (b. 1938), as well as most of the other 'inside' leaders of the movement, were refugees of 1948 or their descendants. Many of them had also spent time in Israeli prisons where they acquired further skills in conducting clandestine and subversive activities.

The backbone of the movement's leadership consisted of professionals who had grown up in the 1970s and 1980s. They had acquired experience in mobilizing, organizing and leading violent protest and clandestine activities through their

7 Official announcements by the Minister of Local Government, Jamal Shubbaki, 27 January 2004, http://news.dahew.com; Palestine Media Center, 20 February 2005, http://www.Palestine-pmc.com.directory.asp.

8 *Ha'aretz*, 11 May 2005,

confrontations with their nationalist counterparts over the control of voluntary and public institutions. The Islamist vision and social background of the leadership group thus combined in shaping the nature of the movement with protest and opposition as its main driving forces. Most of the founding figures had acquired a higher education and were employed in white-collar professions.[9]

Until 1989, Yassin remained the political and military leader of the movement. With his arrest in that year, a new leadership was established led by Mussa Abu Marzuq, which sought to institutionalize and bureaucratize the movement. This younger and technocratic leadership, most of whom—Khalid Abu Mash`al, `Imad al-`Alami, Muhammad Nazzal, Ibrahim Abu Ghawsha and 'Usama Hamdan—were born after the 1948 war to refugee families, established a 'Political Bureau', which assumed responsibility for foreign affairs, finances, propaganda, internal security and military affairs. In addition, an Advisory Committee (*majlis shura*) was established, comprising Palestinians and non-Palestinians, clergy and non-clergy, but whose names have never been released.

This group became known as the 'outside' leadership, as opposed to the 'inside' leadership over which it assumed primacy due to its control of Hamas's foreign relations, including the sources of financial aid from the Gulf monarchies and Iran, as well as the military aid from Syria and Iran. Following his release from Israel's prison in 1997, Yassin managed to gradually retrieve his leadership through a fundraising trip he conducted in the Gulf monarchies and other Arab states. This trend was strongly reinforced by the eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000, in which Hamas took a leading military role and managed to strengthen its popular power significantly at the expense of Fatah and the PA.

Structurally, the movement is generally divided between three main realms: the overt political activities—including the National Islamic Salvation Party (*hizb*

9 Among the founding figures of the movement were physicians and pharmacists (`Abd al-`Aziz Rantissi, Mahmud al-Zahar, Isma`il Haniyya, Ibrahim Maqadmah, and Ibrahim al-Yazuri), teachers, university lecturers, and officials (Muhammad Sham`a, `Abd al-Fattah Dukhkhan, Sayyid Abu Musamih, Salah Shihadah, Khalid al-Hindi, Muhammad Siyam, and Ahmad Bahr), engineers (Mussa Abu Marzuq, `Imad al-`Alami, Isma`il Abu-Shanab, and `Issa al-Nashshar), and clergy (`Imad Faluji and Muhammad Sadr).

al-khalas al-islami al-watani) established in March 1996 with the PA's approval; the covert military apparatus; and the communal services such as education, health and welfare. There has been constant fluidity between activities and roles among these branches, especially between the communal and the political. In addition, the diversity of activities has also enabled the movement's military apparatus to continually mobilize candidates for military operations from those visiting the mosques and communal facilities.[10]

Another division is geographical, whereby the Gaza Strip and the West Bank function as two distinctive regions with substantially different social, ecological, economic and religious characteristics. Compared to the West Bank's relative low density, religious diversity, large urban and well-off population, and potential natural resources, the Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated areas on earth, with over 4% population growth rate—one of the highest in the world—with half of the population residing in refugee camps with poor natural resources (water, in particular). In addition, the period 1948-1967, during which the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian military government and the West Bank was an integral part of the Jordanian Kingdom, also left its imprint, yielding different political developments in the two regions.

It was no coincidence that the Islamic movement in its militant form emerged and flourished in the Gaza Strip, though not in disconnection with the MB in the West Bank, and that Hamas was established and remained almost exclusively under the leadership of figures from the Gaza Strip. Though Hamas did spread into the West Bank, the Gaza Strip remained the mainstay of the movement's power base, institutions and popular support. The densely populated nature of the Strip deterred Israel from conducting major military operations in this area, which rendered it ideal as a hideaway area for Hamas activists wanted by Israel, and for developing self-sufficiency in the manufacturing of weapons, including mortars and rockets.

In the course of the al-Aqsa Intifada some of the movement's more senior figures, including Ahmad Yassin, `Abd al-`Aziz Rantissi, Isma`il Abu-Shanab,

10 All 19 members of the party's Political Bureau were well-known Hamas activists, some of whom were serving prison sentences when the party was founded.

Salah Shihada and Ibrahim Maqadmah, were assassinated by Israel. Similarly, most of the leading military figures (Yahya `Ayyash, Muhyi al-Din al-Sharif, the `Awadallah brothers and others) were assassinated by Israel during the 1990s. Altogether, these assassinations led to two main results:
The weakening of the 'inside' political leadership, particularly in relation to the 'outside' leadership embodied by the Political Bureau headed by Khalid Mash`al. Following the assassination of Rantissi, this 'inside' leadership—represented by Mahmud al-Zahar, Muhammad Siyam and Isma`il Haniyya—maintained an extremely low profile.
The diffusion of power within the 'inside' Hamas movement, particularly between the military and the political leadership.

During the years of Yassin's imprisonment (1989-1997) a new outside leadership took over, locating itself mainly in Jordan and headed by Mussa Abu Marzuq and later by Khalid Mash`al as respective leaders of the movement's Political Bureau. With Yassin's release in 1997 and his gradual recovery of authority, the leadership's center of gravity returned to the Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, due to the restrictions on the movement of Hamas leaders from the West Bank and Gaza Strip abroad, the outside leadership retained the role of diplomatic representation, as seen in its exclusive participation in the futile talks conducted in Cairo in late 2002 and early 2003 among all the Palestinian factions considering ceasing attacks on Israel.

The al-Aqsa Intifada ultimately strongly shifted the center of gravity back to the occupied territories due to the leading role played by Hamas in conducting suicide bombings and other terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens. Still, despite the resultant growth in prestige and public support to the extent of challenging Fatah's primacy in the Gaza Strip and the PA's security apparatuses, following the assassination of Yassin in January 2004, the inside leadership was unable to challenge the outside leadership. Thus was the attempt of `Abd al-`Aziz Rantissi to inaugurate himself as Yassin's successor and overall Hamas leader rejected by the outside leadership of Hamas, which issued a definitive statement circumscribing the leadership of Rantissi to the Gaza Strip only. Similarly, the futile Egyptian efforts to bring about a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip in conjunction with the Israeli intention to unilaterally disengage from this region

included an invitation to the outside leadership of Hamas to Cairo for talks in the summer of 2004.

Public Support

Hamas is a typical popular movement based on a relatively small nucleus of leading activist members who occupy various positions in the movement's religious and social institutions, and circles of supporters at varied levels of involvement. As such, the scope of its total membership or popular support at any given time is unclear. Nonetheless, already before the founding of Hamas, the Islamic movement succeeded in scoring significant public support as indicated by its success in elections to various professional and student associations as well as in local and workers committees. In 1991-92, following the setbacks sustained by the PLO in the aftermath of the Gulf War, Hamas's popular support was estimated at anywhere between 30 and 40 percent, which Fatah perceived as a threat to its primacy. Support for Hamas was always more significant in the Gaza Strip than in the West Bank due to the massive concentration of refugees and poor socio-economic conditions in the former. Moreover, it was clearly indicated that the younger generation, which in the Gaza Strip comprises a vast majority of the population[11] tended to be most supportive of the movement.

With the establishment of the PA in 1994 the popularity of Hamas decreased, and for the coming years fluctuated anywhere between 15-20 percent of the population. In the elections for the PLC in January 1996, in which Hamas supporters, as mentioned, were unofficially called to vote for the Islamist candidates despite the movement's official boycott, an exit poll found out that the average level of support for Hamas was around 12 percent.

11 Over sixty percent of the population in the Gaza Strip is under 20 years old.

The al-Aqsa Intifada benefited Hamas a great deal in widening its popular support due to its strategy of suicide bombings and continuous armed struggle against Israel. Furthermore, Israel's systematic effort to destroy the PA's physical infrastructure and symbols of power while leaving Hamas's civil system of institutions almost intact, in fact helped the latter thrive at the expense of its main rival, Arafat's Fatah movement. By early 2003 large segments of the Gaza Strip, out of the reach of the PA's police and security units, seemed to have come under Hamas's influence if not domination. While the targeted killings of Yassin (March 2004), Rantissi (April 2004) and a number of military figures constituted a serious blow to the movement's organizational capabilities, they may not have necessarily affected its popular prestige.

Financial Aspects

Hamas's main funds can be traced to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, as well as to Iran. Much of the financial aid is official, while the rest is private, contributed mainly by individuals in the oil-producing monarchies. In addition, Hamas operates through a network of fundraising organizations, often under fronts such as charity or cultural associations, both in Europe (the UK, Germany and Scandinavia) and the United States. Diaspora Muslim communities, comprising mainly Palestinians in the United States, also serve as a source of funding. These charities operate throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank and have funding branches in the West including the Palestine Relief and Development Fund in the UK, the US-based Holy Land Foundation with active links in Europe, and the Comité de Bienfaisance et Solidarité avec la Palestine in France. Other Islamic aid agencies, relying on the Islamic communities, exist in the West: Muslim Aid and the Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA). An example of the way funds are funneled into Hamas is the charity association of The Holy Land Fund, and the Islamic Movement in Israel. This organization reportedly channeled funds to support families of Hamas' activists who died as 'martyrs' in the struggle against Israel and also for general humanitarian aid.

Commercial fronts for Hamas exist, but they are more difficult to pin down. Five days before the September 11 attacks in 2001, the FBI raided the headquarters and froze the assets of the US company Infocom, claiming that it had clear links with a senior Hamas member, Mussa Abu Marzuq. Other businesses across the Middle East and in the West are also believed to be closely linked with the group. The US war on terrorism apparently reduced the volume of funds raised by Islamic communities in the United States and transferred to movements defined as "terrorist" by the American administration, including Hamas.

Regional and International Relations

Unlike the PLO, whose emergence was mainly the result of social and political transformation among the Palestinians in the Arab countries as well as of inter-Arab relations, Hamas was an authentic reflection of Palestinian society in its homeland, especially the Gaza Strip. The establishment of regional and international relations by Hamas has been the result of myriad processes, such as the imprisonment and expulsion of the movement's leadership in the territories, the necessity of securing funds to finance the movement's social activities, and the willingness of Muslim state elites and individuals, both in the Middle East and the West, to extend their support towards this need.

The foundations of Hamas's foreign relations were laid in the late 1980s following the second arrest of Yassin by Israel in May 1989 and the collapse of the movement's local echelons. This gave rise to the aforementioned 'outside' leadership, a new generation of younger and technocratic figures headed by Mussa Abu Marzuq, which located itself outside the Occupied Territories (mainly in Jordan). The new leadership began establishing diplomatic relations with Arab and Islamic regional allies, primarily Syria and Iran, who shared Hamas's opposition to the PLO and the peace process, respectively.

It was only reasonable to expect Hamas to draw support from Muslim Brotherhood branches in Egypt, Jordan, Sudan, Syria and the rest of the Arab countries

and communities. These branches were loosely affiliated in practice and over the years developed distinct agendas and strategies of action in accordance with their particular conditions and priorities. Ideologically, however, they all derive their beliefs and legitimacy from common sources, namely, the Islamic scriptures and traditions. Furthermore, they are all militantly committed to the goal of Islamization of their societies, that is, the uncompromising implementation of the Islamic law (*shari`a*) as the ultimate response to the 'invasion' of Western culture and norms, the social injustice and corruption ascribed to the ruling elites, and the state of political weakness and humiliation of the Arab-Muslim world. As a branch of the MB, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's Gaza-based Islamic Movement had close links with the MB in Jordan long before the establishment of Hamas. These links were based on historical and social acquaintances with West Bank and Jordanian figures and an ideological interest in maintaining the unity of the movement on both sides of the Jordan River.

The establishment of an outside leadership with growing international financial and political networks led to tensions with the 'inside' leadership of Hamas, especially over policies toward the PA. The different conditions under which each of these two centers functioned soon became reflected in disagreements over the 'inside' leaders' insistence on calculated violence due to its existential implications on Palestinian society. Another major issue of contention was the attempt of the 'inside' leadership to conduct a policy of coexistence with and participation in the PA's institutions, including participation in the elections for the PA Legislative Council held in January 1996.

Until the signing of the Oslo Accords (September 1993) Hamas was primarily affiliated with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies, mainly for financial reasons. Hamas also fostered spiritual and financial links with the community of exiled MB leaders, mainly Egyptians, located in the Gulf monarchies. Particularly significant in this context is Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a leading Muslim Brotherhood authority, who, more than once, published statements of scholarly Islamic opinion (*fatwa*) in support of Hamas' political and military activities, such as justification for suicide bombings against Israeli civilians.

In the course of the early 1990s, Abu Marzuq's new 'outside' leadership made significant headway in establishing more widespread international links,

especially with Iran and Syria, as well as with MB branches in the Gulf, Europe and the US, which would be essential to the movement's sustenance. Following Israel's deportation of 425 Islamist activists to Lebanon in late 1992, close links were also established with the Shi'a Islamist group Hizballah.

The links with Syria and Iran have been both political and military in nature. In late 1991 Hamas joined the Syrian-based "Ten Front," a coalition of ten Palestinian organizations, mainly leftist nationalist groups, opposed to the PLO's participation in the Madrid peace talks with Israel. In November 1992, a year after Hamas had opened an official office in Tehran, a delegation of the movement visited Iran and met with its supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, and the commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, Muhsin Raja'i. The visit led to the finalization of an agreement providing for a political and military alliance, under whose terms, Iran, apparently via Syria, was to give Hamas financial and military assistance and political facilities, spurring Hamas to escalate its military operations against Israel and the Oslo process.[12]

From the outset, the relationships with Iran and Syria have been pragmatic rather than religious/ideological. Beginning in 1993, Hamas established loose contacts with Hizballah, the protégé of these two states. It is believed that Hamas's adoption of suicide bombings as of 1994 represented an emulation of Hizballah's early modus operandi to which Hamas's deported members had been exposed during their presence in south Lebanon.

Relations with Other Organizations

In principle, Hamas always supported cooperation with other Palestinian and Islamic factions or states based on the common goal of *jihad* for the liberation of Palestine. In practice, relations with other Palestinian factions were determined by political calculations, primarily the struggle for power within

12 According to the agreement, Iran was also to help Hamas establish a radio station in south Lebanon, but this project never materialized.

Palestinian society. From the outset, Hamas posed a serious political and ideological challenge to Arafat's PLO, offering an Islamic version of Palestinian nationalism, as well as an alternative strategy for attaining its national goals. In effect, Hamas portrayed the current PLO leadership as deviating from its own original agenda, the same agenda to which Hamas claims total commitment, thus presenting itself as the true representative of Palestinian national objectives.

Hamas prescribed that its members follow a clear ideological restriction not to use violence against the PLO or any Palestinian organization coalesced within it or against the PA, despite their differences over the peace process with Israel. This approach signaled Hamas's awareness of its military inferiority in any major armed confrontation with Fatah—and later, with the PA security forces—and fear of being eliminated if it aggressively challenged the latter.[13] Despite this policy, during the first Intifada (1987-1993) Hamas activists clashed not only with Fatah, but also with their counterparts in the Islamic Jihad, though this group had been identified with the principle of *jihad* already in the mid-1980s, even before Hamas had adopted it. The clash with Fatah as well as with the Islamic Jihad derived from group and family frictions and competition over influence and control of the local public sphere, regardless of the political leadership's policy.

At the same time, however, Hamas drew a clear definition of its *casus belli* namely, an existential danger to its social institutions. Hence, even though Hamas insisted on maintaining the *jihad* against Israel, it was not willing to go to war with the PA over this issue, preferring instead to reach tacit understandings on its practical implementation so that it would not collide with the PA's interests vis-à-vis Israel. In this context Hamas was willing to adjust itself to temporarily prevailing public moods and acquiesce with tactical self-restrained pauses in the implementation of *jihad*. This ability of self-restraint for tactical considerations was clearly the case in the period prior to the first general elections in January 1996.

13 Such a danger was apparent in the bloody clashes between the PA's police forces and Hamas adherents on 18 November 1994 following the Friday prayer at the Filastin Mosque in Gaza.

The nature of the al-Aqsa Intifada as an uncontrollable, in fact chaotic unleashing of violence by groups and individuals, the competition between factions for public prestige by executing spectacular attacks on Israelis, the tacit "green light" to violence given by the PA's central institutions and the weakness it demonstrated in enforcing law and order, the renewed occupation by the IDF of the Palestinian cities and towns in the West Bank in April 2002 and the dissection of the Palestinian territory by dozens of checkpoints and roadblocks—all contributed to blur ideological and group differences at the local level, enabling joint operations by members of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, or the Islamic Jihad, individual members of the PA security forces and Fatah dissidents organized under the banner of the "al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades."

The deteriorating capacity and prestige of the official Palestinian institutions, including the security organizations, judicial system and local government, gave way to informal power centers and structures, including tribal and clan systems and armed militias, which stepped in to fill the void resulting from the disintegration of the PA amidst internecine competition. As a result, initiatives for violent attacks became more than ever before dependent on existing informal networks at the local level (neighborhood proximity, kinship, common acquaintance based on affiliation to a specific mosque, a sport club, etc.), where factional and ideological differences mattered much less than at the official level. By and large this cooperation was based on local and personal familiarity rather than official decision or policy of cooperation as these factions continued to compete for prestige and resources.

Apart from the Palestinian arena, closer ties were established with Hizballah in Lebanon. Cooperation between Hamas and Hizballah began in early 1993 following the deportation of 425 Islamist activists by Israel to south Lebanon, which enabled Hamas's leaders to establish operational ties with the Lebanese movement. Israel's unilateral disengagement from south Lebanon in May 2000 rendered this cooperation all the more feasible. Hizballah used the eruption of violence in October 2000 to return to active struggle against Israel (in the Shib`a farms sector) while at the same time increasing its support for the Palestinian Islamic groups by providing military training to Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists in Lebanon, sharing intelligence and mobilizing Israeli Arabs from the

Galilee for purposes of gathering intelligence and carrying out military operations (including one suicide bombing).

The Modus Operandi

As far as its social and political activities are concerned, Hamas operates in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Militarily, however, Hamas always sought to strike targets within Israel, mainly due to the prestige such attacks provided, but also in order to demonstrate its attitude, contrary to that of the PA, that historic Palestine is one unit and that there is no difference between the Occupied Territories and Israel. A consistent application of *jihad* has thus been a crucial instrument of popular mobilization and differentiation from Fatah. Hamas has agreed only to tactical deviations from this policy, as demonstrated by its partial response to PA pressure in late 1995 to refrain from conducting violent attacks within Israel prior to the first general elections to the Legislative Council due in January 1996. In its decision, following talks with PA representatives in Cairo in December 1995, Hamas leaders agreed not to embarrass the PA by adopting a policy of *appearing to* refrain from launching attacks against Israel from bases located in PA-controlled areas, mainly by not admitting responsibility for violent attacks within Israel or by claiming that the perpetrators had arrived from areas under Israeli control.

Hamas established itself as a separate apparatus from the mainstay of the Islamic movement and all of its social and communal services, mosques, schools, clinics, hospitals, welfare activities and family centers. This separation was intended to prevent a blow to its civil base, which was considered its core – based on the model of the MB movement – justifying its very existence. Hamas's leadership was initially located in the Occupied Territories – though its composition remained secret. This leadership supervised the movement's activities by functional departments of propaganda, security, finance, political mobilization and day-to-day activities, with a parallel geographic division into a number of districts in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. However, Hamas

was seriously affected in May 1989, when Israel cracked down on its activities, arrested many of its leaders, including Yassin, and deported others. To assist in the recovery process, a group of young, highly educated members of Hamas from the United States, led by Mussa Abu Marzuq, made a working visit to Gaza to reorganize the movement.

The process of reorganization undertaken by Abu Marzuq and his colleagues intended to enable Hamas to sustain future repression by Israel. In 1991 a Political Bureau was established, representing the new leading institution of Hamas. Its location was meant to be out of Israel's reach. Hence, from 1989-1991 the military headquarters were located in London while Abu Marzuq himself moved between the United States and Jordan. The Political Bureau was set in Amman, Jordan, where it operated until its expulsion in 1999, forcing its members to move, partly to Qatar and partly to Damascus.

The Political Bureau became responsible for shaping the movement's international relations, including fundraising and military activities. The district bases of the movement were given more freedom of action, including the military apparatuses, organized under the title "Battalions of 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam."[14]

Control of the military operations has remained diffuse. There is a clear separation of the military command from the political leadership, a policy intended to ensure the safety of the latter. Moreover, it is not clear to what extent the military commands of Gaza Strip and the West Bank are unified or even coordinated. Nonetheless, there is little doubt that some kind of overlap between the political and the military commands does exist, at least in the case of the Gaza Strip. The assassinations in July 2002 and March 2003 of two figures of the hard core of Hamas's leadership by Israel, described as the heads of the military branch of Hamas (Salah Shihada and Ibrahim Maqadma, respectively),

14 `Izz al-Din al-Qassam was a Syrian by origin (from Ladhiqiyya), who, after participating in the 1925 revolt against the French Mandatory authorities, settled in Haifa where he served as a preacher in a mosque and began preaching the duty of *jihad* against Jews and Britons. He was killed in 1935 while leading a small group of followers in a short-lived battle with British soldiers. See also Ch. 2, below.

support this observation. Yet the efficacy of the military command's control of its activists is another question.

Clearly, by employing cellular phones, faxes and internet, the military command of Hamas has mastered a great deal of control over its apparatuses, including secretly smuggling weapons through the border with Egypt (via the "Philadelphi Route"), developing and producing weapons and conducting increasingly coordinated and pre-planned operations against Israeli forces operating in the Gaza Strip.[15] Still, the frequent Israeli operations of closures, search, arrest and targeted killing make such control more difficult and partial at best. Apparently, new local figures replace the deceased commanders and take initiative, sometimes without previously establishing communication with a higher, regional or national command. Thus, following the double bus bombing in Be'er Sheva in September 2004, Hamas leaders in the Gaza Strip expressed surprise and confusion over the operation itself and the identity of the perpetrators.

Following the assassinations of 2002 and 2003, the civilian and communal activities of the Islamic movement remained under the local leadership. The new structure gave the movement flexibility and an increased capacity to survive, but also underlined the varying interests of each group. Generally, the 'outside' leadership became identified with radical positions and military activism. On the other hand, the 'inside' leadership was considerably more sympathetic to the local population and attentive to the negative implications of the armed struggle on daily life given the harsh Israeli retaliatory measures such as curfews, closures and the severe curtailing of the number of workers allowed entry into Israel. Such measures primarily affected the devastated population of the refugees. However, the external leadership clearly had the upper hand, not least because it controlled most of the movement's funds.

The strong popular base of Hamas and the division of functions within it have been the movement's primary security elements. The system is designed to prevent spillover of information and hence the collapse of large parts of the move-

15 Zeev Schiff, "Sliha, Lo Nitzahnu," [Sorry, We Haven't Won], *Ha'aretz*, 1 October 2004, pp. B3, 9.

ment's apparatuses in case of Israeli intelligence penetration. The secrecy of the military apparatus is demonstrated by the vague picture of its structure, hierarchy and personal composition among intelligence organizations in Israel. Security tactics have included, especially since 1989, strict compartmentalization along functional and geographical lines, and the use of mosques as venues for secret meetings, mobilization and communication.

One of the movement's operational weaknesses has been its vast use of technological communication, whose exposure to Israeli intelligence has enabled the implementation of surgical operations to assassinate leading military and political activists. Indeed, as early as the mid-1980s, the Islamic movement became aware of the need to maintain internal security due to the repeated setbacks it sustained at Israel's hands. During the first Intifada Hamas was forced to give special attention to its internal security through a special apparatus (*majd*) vested with the authority to hunt and execute collaborators. This apparatus is directly subordinated to the outside command and maintains close links with the command of Hamas prisoners in Israeli jails.

The relatively easy movement of Palestinians between the West Bank and Jordan and from there to Syria, Lebanon and Iran might explain Hamas's ability to maintain regional links for military training, mobilization and management of operation. Though movement from the Gaza Strip to other areas has been particularly difficult since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada, in many cases Palestinians were assisted by Arab-Israeli drivers or chose to exit through secret tunnels into Sinai, from which they could go on to other Arab countries.

In view of the above communicational problems, much of Hamas's organizational activities were conducted through emissaries and leading figures traveling with foreign passports between Arab and Muslim states, Europe and the United States. These emissaries were assigned with carrying operational instructions and financial resources. Especially in 2001-2002 a new element was mobilized to facilitate communication, namely, Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem (who are allowed to move freely in Israel) and Israeli Arab citizens. These were used on several occasions for transferring suicide bombers to the target, and on an isolated incident to hide an explosive belt in an Arab town in

Israel in preparation for an operation by another person, and generally for collecting intelligence for future operations against targets in Israel.

The military modus operandi of Hamas consists of a variety of means and methods that have developed considerably since the late 1980s and early 1990s. The first Intifada was primarily marked by the use of small side-charges of explosives against vehicles, the kidnapping and killing of Israeli soldiers, the knifing of soldiers and civilians, and shooting at Israeli vehicles by ambush or from passing cars. Since 1994, the most efficient and spectacular method has been suicide bombings against targets such as buses, restaurants, coffee shops, hotels, etc, reaching an unprecedented peak in the course of 2002. This mode of action needs little technological sophistication other than secret venues where chemicals available in the market can be mingled to create explosives ("laboratories"). Light arms, ammunition and explosives are smuggled through secret tunnels between the Gaza Strip and Sinai, as well as by sea. Others are stolen from the PA's security institutions and transferred or sold to Hamas members. In some cases, Israeli soldiers have served as suppliers of arms and ammunition stolen from IDF army bases.

The al-Aqsa Intifada prompted Hamas to acquire and independently develop other weapons that could circumvent the Israeli security fence around the Gaza Strip, such as anti-tank missiles, light mortars and, since mid-2002, home-made *Qassam* rockets of 6-9 km range. The rockets have been used against Israeli towns and settlements neighboring the Gaza Strip, while the mortars have been used mainly against Israeli strongholds and settlements within the Strip. Hamas's military operations in the Gaza Strip during 2004 indicate an increasing development of guerrilla modus operandi, especially in attacking Israeli military strongholds and settlements by small squads, demonstrating intimate acquaintance with the target, good coordination and better individual performance, all of which might reflect the results of training by and learning from Hizballah. It is likely that Hamas has also been endeavoring to acquire shoulder anti-aircraft missiles, though there has been no indication that such weapons in fact exist in the hands of Hamas.

It is noteworthy that Hamas has not been involved in operations outside of Israel and the Occupied Territories. The focus on armed operations within the

Occupied Territories and Israel is apparently a reflection of a strategic decision rather that the result of an inability to operate against Israeli targets on an international level. This ability is indicated not only by Hamas's links with Iran and Hizballah—which have proved their terrorist abilities overseas—but also by an incident in which two Muslim British citizens volunteered to commit a suicide bombing in a nightclub in Tel Aviv (30 April 2003), apparently in conjunction with Hamas in the Gaza Strip.[16] Following the assassination in September 2004 by Israel of a senior Hamas military figure in Damascus, the movement's leaders threatened to retaliate in kind, an option they could realistically pursue given the extreme anguish of the movement in the Gaza Strip.[17]

Interim Summary: Threats

The eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000 paved the way for Hamas to fully return to center stage by waging unrestricted violent operations against Israel. This activity won the movement increasing support from the Palestinian public. The group's growing strength was demonstrated by its armed resistance to an attempt made by the PA security services to arrest leading figures of the movement in Gaza in January 2002.

The Islamic terrorist attacks on Israeli civilian targets served as a powerful incentive for other groups linked to the PA, primarily Fatah factions, to join the violent efforts in order to prevent the loss of more supporters to the Islamic

16 See "Attempt to reinvent Mike's Place Bombing ahead of Akaba Summit," 3 June 2003, Debka.com/article.php?aid=500; "Details of April 30, 2003 Tel Aviv suicide bombing, 3 June 2003," http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Communiques.

17 The killing of `Izz al-Din al-Sheikh Khalil triggered contradictory responses: Hamas's military wing in the Gaza Strip threatened to avenge the killing by targeting Israelis and Jews abroad while the Hamas headquarters in Damascus stressed that the organization would confine its activity to Israel and the Occupied Territories. See Amos Har'el, *Ha'aretz*, 26 September 2004.

groups. The activities of Fatah's young leaders initially assumed more popular forms and were directed mainly toward targets in the Occupied Territories. However, the growing prestige and popular support for Hamas due to its frequent suicide bombings obliged Fatah, as of January 2002, to also gradually adopt this tactic under the name "Martyrs of the al-Aqsa Brigades." By March 2002, just before Israel's "Operation Defense Shield," Fatah-sponsored operations were sufficient for restoring Fatah's reputation.

The scope of suicide bombings and other sorts of attacks conducted by Palestinians, and particularly the cumulative effect of losses inflicted by them, came to be perceived by Israeli political analysts and decision makers as a strategic threat to the State of Israel. The psychological impact of Palestinian terror against Israeli civilians might explain the huge public support for the IDF's comprehensive operation of recapturing the Palestinian cities and refugee camps to eradicate the bases of violence. Although this operation managed to kill or capture many of Hamas' military leaders in the West Bank, many of them were soon replaced by younger and no less motivated figures who continued to mobilize, equip and dispatch suicide bombers to Israel; the movement's political leadership and civic infrastructure in the Gaza Strip thus remained almost entirely intact.

Initially established by refugees as a social movement, Hamas prospers particularly among poor refugees and city dwellers. In spite of its image as a primarily murderous organization, its main energies and activities have been focused on providing social and communal services through a well-administered system of institutions, from clinics, kindergartens and schools to a blood bank, and welfare services such as food and other basic commodities for the needy. This system, with the mosques at its center, imposes strict limitations on any authority attempting to contain such a resistant movement. Such control would be possible, if at all, only under a legitimate Palestinian government.

The continued cycles of violence between Israel and the Palestinians proved to be a prescription for the popular growth of Hamas to the extent of seriously endangering Fatah's current primacy. This was especially the case in the Gaza Strip with its densely populated refugee camps and the relative difficulties of conducting vast military operations similar to "Defense Shield" in the West

Bank. In view of the Israeli plan of unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip the question is whether Hamas can or genuinely aspires to actively take over or to simply inherit a failed Palestinian Authority, and how such a development might affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at large. After all, in such a case Hamas would have to either wage total war against Israel or come to terms with it. At the same time, the movement's repeated willingness to accept truce (*hudna*) with Israel on condition of full disengagement to the lines of 4 June 1967 might indicate a level of pragmatism, which could allow temporary arrangements or tacit coexistence with Israel.

These dilemmas have become particularly immediate with Arafat's death on 11 November 2004 and the new possibilities of renewed coordination between the Israeli and Palestinian governments.

2 The Islamic Jihad in Palestine

The Islamic Jihad in Palestine (*al-jihad al-islami fi filastin*) was established at the beginning of the Intifada in October 1987 by two main figures: Fathi Shiqaqi and `Abd al-Fattah ‘Awda, both from the Gaza Strip. The movement emerged from various Islamist groups (primarily “The Islamic Vanguard”) and individuals who from the early 1980s till the eruption of the Intifada in December 1987 distinguished themselves from other Palestinian resistance groups by officially upholding the idea of *jihad* as the only strategy for the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation. Although the founders of the Islamic Jihad—similarly to Hamas—had their roots in the MB, they differed from Yassin and his disciples in the Gaza Strip, who remained inactive until late 1987. Shiqaqi and `Awda were younger than Yassin and represented the increasingly violent breed of Islamism fostered by the jihadist groups in Egypt. The call for practical implementation of *jihad* against the ‘jahili’ Muslim rulers and elites who refuse to apply the Islamic Law and ‘infidels’ was boosted by the Shi’ite revolution in Iran, but even more so by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Islamist nature of the resistance that followed. These two major events in Iran and Afganistan had a deep impact on the rise of jihadist tendencies among various Islamic groups in Arab societies, particularly in Egypt, which became a focal arena of inspiration for Islamist activists from other Arab countries, including Palestinians, both in Israel and the Occupied Territories, especially in the Gaza Strip. In Israel, a clandestine group of Israeli Arab citizens “The Family of Jihad,” (‘*usrat al-jihad*), who planned to embark on a violent course, was exposed and tried in 1981, following which the group members shifted their activity to sheer social and political endeavors. Another jihadist group appeared

in the early 1980s in the Gaza Strip, combining militant Islamic ideology, Palestinian nationalism and alienation towards the veteran leadership, both the national-secular and the Islamic. The founding figures of the movement were young, highly educated professionals, who represented the new middle-class of third-generation of refugees, combining social and ideological protest.

The idea of *jihad* among Arab Palestinians had its roots in the struggle against Zionism during the British Mandate The first to advocate and implement *jihad* in this context was Sheikh `Izz al-Din al-Qassam, a scholar (`alim) of Syrian origin who fled Syria after taking part in the 1925 rebellion against the French Mandatory authorities. Al-Qassam settled in Haifa where he became a Muslim marriage registrar and preacher in the Istiqlal Mosque. Beginning in the early 1930s, he began preaching the implementation of *jihad* against Jews and Britons. In 1935 he was killed in a battle with the British Army in northern Samaria while leading a small group of followers on a *jihad* mission. Al-Qassam's *jihad* soon became a role model for Arab Palestinian militants, some of whom were his former disciples (Qassamiyyun) who took the lead of some of the rebel groups during the 1936-39 Arab rebellion in Palestine. Later on, the followers of the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, took up the idea to define their fighting against the Yishuv as Holy *jihad* (*al-jihad al-muqaddas*) during the 1948 war.

The Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip refrained, by and large, from joining the armed struggle of the Palestinian guerrilla factions that mushroomed after the 1967 war. Nonetheless, already during the 1970s Fatah's Western Sector (the apparatus in charge of military operations in the Occupied Territories) mobilized members of Islamic groups to its ranks and organized them under the name "Companies of the Islamic Jihad" (*saraya al-jihad al-islami*), and supported Islamic militants who operated in the West Bank and Gaza Strip outside Fatah. This tendency emanated from Fatah's positive approach to Islam, as well as from the close contacts between some of Fatah's founding fathers and the Muslim Brotherhood. Practically, however, it functioned to contain potential competitive activist groups and put them under Fatah's control.[18]

18 Meir Hattina, *Radicalism Islami: Tenu`at ha-Jihad ha-Islami* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Moshe Dayan Center, 1994), p. 23.

In addition, the Israeli prisons provided a venue of encounter among Palestinian activists from various groups and ideological denominations, as well as the possibility of ideological socialization and training in secret organized activity. The exchanges of Israeli and Palestinian prisoners in the early 1980s (especially the 1985 "Jibril deal") allowed many veteran prisoners to implement what they had learned in jails and boost the idea of *jihad* as a relevant political interpretation of this deeply established religious duty. Indeed, although *jihad* has been a religious duty since the early days of Islam, its interpretation and practical implementation fluctuated in accordance with domestic and international circumstances, often reflecting social and political rivalries and tensions.

Unlike the dominant interpretation of *offensive jihad* in Muslim societies as a matter to be exclusively determined by the state, the interpretation of a *defensive jihad* as the principal religious duty of the individual Muslim became increasingly popular among Palestinian Islamists in the early 1980s, along with the MB's growing presence and influence in the Palestinian public sphere. In essence, the definition of *jihad* as defensive provided its adherents an effective legitimate mechanism of defiance towards an existing international order and of delegitimization of authority, all in the name of this all-Islamic religious duty of holy war. The growing sense among Palestinian activists in the post-Lebanon war of collective political and military weakness and inaction of the PLO secular factions indeed called for the renewal of ideas and strategies and substantiated the new call for *jihad*. Under these circumstances, Palestinian Islamists embraced defensive *jihad* by which mobilization for the holy war was defined as entirely individual duty (*fard `ain*) and its implementation was divorced of even the most basic social norms and commitment, such as the child to his father, the women to her husband and the slave to his master.[19]

Palestinian Islamic radicals, however, adopted conflicting approaches regarding the primary arena of defensive *jihad* , divided between a universal Islamic view, represented by Sheikh `Abdallah `Azzam, and an ultra-nationalist trend,

19 `Abdallah`Azzam, *al-Difa`, `An Aradi al-Muslimin Ahamm Furud al-A`yan* (Jidda: Dar al-Mujtama`, 1987), p. 21-25. This definition was fully adopted by Hamas and incorporated in article 12 of its Charter (Mishal and Sela, *Palestinian Hamas*), p. 182.

embodied by activists who sought to establish the Islamic Jihad in Palestine. `Azzam, a Palestinian militant leader in the MB movement in Jordan who spearheaded their military activities against Israel in the late 1960s, issued in 1987 a scholarly Islamic opinion (*fatwa*), supported by leading scholars in the Muslim world, suggesting that the defensive *jihad* against the infidels' invasion of a Muslim land (*dar al-islam*) was tantamount to defending the Islamic community as a whole, since any political or military success by the infidels in this regard might sow doubts about Islam itself.

`Azzam specified Afghanistan as the arena that should take precedence for an Islamic *jihad* and his reasoning assumed a pragmatic, rather than theological explanation: Afghanistan had already been an arena of battle between the Muslim rebels (*mujahidun*) against the Soviet invaders; the rebels were committed to establishing an Islamic state and the geographic and social conditions favorable to guerrilla warfare. He put this opinion into practice when, at the behest of the Saudi Arabian intelligence services, he established the "Services Office" in Pakistan, in the early 1980s, whose main activities included mobilization, training and outfitting Arab volunteers for the *jihad* in Afghanistan; he continued this work until his assassination in 1989.

`Azzam's universal interpretation of *jihad*, however, remained marginal among Palestinian militant Islamists. In fact, the mainstream Palestinian Islamic approach to *jihad* was markedly nationalist, giving clear priority to the armed struggle against Israel, especially at a time of discernible decline of the armed struggle by the secular organizations of the Palestinian national movement embodied by the groups coalesced in the PLO. The leading figures behind this approach were inspired by Egyptian jihadist groups and the Iranian Shi`ite revolution, as well as by the legacy of the Islamic Liberation Party (a splinter group of the MB in Jordan, established in 1952 by a Palestinian sheikh, Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani), which also advocated strongly for waging a holy war against the Americans and their regional allies.

A key role in promoting the call for *jihad* and its interpretation in the context of the struggle against Israel was played by Sheikh As'ad Bayyudi al-Tamimi, the former sheikh of the al-Aqsa Mosque who was deported by Israel to Jordan in 1969. Tamimi became a major source of religious inspiration and legitimacy for

the concept of *jihad* and the centrality of Palestine in the Islamic Jihad, calling himself "Commander of Jihad" (*amir al-jihad*) and establishing the Fatah-based group "Islamic Jihad – Jerusalem" *(al-jihad al-islami – beit al-maqdis*). Practically, however, those who accounted for the emergence of an organized jihadist Palestinian group were mainly two young militant Islamists, Fathi Shiqaqi, a physician, and `Abd al-Fattah 'Awda, a preacher, both from the Gaza Strip.

The early 1980s was the incubation period of the Islamic Jihad during which a number of groups—including those affiliated with Fatah—appeared under various Islamic names, gathered weapons, disseminated pamphlets and other printed materials, and, as of 1983, moved to sporadic violent actions against Jews. Some of the armed activities, especially in Jerusalem and Hebron, were coordinated by Sheikh al-Tamimi on behalf of Fatah, which continued its links with many of the Islamic activists in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. These activities reached their peak in the hand grenade attack of October 1986, carried out by the "Companies of the Islamic Jihad" against IDF cadets during a ceremony at the Dung Gate, near the Western Wall. The growing popularity of Islamic militancy against Israelis was reflected in the repeated clampdowns by Israel against these groups, mainly in 1983 and 1986. The escape, in May 1987, of a core group of Islamic activists from the central Israeli jail in Gaza and a series of successful attacks on Israeli military as well as civilian targets in the months that followed, boosted the prestige of the Islamic groups. The killing of most of the fugitives by Israel in early October of that year and the mass Palestinian demonstrations that followed in the Gaza Strip turned out to be one of the triggers for the eruption of the first Intifada and, no less significantly, for the foundation of the Hamas as an offshoot of the local MB Society shortly afterward.

Especially in the first phase of the Intifada, the Islamic Jihad took the lead in waging violence, organizing demonstrations and disseminating leaflets among the population with instructions on how to organize their daily life. The movement is believed to have then encompassed a few thousands of members[20]

20 Hattina, ibid., p. 31.

though the real extent of support remains uncertain and might well have been much less. Yet despite its decisive contribution to the eruption of the Intifada, with the establishment of Hamas at the beginning of the Intifada and its entrance into violent and political activity, the Islamic Jihad was soon marginalized, due to the Hamas's well-organized and popular nature, in addition to its communal infrastructure of social services and mosques relative to the Islamic Jihad's secretive and highly compartmentalized structure. In addition, Israel managed to weaken the movement by the imprisonment, or targeted killing of its leading activists and, in 1988, the deportation of Shiqaqi and `Awda to Lebanon.

Shiqaqi's arrival in Lebanon in August 1988 was to be the beginning of a shift in the movement's center of gravity from the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. These camps were under strict influence of the leftist-nationalist Palestinian guerrilla groups who had little or no Islamic orientation. Shiqaqi established direct links with the Iranian embassy in Beirut, which became the backbone of the movement, both politically and materially. The Iranian support for the Islamic Jihad brought with it the establishment of an organizational, operational and propaganda infrastructure outside the Occupied Territories, including the allocation of headquarters and training camps, military guidance and arms supplies as well as financial support. Predictably, Hizballah played a key role in translating the Iranian support for the Islamic Jihad into reality. Shiqaqi's close relations with Hizballah were to enable his group to engage in armed activity against Israel through south Lebanon.

In the following years the Islamic Jihad struck roots among the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon by employing Islamic clergy and waging an intensive Islamic propaganda campaign among their population and developing some communal activities. Most significantly, however, the movement underwent a process of institutionalization by establishing a semi-formal and hierarchical structure in the form of a general council (*mu'tamar `aam*), a consultative council (*majlis shura*), and a general secretariat (*amana `aamma*). These institutions, however, remained formal and were of little influence because Shiqaqi—as an authoritative General Secretary—assumed all functions of moral, political and military leadership.

During the years of the Intifada the Islamic Jihad became increasingly identified with Iran and Hamas while its relations with Fatah declined and turned into an official rivalry, especially after the convening of the Madrid conference in October 1991. The Islamic Jihad refused, similarly to Hamas, to join the PLO and, as a result of Arafat's support of Saddam Hussein following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, Shiqaqi intensified his propaganda against Fatah and his castigation of Sheikh al-Tamimi and his *jihad* group due to their affiliation with Fatah. In the wake of the Madrid peace conference the Islamic Jihad joined the "Ten Front" sponsored by Syria and partly by Iran (see above). Coalescing with Marxist-atheist organizations was justified by the latter's unwavering commitment to armed struggle against Israel.

With the establishment of the PA in the Gaza Strip and Jericho in May 1994, the Islamic Jihad intensified its military activity against Israel. In a similar manner to Hamas, and apparently under the influence of the Hizballah, the Islamic Jihad expressed its objection to the Oslo process by adopting the concept of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians and soldiers within Israel, sustaining repressive retaliatory measures by the PA. In November 1994 followers of the Islamic Jihad and Hamas rioted and clashed with the PA security forces in the worst case of intra-Palestinian violent collision since the establishment of the PA. The riots that erupted after prayer at the Palestine Mosque in Gaza resulted from incitement by Sheikh `Abdallah al-Shami, the leading figure of the Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip, who indirectly accused the PA of collaboration with Israel in the assassination of one of the movement's leading military figures. Although al-Shami later withdrew his charges against the PA, the incident indicated the willingness of the PA to use violence against Palestinian militants when its own position and authority were at stake.

In October 1995, Fathi Shiqaqi was assassinated in Malta, apparently by Israeli agents, and replaced by Ramadan Shalah who, like his predecessor, chose to maintain his headquarters in Damascus. The Islamic Jihad was active in the al-Aqsa Intifada that began in October 2000, particularly in suicide bombings against citizens within Israel. The relative scope of its activity, however, remained small compared to Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades despite a number of joint operations with Fatah activists.

Interim Summary

The Islamic Jihad remained a relatively small group without a strong social basis among the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. The movement's mainstay is the Gaza Strip where Israeli military options have been strictly limited by circumstance, thus allowing more freedom of action for the Islamic opposition groups in this area relative to the West Bank. The movement's strict *raison d'etre* of *jihad* against Israel without developing a sound communal or political basis, its close relations with Iran and Hizballah, and competition with Hamas, have all apparently narrowed the possibilities of social and political development of this group as a meaningful Palestinian public player. Moreover, given Hamas's strong social and political basis in Palestinian society and its adherence to the principle of *jihad*, the Islamic Jihad might not be allowed to continue waging an armed struggle against Israel once Hamas has agreed to a cease-fire or a long-term truce. It is assumed that by and large, the Islamic Jihad will conform to any changes in Hamas's policy regarding the use of violence against Israel.

3 The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and the Popular Resistance Committees

The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades emerged as an unofficial militia of Fatah and became involved in armed activities against Israeli settlers and soldiers in late 2000, shortly after the eruption of violence in the al-Aqsa Intifada. The members of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades came from both Fatah security apparatuses (mainly the General Intelligence, but not from the Preventive Security) and the Tanzim, a semi-secret militia of Fatah led by Marwan Barghouti, then Secretary-General of Fatah in the West Bank. Especially until Israel's Operation Defense Shield (April-May 2002) in which the IDF recaptured most of the Palestinian 'area A' in the West Bank, the urban centers served as the al-Aqsa Martyrs' mainstay, providing them protection and serving as bases for attacks on Israeli targets.

As of early 2002, due to the growing prestige of Hamas as a result of its numerous suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, the al-Aqsa Martyrs also adopted this concept and accounted for most of the Fatah suicide bombings inside Israel. At the time, this was presented by Barghouti as a response to Israel's growing attacks against the Palestinian population in 'A' areas:

> … while I, and the Fatah movement to which I belong, strongly oppose attacks and the targeting of civilians inside Israel, our future neighbor, I reserve the right to protect myself, to resist the Israeli occupation of my country and to

> fight for my freedom. If Palestinians are expected to negotiate under occupation, then Israel must be expected to negotiate as we resist that occupation.[21]
>
> As it turned out later, however, the main motivation explaining the full adoption of suicide bombings by the al-Aqsa Martyrs, was fear of "losing the street" to Hamas, and was intended to offset Hamas's growing popularity. As will be discussed below, it was this fear of losing political ground to Hamas that also motivated Arafat in extending financial support to the al-Aqsa Martyrs even when it was clear that his control over them was partial at best.

The phenomenon of the al-Aqsa Martyrs and its four-year history is a reflection of Fatah's structural malaise as well as of the processes of destruction and fragmentation it has undergone since the beginning of violence. Its emergence was rooted in the basic contradiction between the young field activists of the first Intifada and the Fatah\PLO leadership in Tunis even before the Oslo Accords. The incorporation of many of the newcomers from Tunis into the PA left a large number of the Intifada's veterans out of the bureaucracy and security apparatuses and hence sowed the first seeds of frustration and bitterness toward the PA. The sense of deprivation was particularly strong among Fatah's activists who had spent many years in Israeli jails and were left out, in many cases even without rehabilitation. Such individuals and groups played a major role in turning the spontaneous eruption of violence following Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount on 28 September 2000 into a full-fledged continuous conflagration.

It remains unclear who was behind the founding of the al-Aqsa Martyrs. It is especially unclear what role, if any, was played by Arafat and/or high-ranking PA officials in creating this group and providing it with material means and operational instructions. While Israel, pointing to the role of PA military officials (such as Tawfiq Tirawi) and individual members of the security apparatuses, has long been accusing Arafat of fully sponsoring these groups, other indications point to a rather grassroots initiative, which, once emerged, was partly sponsored by leading Fatah activists such as Marwan Barghouti, head of the Tanzim. What seems evident is that the phenomenon of al-Aqsa Martyrs represents two sets of underlying issues:

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21 Marwan Barghouti, *Washington Post*, 16 January 2002.

The unresolved and ongoing debate within Fatah ever since the signing of the Oslo agreement over the future of the Palestinian revolution, namely, of the option of armed struggle, as opposed to the view of focusing on institutionalization and state building through a diplomatic process. In this debate, Arafat himself remained uncertain. Not only did he occasionally speak in flamboyant "revolutionary" language regarding the Palestinian long-term strategic goals, he also encouraged the use of revolutionary speech among some of his close confidants (such as Fatah's ideologue Sakhr Habash) and preserved the Fatah Central Committee, comprised purely of the 'Tunis old guard.'

The generational and political cleavage between Fatah's veterans (the 'Tunis elite') and the West Bank grassroots leaders emerged in the first uprising (the 'Intifada elite'). With the eruption of violence in late September 2000 this cleavage, which assumed the form of growing criticism of the younger generation toward the older in the years of the Oslo process, was translated into a militarized mode of behavior in the conflict with Israel and found to be an efficient instrument of struggle for attaining influence and power.

The emergence of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades represented primarily intra-Fatah tensions and rivalries to which the eruption of the riots in October 2000 injected a sense of opportunity through urgent popular mobilization followed by violent action. Feelings of frustration and deprivation began to mount, even before the establishment of the PA in May-June 1994, particularly among Fatah's local leaders and activists. From 1994, they began observing, with growing concern, the disintegration and decline of their movement and the weakening links with the PA's centers of power. Despite its being Arafat's own organization and despite the assumption that it would become the "ruling party," Fatah became increasingly amorphous, neglecting basic organizational activities, to say nothing about the ideological vacuum experienced by the movement following the Oslo Accords. The sense of weakness and loss of contact with the public—apart from superficial, self-interested identification with the PA by its employees, many of whom served in at least 12 security organizations, adding to the disarray and inefficiency—was particularly conspicuous in comparison with Hamas, the main opposition movement. Hamas's continued armed struggle in the name of Islam and constant efforts at political mobilization, *inter alia*,

through social services to the public, enabled it to widen its popularity at the expense of Fatah. The overt corruption and inadequacy of the PA, in addition to the deadlocked diplomatic process, also affected this mood of deep frustration among Fatah's young cadres.

The grievances within Fatah's younger generation were further nurtured by the manifestations of corruption among the PA's highest echelons and apparatuses long before the eruption of violence. No less important was the dissatisfaction over the PA's lenient position on the implementation of the Oslo process in accordance with its agreed timetable, especially regarding the declaration of a Palestinian state. Many of these grievances were repeatedly expressed through mid-generation activists such as Marwan Barghouti, Hattem `Abd al-Qader, Hussam Khadr and others who persistently demanded that the changing realities set in motion by the Oslo process necessitated reforms in Fatah's institutions. Concretely, they demanded elections to Fatah's institutions that would ensure representation for the local 'Intifada elite,' primarily in the main Fatah decision-making body—the Central Committee. Employing various strategies of procrastination, the appointment of committees, and other manipulations, Arafat managed to prevent any change in the structure and membership of the Central Committee, which has remained comprised of Arafat's Tunis figures with no representation among the younger generation.[22] The growing tension between the young 'Intifada elite' and veteran Fatah leaders accounted for a number of petitions, complaints and demands submitted to Arafat on these issues, but to no avail. This tension was also what enabled Barghouti to challenge Arafat's policy, forcing the PA Chairman to accept him as the strongman of Fatah in the West Bank for the position of Secretary-General of the movement just before the al-Aqsa Intifada erupted.

During the years of the al-Aqsa Intifada Palestinian society in general experienced the PA's increasingly disarrayed system of government, manifested in the growing insecurity of life and property, human rights violations, arbitrariness of the legal system and its inability to protect the weak, especially in cases of internal family disputes. These manifestations have been ascribed to

22 The last General Conference of Fatah was held in 1989.

the multiplicity of security apparatuses, their arbitrary behavior and the lack of clear division of labor and coordination between them. Moreover, during the four years of the Intifada, the PA's eroded authority, poor social services and gradual decline of its presence in the public sphere due to both financial limitations and preference of selected groups and sectors, doubly underlined the chaos. Indeed, Arafat may not have initiated the al-Aqsa Intifada, but once major violence started he had no reason to stop it and may even have tried to jump on the bandwagon and sponsor it, though unable to control its course.

If any one cause might explain Arafat's ability to maintain his prestige and final word among the Palestinian leadership, it was the Israeli policy of humiliation, exclusion and deliberate attempt to ignore him as the only legitimate leader of the Palestinians. Above all, the systematic Israeli policy of physical destruction of the PA installations, institutions, and symbols of authority, including Arafat's own position, seriously eroded the PA's efficacy. Israel's prolonged military occupation with its utter neglect of civil administration in the Palestinian areas, the continued dissection of Palestinian population centers and the policy of closures and sieges on cities and rural areas, all led to the emergence of numerous armed groups and militias based on a local, clan or tribal basis, some of which engaged in financial blackmail of the businesses community, arrests without trial and murder of opponents according to local and family interests. On the local level boundaries between Islamists and Fatah activists often blurred while shared interests of action and local and family networks prevailed.

It is against this backdrop that until Israel's Operation Defense Shield in the spring of 2002, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades seemed to be for the most part dedicated to the national cause, sponsored or patronized by Barghouti who helped them leverage financial allocations from Arafat. With the arrest of Barghouti and the killing or arrest of many of the founding leaders of the Brigades, and under renewed Israeli occupation of Palestinian cities, the violent energies of the younger generation began shifting inward, similar to the process that marked the first Intifada after the first two years once the uprising had reached an impasse. Over time, the allegiance of these groups grew to be determined by locality and kinship rather than by ideology. Since late 2002 elements associated with the al-Aqsa Brigades have come to play an active role

in "regulating" security and civil affairs, mediating and prosecuting internal conflicts and using their armed power for extortion, blackmail and settlement of family feuds.[23] Unlike the case of Hamas, where the military apparatuses seem to operate under a central political leadership, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' structure was from the outset a loose network of local groups under various patrons and financial resources.

The fragmented and chaotic nature of the al-Aqsa Brigades, their lack of organized action and total absence of central leadership have also been reflected in the development of different levels of allegiance and self-serving links between some of these groups and competing local as well as outside regional patrons, primarily the Hizballah,[24] Iran and Syria. These links have focused mainly on financial and other assistance, including military training from the Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Lebanon through the Hizballah.[25] At the same time, their links with other Palestinian active groups such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were clearly tightened and in some cases led to joint military operations.

Contrary to Israel's official position, which blamed Arafat for the continued violence, in effect, his limited control of the wave of violence applied not only to Hamas and the Islamic Jihad but also to his own organization of Fatah and its offshoots in the form of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. Arafat's lack of control was a reflection of the endemic fragmentation of these militia groups and the relative autonomy they attained, *inter alia*, thanks to the militant public mood and the PA's dependence on supporting these groups as a means of containment and, at the same time, as a source of legitimacy. This was clearly demonstrated by the overt defiance of Arafat's decree to dissolve the al-Aqsa Martyrs group in early March 2003. Hence, in late 2003 the BBC reported that Abu Mazen's

23 International Crisis Group (ICG), *Who Governs the West Bank*, Middle East Report No. 32 (Amman/Brussels: September 2004), p. 24.

24 See for example, "Iran Sponsoring and Encouraging Terrorism in the Palestinian Authority Administered Territories," Special Information Bulletin, January 2004, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center at the Center for Special Studies, http://www.intelligence.org.il.

25 ICG, ibid, p. 26.

government had, with Arafat's approval, disbursed $50,000 a month to Brigades members in Nablus in order to "ensure that al-Aqsa members were not influenced by outside organizations to carry out further suicide bombings."[26]

Another Fatah militia group that emerged shortly after the beginning of the Intifada is the "Popular Resistance Committees," (*lijan al-muqawama al-sha`biyya*) led by Jamal Abu Samhadana. This militia was established by Palestinian policemen, mostly but not exclusively from Fatah, and in their operations they collaborated with the Islamic Jihad and the Hamas. Underlying the emergence of the group were personal and group rivalries within Fatah, primarily between Abu Samhadana and the commanding echelons of the PA's Preventive Security, Muhammad Dahlan and Rashid Abu Shbak. During the al-Aqsa Intifada the militia exercised effective authority in the southern part of the Gaza Strip, defying the PA governors and their security forces.

The group's main area of operation is the Khan Younis-Rafah area in the southern Gaza Strip. The Committees are apparently responsible for much of the activities of smuggling weapons and combatants from Sinai into the Gaza Strip and vice versa. Though the PA refrained from taking harsh measures against this group, following the PA's pressure on this group, in early 2002 it shifted its activity temporarily to the northern Strip, where it managed to conduct some of the more successful operations against Israeli forces namely, the bombing of two Merkava tanks at Nezarim, in early 2002. According to Israeli sources the group was also involved in the attack against the American diplomats in October 2003 in which three security guards were killed.[27]

26 ICG, ibid, p. 27.

27 See articles by Amos Har'el and Arnon Regoler, *Ha'aretz*, 10 December 2004, p. A6.

Interim Summary

The main obstacle to any future effort to stabilize the political situation in the West Bank—and, to a lesser extent, in the Gaza Strip—as far as the al-Aqsa Brigades and the Popular Resistance Committees are concerned, is the threat emanating from their chaotic state, a result of their compartmentalized allegiances and patronages, with no central political control over all the armed groups claiming affiliation with Fatah. This was aptly demonstrated by the shooting by members of a local group (the "Abu `Ammar Martyrs Brigades") at Abu Mazen and Muhammad Dahlan while they were making a condolence call in Gaza on November 14, and the group's unequivocal message that under no circumstance would they allow the new Fatah leadership to put an end to the Intifada.

The original phenomenon of the al-Aqsa Brigades as a protest group came to the surface in the tension between Fatah's "old guard" and Marwan Barghouti concerning the latter's candidacy for the post of PA Chairman. Though Barghouti later changed his mind, he initially agreed to refrain from challenging Abu Mazen as Fatah's candidate in return for the latter's commitment to conduct new elections for the movement's General Council during 2005.[28] Barghouti's candidacy might be a source of continuous friction within Fatah and may well be interpreted by some al-Aqsa Brigades groups as granting them legitimacy to maintain their autonomy and use of violence.

At the same time, however, in view of these groups' affinity to Fatah, they might be more willing than other opposition factions to be absorbed in the PA's bureaucracy and security apparatuses once an agreement can be reached with Israel to avoid persecuting them and killing their leaders.

28 See a statement about this arrangement by Faris Qaddoura, a Fatah member of the PA's Legistative Council and close confidant of Barghouti, *Ha'aretz*, and Barghouti's reversed decision, ibid, 3 December 2004, p. A1.

4 Hizballah as a Regional Actor [29]

This Shi'ite-Muslim movement, militia and political party in Lebanon has its main strongholds in the southern suburbs of Beirut, the Biqa' (especially the town of Ba'albek) and South Lebanon—all poor and underdeveloped areas with an overwhelming Shi'ite majority.

Hizballah emerged as a loose coalition of several Shi'ite radical political groups, mostly clerical unions and militant factions that broke away from the relatively moderate Amal movement during the 1980s (then the mainstream Shi'ite social and political movement in Lebanon). Hizballah was founded during the 1982 war in Lebanon, inspired by the Iranian Revolution three years earlier and by the presence of approximately 1,500 Iranian Revolutionary Guards (*Pasdaran*)—troops and clerics sent by Iran to the Biqa' in April 1982. Its founders, a group of young Shi'ite clerics, were adherents of a Shi'ite high-ranking cleric, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlallah, who was considered the movement's spiritual guide, though he himself denied it during its first decade of existence. These clerics were all educated in the Shi'ite religious centers of Qom in Iran and Najaf in Iraq, and upon returning to Lebanon established Shi'ite religious seminaries there.

29 Based mainly on Oren Barak, "Hizballah," in: Avraham Sela (ed.), *The Continuum Political Encyclopedia of the Middle* East (New York & London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 350-352, and Martin Kremer, *Fadlallah, ha-Matzpen shel Hizballah* [Fadlallah, The Compass of Hizbullah] (Tel-Aviv: The Dayan Center, 1997).

Although it portrays itself as a tightly knit party, Hizballah in fact lacks formal organization and its various subgroups retain their separate existence, relying both on the religious authority of their charismatic leaders as well as on deeply rooted family and clan allegiances. It is financed both by donations and outside aid, deriving mainly from Iran, and engages in social and political—including military—activities. In the areas under its control it provides services to the local population that are, in some spheres, superior to those provided by the state. It operates hospitals and clinics, schools and community centers, and distributes food to the needy. In addition, it maintains an engineering and construction company, which has been useful in repairing houses damaged in periods of conflict (e.g., in Israeli retaliatory bombings and in clashes with its Shi'ite rival, Amal). It also pays pensions to the families of its fallen fighters, or "martyrs."

As opposed to Amal, the state-oriented Lebanese Shi'ite movement, which persistently tried to gain recognition from the Lebanese state and receive its due share, Hizballah originally offered an ideological and political alternative to the secular state: the establishment of an Islamic state in Lebanon based on the Iranian model. However, when Hizballah joined the Lebanese political system in the early 1990s, it abandoned this goal, admitting that the idea of an Islamic state was inapplicable in a multi-religious society like Lebanon. Hizballah's antagonistic views towards Amal, as well as the bitter competition between the two movements over the support of the Shi'ite community, led them in 1988–1990 into violent military clashes.

As Amal moved closer to Syria after retrieving its dominant position in Lebanon in the mid-1980s following the Israeli invasion of this country in 1982 and withdrawal to a "security zone" in south Lebanon, Hizballah sought aid and spiritual guidance from Iran. Iran's proclaimed animosity towards the US and Israel, and Israeli and American military presence in Lebanon, especially in Shi'ite-populated areas, which added to this hatred, bolstered popular support for the movement. Starting from 1983, Hizballah carried out violent attacks against American and Israeli targets using suicide bombers and airplane hijackings, and its members kidnapped over fifty Western citizens (Hizballah denied responsibility for some of these acts). The movement's radical views and

bold methods appealed to young Shi'ite militants who left Amal and joined its ranks, earning it domestic as well as international publicity.

Syria initially allowed Hizballah to operate quite freely, using it as a proxy in its struggle against the Western Multinational Force in Beirut, i.e. the bombings of the American embassy in Beirut, the US Marine headquarters and the French headquarters in 1983, which led to the departure of these forces from Lebanon, as well as attacks against the Israeli forces in South Lebanon. However, as the movement's actions came into conflict with Syria's interests in Lebanon of preserving the Lebanese state and maintaining Syrian hegemony, Syria did not hesitate to act vigorously against it, the alliance between Damascus and Tehran notwithstanding.

As the Lebanese conflict neared its end in the early 1990s, the Lebanese government did not disarm Hizballah, as it did all other militias, allowing it to keep its weapons and use them for "resistance" against the Israeli occupation in the South. At the same time, Hizballah entered the Lebanese political arena as a political party, and in 1992, 1996 and 2000 participated in the parliamentary elections. Today it commands a block of ten to eleven deputies, including a few non-Shi'ite candidates who have migrated to its lists. Informed observers argue that its deputies have behaved responsibly and cooperatively in the Chamber, building political alliances on pragmatic grounds and enabling the party to gradually become absorbed by the Lebanese political system.

The main concern of the Hizballah leadership after the launching of the Arab-Israeli peace process in 1991 and the peace negotiations between Israel and Syria (and Lebanon) turned to the future of the movement subsequent to a peace agreement. Lebanese officials repeatedly stated that Israel's disengagement from South Lebanon would lead to the disarmament of Hizballah. This evoked a concerned response from Hizballah leaders, lest they be obliged to give up their unique position as the core of national resistance to the Israeli occupation of the south. Indeed, acting under the name of the Lebanese Resistance Movement, Hizballah became the main force behind the continuous guerrilla war staged against the Israeli Army and its surrogate, the South Lebanese Army (SLA) in south Lebanon, inflicting heavy casualties on both forces and earning legitimacy that transcended communal political divides.

Since Israel's 1996 operation in south Lebanon ("Grapes of Wrath"), Hizballah has adopted a 'balance of deterrence' strategy with Israel by which any attack against south Lebanese civilians is responded to by a similar attack against Israeli civilians in the northern Galilee. According to official Israeli reports, by 2002 Hamas had received from Iran a large quantity of medium range rockets, which could cover much of Israel's northern territory, including Haifa and Hadera. Perceived as an extension of Iranian policy, the threat Hizballah constitutes to Israel has become a major consideration in Israel's security policy across its northern border.

In May 2000, when Israeli troops left Lebanon and the SLA disintegrated, Hizballah activists filled the vacuum (although other Lebanese parties are also present there) and, given the Lebanese Army's aversion to deploying its own units in the area, became the effective sovereign civil and military power along the border. The official UN recognition of the border behind which Israel redeployed its forces obliged Hizballah to refrain, beginning in May 2000 from any direct violation of Israel's sovereign territory across the Lebanese border. Nonetheless, the organization maintains the flame of "resistance" towards Israel by continuous efforts to combat Israel's air incursions into Lebanon's air space, and by continually advocating for the issue of prisoners' exchange with Israel.

To preserve this flame of resistance against foreign occupation, which had served Hizballah so well in the previous decade of fighting Israel's "Security Zone" in south Lebanon, Hizballah adopted a new territorial claim, namely, the Shib'a Farms. Hizballah claims that this tiny piece of land, located on the Lebanese-Syrian border of the Golan Heights, is historically Lebanese territory and hence, ought to be liberated. Israel, on its part, insists that this area is part of the occupied Golan and, therefore, an area under claim by Syria.[30] Some fighting with the Israeli army in this area has indeed continued, although its overall scale is relatively limited.

The eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada provided Hizballah with an opportunity to promote its reputation and legitimacy both in Lebanese politics and the region

30 Asher Kaufman, "Who Owns the Shebaa Farms?" *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 56, no. 4 (Autumn 2002), pp. 576-596.

as a whole. In addition to providing funds, training, arms and political support to various Palestinian factions, such as the al-Aqsa Martyrs, and apparently mediating arms shipments for the PA (see above, the case of interception by Israeli intelligence of the "Carin A" cargo ship in January 2002), Hizballah remained an active supporter of the Iranian-backed Islamic Jihad in Lebanon in waging attacks against Israel across the border (such as during the IDF's 'Operation Defense Shield' in April 2002). Hizballah also operated intelligence and terrorist networks of Israeli Arabs.

The current Secretary-General of Hizballah (since 1992), Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah (b. 1953) has become widely known in the Middle East and beyond in recent years as a calculating and pragmatic politician who has been the main architect of incorporating Hizballah into Lebanese politics without giving away his movement's ideological commitment to all-Islamic matters, first and foremost, the Palestine cause. Under Nasrallah's leadership Hizballah managed to acquire increasing regional and international recognition as a significant player—and hence, also "spoiler"—and to spread its messages throughout the world, among other things, by operating a television station (*al-Manar*) and a newspaper (*al-Ahd*).

Interim Summary

Although Hizballah is often portrayed as a military and political instrument in the service of Iranian and Syrian interests, it has in fact proved to be operating rationally and largely along its own interests as a Lebanese political party. In view of Hizballah's past experience with Syrian forces in Lebanon and concerns that renewed Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations might lead to its disarmament, there is little doubt that it would refrain from any attempt to obstruct such negotiations by using violence against Israel in blunt contrast to Syria's interests.

In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict despite its disconnection from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Hizballah's capabilities in interrupting a renewed Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process are not insignificant. Especially in the

case of authentic Palestinian motivation to engage in violence against Israel, Hizballah can play a substantive role in instigating attacks against Israeli targets in order to interrupt such a dialogue by operating its secret Palestinian cells in the Occupied Territories and among Israeli Arabs.

5 The Palestinian Economic Crisis and Political Implications

A major factor nurturing Palestinian individual and group violence, and social and political chaos is the ongoing decline of the economy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which has reached an unprecedented low point after four years of Intifada. The worsening social and economic conditions have apparently played into the hands of Hamas whose social services system was for a growing number of Palestinians the only institutional source of hope. During the four years of the al-Aqsa Intifada the Palestinian economy witnessed a dramatic decline marked by a steadily decreasing scope of economic activity and plunging numbers of Palestinians employed in Israel. This was mainly due to the ongoing violence, Israeli security measures such as checkpoints and other limitations on freedom of movement, frequent closures, and retaliations to Palestinian violence.

In 1997-2000 the Palestinian economy witnessed a significant economic growth spurt due to rising rates of Palestinian employment in Israel, leading to a decrease in unemployment from 25 percent to 11 percent in mid-2000. This growth was augmented by the disbursement of taxes collected by Israel from Palestinians and international financial aid.[31]

31 Between 1994-2001 the international community provided the PA territories with $4.5 billion. Gil Feiler, *Economic Aspects in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Mideast Security and Policy Studies no. 59 (Ramat Gan: BESA, Bar-Ilan University, 2004), p. 6.

A major aspect of the al-Aqsa Intifada's contribution to the demise of the Palestinian economy was the destruction of economic relations between Israel and the Palestinians due to Israeli security measures adopted during the period of the Intifada. According to a recent World Bank report (issued before the death of Arafat), the policy of closures that prevents the movement of labor and goods between Israel and the PA areas as well as within the West Bank and Gaza Strip is the main reason for the deteriorating economic conditions of the Palestinians.

The report maintains that despite the $1 billion of international financial donations to the Palestinians, 47 percent (64 percent in the Gaza Strip alone) of the population lives under the poverty line ($2 per capita a day) and the GDP per capita income has dropped to one third of what it was in 2000. According to the report, by the end of 2003 unemployment among the Palestinians had reached 26 percent and the GDP per capita had dropped to only $925. The report estimated that without a significant change in the restrictive Israeli policy on movement of goods and people across its borders with the PA territories, unemployment will reach 35 percent and 55 percent will be living under the poverty line (70 percent in the Gaza Strip).[32]

Since 2000 the number of Palestinians employed in Israel and the settlements has dropped drastically. Before the al-Aqsa Intifada 21 percent of Palestinian workers were employed in Israel. The Intifada led to the loss of 80,000 jobs in Israel and in addition, some 60,000 lost their jobs in the Palestinian territories due to Israeli restrictions on free movement of people and goods. Official Palestinian statistics found that by the end of 2003, 31 percent (274,000) of the Palestinian labor force (815,000) was unemployed. These numbers include the demographic growth of about 100,000 in the Palestinian labor power (age 15+). The economic depression is particularly apparent in the Gaza Strip. According to UNRWA, in early 2001 nearly 85 percent of the families in the refugee camps needed welfare in food products.[33]

32 For the main findings of the report, see *Ha'aretz* (Economy), 5 November 2004, p. G2.

33 Feiler, ibid, p. 8.

During the Intifada tax collection dropped by 80 percent. Israel's decision to stop transferring to the PA the revenues and taxes it collects from Palestinian workers and imported goods deprived the PA of the lion's share of its income from tax collection (66 percent before the Intifada) and forced it to cut by half the salaries to government employees, the largest labor sector. The Palestinian population managed to survive economically thanks to drastic cuts in household expenditures, loans and private savings, regular transfer of money from relatives in the Gulf and the West, and most of all, foreign donations. As of 2002 these donations exceeded $1 billion per annum, more than doubling the scope of aid in 1999.[34]

The sharp drop of income and dearth of economic opportunities, the deep uncertainty and life in continuous violent conflict, all combine to encourage social crime and violence, family disputes, and contribute to the significant decline in new marriages and rising divorce rates. Under these circumstances and exacerbated by the internal factional struggles among leaders of the PA security apparatuses, the Tanzim, the hardcore of Fatah's cadres, emerged as a voluntary alternative to the PA's dysfunctional or non-existing social services. Local Tanzim leaders became frequently involved in facilitating quarrels between families and political factions and ensuring some social services to the needy, all this with loose, if any, link to the PA or Fatah's central institutions.

The main consequences of the economic situation, especially in the absence of a functioning government, are:

A. A growing significance of local and communal self-supporting networks, which allows Hamas to play a major social role.

B. The likelihood that violence, both criminal and political, will continue and even increase in severity despite the Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

The deteriorated economic conditions in the Palestinian areas, however, also underline the role that the international community can play in assisting the PA

34 Ibid, p. 10-11.

to bring about the reconstruction of Palestinian infrastructures, raise the level of employment and revitalize the economy. Any international financial aid to the PA will have to be linked to structural and political reforms in the PA and its governing institutions, particularly the security agencies and bureaucracy. Steps must be taken in order to reduce the relative significance of Hamas's role as a provider of social services, by building a social security system and other like interventions.

6 The Israeli Disengagement: International and Palestinian Perspectives

Introduction

How could the peace spoilers affect the Israeli-Palestinian efforts to coordinate the coming disengagement process? What is required to ensure that the joint attempt of Ariel Sharon and Mahmud Abbas to stop violence and coordinate the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank will endure? And, finally, what will be the implications of renewed violence by the peace spoilers, especially by Hamas?

The developments in Palestinian-Israeli relations since the death of Arafat add further relevance and urgency to these questions. Indeed, the passing of Arafat removed a major obstacle to the ending of violence, giving way to a radical change of orientation, from revolution to structural reforms and state building, from violence to diplomacy. Yet the relatively smooth succession of Arafat by Mahmud Abbas—who, during his election campaign stated publicly that violence must stop and that the Intifada was a failure—has apparently put an end to Israel's habitual practice of blithely precluding the possibility of return to diplomacy with the PA by disqualifying Arafat as a partner in any future negotiations with Israel.

Indeed, as long as Arafat was alive, this Israeli approach scored American backing and some European understanding, but no longer. With the new PA

leader, Israel's intention to conduct the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern West Bank unilaterally seemed no longer acceptable and Jerusalem once again came under world pressure to return to bilateralism and coordination with the PA.

In fact, since the government's approval of disengagement in June 2004, regional and international players alike have expressed their support for the withdrawal as the only practical option for reducing the scope of Israeli-Palestinian armed confrontation. The change of Palestinian leadership, however, brought about a renewed interest of the newly elected US administration and the international community as a whole in the Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process. The perceived opportunities these developments seemed to have produced were rapidly identified by the international community and were immediately reflected in British PM Blair's initiative—together with the re-elected President Bush and other Quartet members—suggesting a return to the Road Map. Since the election of Abbas, the international interest has been to assure that the Israeli disengagement plan is bilateral rather than unilateral and that its implementation is conducted in coordination with the PA, thus laying the fundamentals for the resumption of the peace process between the two parties.

The renewed international interest in the peace process might explain the rapid rapprochement between the Israeli government and the new PA leadership. Within a month after Mahmud Abbas was elected the new chairman of the PA, the Sharm a-Sheikh summit in early Ferubary 2005 put the Israel-PA relations back on a promising track, as they had never been since October 2000. Indeed, Israel and the PA have renewed the security coordination and the IDF's exit from five Palestinian cities is being discussed; the release of Palestinian prisoners seems almost evident, even if not entirely to the PA's satisfaction; and, despite initial reluctance, the Islamic opposition movements—Hamas and the Islamic Jihad— have agreed to join the undeclared cease-fire. Moreover, representatives of the Islamic opposition took part in negotiations with Fatah on

changing the system of elections to the legislative council, which would pave the road for Hamas's participation in the elections due on 17 July this year.[35]

Yet the return to dialogue and calm should not be overestimated. The situation on the ground remains fragile because all the armed Palestinian groups have remained intact and no disciplinary action against such groups or efforts at disarming them have yet been taken. Despite Abbas's firm message to the Islamic groups that the cease-fire must be maintained and his decision to dismiss nine senior police and security officers, it remains unclear under what circumstances, if any, he would be willing to enforce this policy on the various militia groups, including by force if needed. In fact, on one occasion an armed group carried out a shooting attack on the PA Chairman's office without being punished, demonstrating the impotence of the PA's security apparatuses despite the reshuffling conducted by Abbas.

It is due to this uncertainty that PM Sharon, despite his apparent willingness to cooperate with Abbas, has left no doubt as to his intention to adhere to a unilateral implementation of the disengagement.

Palestinian Responses

Although all Palestinian opposition movements have been potentially dangerous to the Oslo process, this section deals primarily with Hamas, the largest and by far the most significant opposition movement in Palestinian society. There is little doubt that since Arafat's death, the PA has been carefully calculating its policy towards Hamas, which it perceives as a key political actor in the

35 Given the requirement that the law of elections be approved by the Legislative Council at least three months prior to election day, it was inconceivable that the elections would be held on the target date, apparently due to fears among Fatah leaders of a Hamas landslide victory and also because of internal tensions and rivalries within Fatah over the young generation's demand for reforms and reelection of the movement's Central Committee, the key institution of Fatah. See article by Danny Rubinstein in *Ha'aretz*, 17 April 2005, p. 3.

Palestinian arena. First, Hamas is an essential partner in any attempt at returning to calm, as it wields influence over other opposition groups. These groups would adhere to its position and most certainly respect a Hamas prohibition on head-on collisions with the PA. Conversely, Hamas is capable of wrecking any attempt at resuming bilateral Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy and reaching any sustainable agreement over the Gaza Strip. Equally important as a precondition for lasting stability, Hamas is an indispensable partner for undertaking to rebuild the Palestinian economy.

With the approval by the Israeli government of the PM's plan for full unilateral disengagement of Israeli forces and settlements from the Gaza Strip and evacuation of four settlements in the northern West Bank, disengagement became a central issue on the Palestinian public agenda. PA official spokesmen initially referred to Sharon's plan with ambivalence, pointing to its insufficient territorial scope and undesirable unilateral nature, but welcoming the very intention of Israeli disengagement from Palestinian lands. Despite official Palestinian statements, the more the Israeli PM seemed to be committed to his original intention regardless of his difficulties within his own Likud Party, the more all Palestinian political groups effectively began examining their alignment and preparations for the implementation of the Israeli disengagement and "the day after."

Obviously, the anarchic state of affairs in the Palestinian areas rendered the intended Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip a source of major concern among leading figures in the PA and Palestinian opposition groups over perceived losses that the implementation of the Israeli plan might inflict on them as well as in terms of the spoils they might reap. In the absence of a functioning Palestinian government, and given the deep social and political fragmentation and the chaotic state of civil and security affairs, the need to ensure maximum benefits from the anticipated disengagement became a partisan (group and movement) issue rather than a collective Palestinian interest under a unified leadership.

From the outset, Hamas, as well as other opposition groups, took credit for the Israeli decision to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip, presenting it as a result of its dedicated armed struggle. Hamas thus intensified its violent

activities in Gaza in order to further emphasize its leading role in expelling Israel, similarly to the manner in which Hizballah bade farewell to Israel prior to its retreat from south Lebanon in May 2000.[36] At the same time, however, the growing momentum of the Israeli disengagement plan drove both Fatah and Hamas leaders to seek a mutual agreement concerning the future government in the Gaza Strip, which they both justified by their deep commitment to prevent Palestinian infighting.

The Fatah-Hamas talks conducted in Gaza in early June between Muhammad Dahlan—at the behest of Arafat—and Hamas political leaders in the Strip clearly indicated a mutual recognition of each other's crucial role in any future government subsequent to disengagement. Indeed, while Fatah possesses a much larger armed force than Hamas, the latter's consent and cooperation is indispensable for securing a legitimate and stable future government in the aftermath of an Israeli pullout. Although neither Hamas nor the Islamic Jihad agreed to commit itself to a ceasefire during or after the Israeli disengagement, both clearly expressed their interest in its full implementation, provided that Israel commit to stopping its incursions into the Gaza Strip as well as its chasing and targeted killing of political and military figures of these movements. These movements reiterated their insistence that while Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip should be final, they preferred it to be unilateral and with no compromises on the part of the PA or their own movements.[37]

As for the nature and structure of Palestinian government in the Gaza Strip following the Israeli disengagement, Hamas is caught between rejection of the Oslo process and its institutions, and its striving, as a social and political movement, for recognition and influential status. Hence, it has practically adopted a policy of "participation without representation," which has marked its position since the signing of the Oslo agreement. Encouraged by its growing

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36 Graham Usher, "Gaza in the Balance," Al-Ahram Weekly, 10-16 June 2004 (no. 694), http://weekly.ahram.org.eg; AFP report, *Islam-online.net*, 30 June 2004.

37 See Dahlan's statement to the news channel *al-`Arabiyya*, 3 June 2004, IMRA, quoting the *Jerusalem Times* (an independent, English language Palestinian newspaper), 3 June 2004, http://www.jerusalem.times.net. See also AFP report, 30 June 2004, *Islam-Online.net.*

popularity due to its combatant and social role in the Intifada, and by the apparent weakness and fragmentation within Fatah, its main political rival, since the election of Abbas as the new PA Chairman, Hamas has embarked on a new and bold interpretation of this principle. This has been reflected by the movement's orderly participation in the municipal elections conducted in part of the PA's areas (scoring significant achievements, especially in the Gaza Strip, winning the majority in seven out of ten municipalities) and its declared readiness to take part in the general elections to the PA's Legislative Council due in July 2005. Moreover, Hamas went as far as expressing willingness to join the PLO, though it is not clear yet under what conditions in terms of its proportional representation in this overall Palestinian national assembly.

These options, however, remain conditional on the approval of the new election law, which has been altered, in keeping with Hamas's demands, from purely regional to regional-proportional. Ostensibly, such a change would enable Hamas to participate in the elections on the grounds that they no longer emanate from the Oslo process. In fact, Hamas would insist on such a change in order to maximize its representation in the Legislative Council to materialize its proven popularity advantage in the Gaza Strip and increase its representation.[38]

Following the death of Arafat and deliberations on the election of his successor, Hamas spokesmen stated their interest in playing a "responsible" role. Although the movement boycotted the elections for the PA Chairman, it expressed its interest in taking part in the elections for the Legislative Council. This clearly indicated Hamas's wish to cash in the popularity and influence it had acquired in the Palestinian society during the four years of the Intifada, though without taking direct governing responsibility. This strategy was echoed in the words of Sheikh Hassan Yousuf, the most senior political leader of Hamas in the West Bank, who stated that,

> Had Hamas assumed leadership at this time, it would have been vilified and isolated by the international community and then the people would have

38 Arnon Regoler, *Ha'aretz*, 19 November 2004, p. A3.

suffered. Therefore, Hamas wants to be in a position where it can influence the leadership through the democratic process.[39]

Practically then, Hamas may not seek official power or participation in the new administration of the Gaza Strip—especially if the Israeli disengagement entails a Palestinian commitment not to wage violence from that territory. Hamas's position seems to assume a tacit commitment not to disrupt the establishment of a new Palestinian administration in the Strip provided that it reckon with their political interests. This could assume the form of participation in local and municipal government and the incorporation of their adherents into the bureaucracy and security services.

The aftermath of Arafat's death reiterated the political gap between Hamas's 'inside' and 'outside' leaderships, especially regarding options of coexistence and cooperation with the PA and the scope and timing of the use of violence against Israel. This gap surfaced again following the repeated statements of willingness by 'inside' Hamas leaders, such as Sheikh Hassan Yousuf and Mahmud al-Zahar, to accept the PA's request for a total suspension of violence, defined as an indefinite truce (*hudna*), triggering denials by 'Usama Hamdan, the Hamas representative in Beirut and one of the members of the movement's Political Bureau, which is distinguished by differences of approach and interests and backed by Iranian and Syrian influence.[40] Under pressure from Egypt and the PA, and after long deliberations in Cairo in February and March, Hamas gave its consent for an unofficial relaxation (*tahdi'a*) rather than truce, signifying a low level of commitment to hold back violence and a willingness to resume it when necessary.

39 Statement by Sheikh Hassan Youssuf, "strongly opposed" to any attempt by Hamas to take over government in Gaza, *HamasOnline*, 21 November 2004. See also *Ha'aretz*, 4 November 2004, p. A3.

40 *Ha'aretz*, 5 December 2004, p. A4.

Regional and International Responses

From the outset, Sharon's initiative scored encouraging regional and international credence as the only chance out of the continued, violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Already in April—prior to obtaining the approval of the Israeli government on 6 June 2004—PM Sharon attained President Bush's endorsement for the disengagement plan, shortly followed by that of the European Union.

At the regional level, Egyptian President Mubarak gave his public support for the Israeli disengagement plan and made a continuous and ultimately futile effort to coordinate a cease-fire with Hamas, to allow for a smooth Israeli disengagement from the Strip. At Israel's request, Egypt agreed to take responsibility for security along the Egypt-Gaza Strip border (the "Philadelphi Route"), by deploying an armored military units backed by helicopters and navy patrols to reinforce the border-guard police currently in charge of security along this line by military units in order to prevent infiltrations and arms smuggling. Israel also agreed to the training of some 40 Palestinian security officers in Egypt. Parallel to this, Egypt is expected to send some 200 advisors into the Strip to improve local performance of the Palestinian security services.[41]

Egyptian willingness to take an active part in the implementation of the disengagement and secure its success was demonstrated in President Mubarak's initiative in convening the Sharm al-Sheikh summit bringing together Sharon, Abbas and King Abdallah of Jordan. Though the summit was primarily ceremonial, it indicated new joint undertakings by the participants and the beginning of a new chapter in Arab-Israeli relations represented by the decision of Egypt and Jordan to return their ambassadors to Israel. These gestures will no doubt serve as additional constraints in the Israeli decision-making process by further tightening Jerusalem's commitment to coordination with the PA.

41 This was reportedly agreed upon by Israel and Egypt, *Ha'aretz*, 2 December 2004, p. A1.

On another end of the regional spectrum, the assassination of former PM Hariri reiterated the cumulating tension between the US administration and Syria over the latter's continued presence and policies in Lebanon. Lebanese political parties and non-Shi'ite ethnic communities might well interpret the growing American pressures on Assad's regime as a signal to renew the pressures on Hizballah to dismantle its militia and adapt itself to the rules committing all the Lebanese. In such a case Hizballah's capabilities to undermine the disengagement process by instigating its recruits in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to commit terrorist attacks against Israel or to assassinate Abbas will be greatly reduced.

Conclusions

For many Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip the long, costly and futile violence is resulting in a growing sense of frustration. This has been particularly prevalent among the educated elite, the "old guard" figures and Fatah's prisoners in Israeli jails.

Especially but not only for the Islamic opposition groups, in spite of the ambiguities and disadvantages it entails regarding the future of Palestinian national struggle for statehood, the Israeli disengagement plan is publicly irresistible. At the same time, it offers these groups an opportunity for extracting political gains, especially now that the new Palestinian leadership is badly in need of their consent.

Though Israel and the PA have renewed the security coordination and the Islamic opposition movements—Hamas and the Islamic Jihad—have agreed to join the undeclared cease-fire, the return to dialogue and calm should not be overestimated. The situation on the ground remains fragile because all the armed Palestinian groups have remained intact and no disciplinary action against such groups has yet been taken. The dependence of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad on their outside financial and institutional sources, and especially their loose control of the military apparatuses, is but one potential obstacle that may fail the efforts of the new PA leaders to secure a long-term cease-fire. Similar to the situation in the first Intifada, Arab regional actors do not necessarily wish for the success of the Palestinian popular war, due to its spillover effect

and potential development into a regional conflagration that would endanger regime and interstate regional stability. At the same time, these actors see no other possible solution than the establishment of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

As for Syria, as long as it has not retrieved the Golan Heights, it will continue, together with Iran, to support Palestinian radical groups employing violence against Israel. In order to suppress these activities Israel will need full cooperation with the PA.

Finally, despite Abbas's firm message to the Islamic groups that the cease-fire must be maintained and his decision to dismiss nine senior police and security officers, it remains unclear under what circumstances, if any, he would be willing to enforce this policy on these groups, including by force if needed. This matter is of less concern regarding the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a dissident group whose main claims can be met within the Fatah movement.

Even in the best scenario of a Fatah-Hamas accord on cease-fire and power-sharing in the Gaza Strip following the Israeli withdrawal, it is inconceivable that Gaza Strip will remain silent without any progress being made toward Palestinian statehood. Hence, Israel should make its intentions clear regarding the establishment of a Palestinian state, its territorial boundaries in the West Bank and the future of the Jewish settlements. In this context, the implementation of recently published Israeli plans of mass construction aimed at connecting Ma`aleh Adumim to Jerusalem might be well taken by the Islamic opposition groups and by Fatah's activists as a blatant violation of the lull and be invoked by them to legitimize the resumption of violence.

A constructive Israeli-Palestinian process of negotiation can strengthen the new PA/PLO leadership but may also weaken its legitimacy. Among the matters that will have to be addressed is the commitment of the Israeli government and its military echelon to suppress Palestinian violence and maintain freedom of action in chasing perpetrators of terrorist attacks deep in the Palestinian areas, in its effort to reiterate its message that violence will not pay.

A strengthened PA/PLO leadership might be more conducive to pragmatic settlements with Israel, though without giving away the basic goals of a

Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. However, without reforms within Fatah, the generational competition and the revolutionary spirit that nurtured violence may go on.