

Hamas

*Political
 Thought
 and
 Practice*

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Washington, DC

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For my father, Muhamad Al Hroub, and for the soul of my mother, Muyassar Al Hroub. Both were forced away from their beloved city, Bethlehem.

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What else could I say? If I were a young Palestinian immersed from birth in the Palestinian ethos, I'd have become a third-grade teacher?

—Ehud Barak, responding to a television interviewer who asked whether he would have joined a Palestinian guerrilla group if he had been born a Palestinian.

(Response printed in *Jerusalem Post* [International edition], 14 March 1998.)

Introduction

In the aftermath of the 1982 exodus of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Lebanon to Tunis, the Palestinian resistance movement to Israeli occupation underwent a major transformation. In the few years following 1982, the internal dynamics of the Palestinian movement vacillated between the extreme situations of geography and the nature of the struggle against Israel. With respect to geography, the center of weight of Palestinian military and political leadership was moved to the furthest place from Palestine since the rise of the Palestine question early in the twentieth century. With respect to the nature of the struggle, the Palestinian movement experienced the loss of its military alternative, however modest, and found itself confined to unsatisfactory political means and appeals. During the same period, two other developments pertaining to the geography and nature of the struggle took place. Geographically, the eruption of the Palestinian popular uprising, or *intifada*, in December 1987 brought the center of struggle to the heart of the historic territory of Palestine for the first time since the Israeli occupation. Regarding the nature of struggle, the extreme employment of pure political means, futile and stripped of any military capability after the resistance groups were forced to leave their bases in Lebanon in 1982, was replaced by the extreme of a costly but fruitful means of struggle—a widespread popular uprising throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The rapid transformation of the geography and nature of struggle brought with it new “strugglers”: the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Islamic Jihad as new Palestinian organizations with great influence and specific coloration. This was not

only a new point of departure for the Palestinian political struggle; it was also the Palestinian incarnation of politicized Islam in the Middle East.

Within this context, the transformation of the Palestinian struggle and the emergence of (Palestinian) Islamism, this study examines Hamas's political thought and practice. The focus on Hamas, without covering other, and less influential, Islamic movements in Palestine, stems from the movement's greater relevance to the wider context of the Palestine question. Enjoying an acknowledged popularity and significant political and military weight, Hamas has claimed that it represents the mainstream of Palestinian Islamism, a claim with which most observers would agree. This status, then, justifies an in-depth study of the Hamas movement.

As the intifada continued from year to year and the press of events reshuffled the deck of political cards in Palestinian and Arab affairs, Hamas became better established. Its influence spread due to its participation in the intifada, the operations of its military wing, and its social work. The popular support that Hamas gained in this way molded it into a significant rival of the PLO in the period between 1988 and 1994, when the Palestinian Authority was established in accordance with the 1993 Oslo Agreement. Popular support for Hamas found expression in electoral victories at training institutes, universities, associations, chambers of commerce, and municipal councils, as well as in its control over mosques and Islamic societies. During the intifada, and at a time when Hamas was at its peak, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the founder of Hamas and its current leader, maintained that the Israelis urged him to take over the administration of the Gaza Strip on their behalf. However, he turned down the offer, saying that "it would have been crazy for us to consent to be mere stand-ins for Israeli rule."¹

Hamas's political importance stems from the public support it has amassed in excess of its potential membership base and outside its institutional structure. Its grass-roots support goes beyond the deeply religious or those who subscribe to its doctrinal position and ideology. In fact, some observers point out that hundreds of thousands of its Palestinian supporters "don't even know what the inside of a mosque looks like."² From the perspective of many Israelis, Hamas has moved beyond the stage of being a charitable society and has turned into a large movement with multiple roles, and it relies on the support and sympathy of the average Palestinian.³

1. Ahmad Yassin, *Filastin al-Muslima* [Muslim Palestine], April 1998, p. 41.

2. Gil Seden, "Taming the Monster," *The Jewish Journal*, 4–10 November 1994.

3. Yaacov Biri (former head of Israeli secret police, Shabak), *World Witness*, 6 December 1997.

Israel itself, despite its fierce attack on Hamas—which it describes as a terrorist organization—and its effort to rally opposition to the movement in the Middle East and the world in general, is prepared in the final analysis to talk to Hamas, not only because of the grass-roots support it enjoys inside Palestine, but also because of the influence and support it enjoys in the Arab and Islamic worlds.⁴

The leaders of Hamas have a more grandiose view of their base of support. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, one of the founders of the movement, says that “Hamas has the widest popular base in the world because Hamas’ actions resonate with Muslims from South Africa to India, Pakistan, and China; and from Latin America to the United States and to Europe; all Muslims support what Hamas is doing.”⁵

Regardless of the final judgment on Hamas’s ideology, political vision, and practice, the significance of studying Hamas lies in the critical nature of this phase in Palestine’s contemporary history. For the first time in this century, a sort of Palestinian authority has been established over certain parts of the historic territory of Palestine, on the basis of the 1993 Oslo Agreement. However, grave doubts have developed as to whether this agreement satisfies a minimal level of legitimate Palestinian rights. Furthermore, there are fears that implementation of this accord could lead to a Palestinian civil war in the name of a war on terrorism, an internecine conflict in which the primary victor would be Israel. Many groups in Palestinian society have condemned talk about “uprooting the Islamic resistance, which has represented the true *fiḍā'i* (self-sacrificing) resistance in Palestine since the outbreak of the Palestine intifada. . . . How is it permissible to allow the repression of a movement that has proven itself capable of enduring and forcefully challenging the enemy who occupies our land? What could justify the repression of the youth among our people who have laid down their lives and given everything to resist the occupation?”⁶

In brief, Hamas constitutes a new link in the chain of Palestinian struggle and thus needs to be studied, analyzed, and understood. The aim of this book is to constitute a qualitative addition to the list of indispensable readings for understanding this Palestinian and Islamic phenomenon. Hamas was formed more than one decade ago, yet the available studies about it—whether in Arabic or in Western languages—and about

4. Ezer Weizmann (President of Israel), *Al-Hayat* (London), 10 October 1997.

5. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, *Al-Wasat* (London), 1 September 1997.

6. Hisham Sharabi, “That the Palestinian Entity May Be a Democracy, Not a State [Run] by the Security Services” [in Arabic], *Al-Quds al-'Arabi* (London), 8 December 1993.

Palestinian Islamists in general are neither sufficiently comprehensive nor detailed. Leaving aside partisan and rhetorical writings, academic literature in Arabic, although relying on original sources, remains insufficient and not comprehensive, taking the form of articles and short to medium-length monographs.

Western literature, for its part, is of two types. The first does not rely on Arabic language sources, with the result that the relevant studies tend to be superficial and somewhat repetitious of journalistic coverage. The second type, which does make use of Arabic texts, includes better and more solid research but usually does not give a complete picture of the multifaceted phenomenon that Hamas represents. Moreover, both types are concerned with specific aspects of Hamas, such as its history, ideology, or political behavior, and do not provide a comprehensive view, as does this study.

The objective of this book is to provide a balanced picture of Hamas by highlighting the various functions and roles that the movement plays. It provides a view from the inside, insofar as this is feasible, by making use of primary sources—Hamas's own literature and documents, as well as interviews with senior figures in the movement. It examines the role of Hamas as a resistance organization, as well as its political and social roles, by delving into its ideology and actual practice. Starting with the historic roots and evolution of the movement, then focusing on the record of Hamas's political and social thought, this study examines and analyzes Hamas's posture and role within the context of the Palestinian struggle against Israeli occupation.

An examination of the multifaceted activities of Hamas will provide a more refined and nuanced understanding of the movement than is prevalent in the Western media. The common image of Hamas in the West, even among intellectuals and politicians, is that of a terrorist organization involved in suicide bombings and attacks on passenger buses. This book, in contrast, presents Hamas as Palestinians view it. Primarily, they see Hamas as a multidimensional political movement that is involved in wide scale social, cultural, and charitable activities and as an organization with a network of political ties to parties, organizations, and states. Additionally, it has official representatives abroad and supporters in many Arab and Islamic countries, as well as in Muslim communities throughout the world. Secondly, Hamas is seen as the natural product of unnatural circumstances: the Israeli occupation under which the Palestinian people live. These views of Hamas can be appreciated by focusing on the historic rise and development of the movement against the background of the events that have

befallen the Palestinians and the changes in the Middle East and in the world as a whole. Hamas thus is a response, a link in the chain of cause and effect arising from the cruel circumstances of life under occupation to which the Palestinian people have been subjected since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Quite simply, the same logic that lies behind the emergence of resistance movements elsewhere in the world where people are under occupation or have been colonized against their will explains the rise and development of Hamas. In the case of the Palestinians, resistance to occupation and to colonialism gave rise to rebellions, such as the uprisings against the British during their Mandate over Palestine, the most notable of which was the revolt led by 'Izzidin al-Qassam in the 1930s. Palestinian rebellions since that time, including the revolution that began in the early 1960s against Israel and was led by the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fateh), are subject to the same logic. The continuation of the brutal and repressive Israeli occupation led to the popular uprising or intifada and to the birth of Hamas in late 1987. There is no doubt that the unchanging nature of the occupation, even if there is a transformation in its form or open manifestation, will give rise to successor movements if Hamas should cease to perform the function of resistance or cease to exist.

This study shows that the increase in popular support for any Palestinian political movement is commensurate, in a very basic sense, with its capacity to serve as an outlet for resistance against the occupation and with its ability to secure a minimally reasonable level of satisfaction of Palestinian rights. Hence, the fluctuations in the balance of power among Palestinian movements and in their share of public support basically are contingent on how well they embody the state of resistance. However, it also depends on how realistic that resistance is and the Palestinian people's assessment of whether the "revolutionary project" espoused by a movement can be realized. Thus, Fateh was popular during the second half of the 1960s and throughout the entire decades of the 1970s and 1980s because it was perceived to be a true expression of the condition of resistance, and the Palestinian people endorsed the feasibility of Fateh's revolutionary undertaking.

By contrast, the Islamists did not enjoy a measure of popularity to rival that of the PLO because of their nonparticipation in the "resistance project." The rising popularity of Hamas in the late 1980s and during the 1990s and the declining popularity of Fateh and the PLO during the same period is due to the same factor. One can say that had it not been for the regional and international momentum behind the peace process, which

began in Madrid in 1991 and resulted in the Oslo Agreement in 1993, the current balance of power among Palestinian forces would have been radically different.

From another perspective, the “Islamism” of Hamas is a manifestation of the phenomenon of the strong rise of Islamic movements in the Arab and Islamic world since the late 1970s. In this respect, they are just like the “leftism” of many Palestinian resistance organizations in the 1960s and 1970s, which were a reflection of international ideological trends sweeping the Middle East. Thus, Palestinian nationalist movements in the twentieth century can be seen from two different aspects: first, as resistance to occupation (first British, then Israeli), pure and simple; and second, as manifestations of ideologies dominant in the Middle East region at the time. The ideologies then are pressed into the service of “the resistance project,” thus establishing a dialectical link between resistance and social change.

This study employs neither an apologetic nor a demonizing analysis of Hamas. Its main purpose is to paint as much as possible a detailed picture of the organization’s multifaceted nature and to provide deeper understanding of its political thought and conduct. Nor is this study trapped in Western political outlooks, definitions, and “labeling” of others. When dealing with highly sensitive issues that pertain to the violation of the rights of millions of people, the practice of “issuing” verdicts and “labeling” groups leads to a crude simplification of rather complicated phenomena. For example, the abstract debate of who is or is not a “terrorist” has little value, if not complete uselessness, when one tries to assess realities on the ground that counter-pose the internal image of the heroic “freedom fighter” to the external image of the same as a cold-blooded “terrorist.” The recent past bears witness that many of today’s peace negotiators, allies, and statesmen were yesterday’s terrorists. By the same token, many of today’s “terrorists” could be tomorrow’s “distinguished figures,” VIPs, and statesmen.

The contribution of this study lies in its almost total reliance on primary sources, specifically, the unpublished as well as published documents and literature of Hamas. Extensive extracts from unpublished documents are being published for the first time and have been incorporated into various parts of the book. Use has been made of Hamas press releases, both periodical statements and leaflets used for commentaries on various issues. These releases had a great deal of significance during the first three years of the movement’s existence, especially prior to the appointment of an official spokesman for Hamas outside the Occupied Territories at the end of

1990. Up to that date, the movement relied primarily on its releases to make known its official position on new developments. Hamas regards those releases as having served in the capacity of “the official spokesman for the movement.”⁷ Hamas was not bound by the statements of its own leaders or prominent figures, especially those made inside the Occupied Territories; these individuals were not in a position to speak in an official capacity on behalf of the movement lest they be arrested or pursued by the occupation authorities. This changed with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in April 1994, after which it became possible for prominent figures in the movement to speak without trepidation.

This study also made use of a number of private interviews and statements by prominent figures and leaders of Hamas, as well as booklets and literature produced by the movement itself and by those close to it; these sources provide important perspectives for analysis. The availability of new documents and texts open new possibilities for understanding Hamas and its political thought. Perhaps those documents in themselves are more important than the analysis provided, with which one may agree or disagree.

This study is organized into six chapters. The first chapter provides a critical analysis of the rise and development of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, showing Hamas to be an offshoot of the organization and ideology of the Brotherhood. It also traces the ideological transformations that altered the Brotherhood’s view of the question of how to liberate Palestine and the effect this had on the Brotherhood’s activities during the decades between the 1950s and the 1980s. This chapter also provides details on the creation of Hamas at the end of 1987, in tandem with the intifada, which was a basic and visible influence on the ideological and political transformation of the Brotherhood. From that point on, resistance to the Israeli occupation was given precedence over the long-standing goal of transforming and Islamicizing Palestinian society as a prelude to engagement in resistance activities.

The second chapter of the study offers a detailed reading of Hamas’s vision of the struggle over Palestine and its principal elements. The latter include the movement’s understanding of the nature of the conflict as a doctrinal, cultural, and political one, its perspective on the parties to the conflict (Zionism, Judaism, the Arabs, Muslims, and the West), and the

7. See the Introduction to *Documents of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)* [in Arabic], a series of documents from the third year of the intifada, issued by the Hamas information office, but with no publisher or date of publication listed.

manner in which the movement sees its participation in the struggle. There is also a discussion of Hamas's perspective on the traditional dilemma of Palestinian political thought: the proposal for a small state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (which Hamas sees as an interim solution) as against the total liberation of Palestine (which Hamas calls the historic solution). The reader will note Hamas's conditional tolerance for the interim solution while it attempts to sustain the flame of the historic solution in the context of the peace process, the Madrid Conference, and the Oslo Agreement.

The third chapter discusses the political relations of Hamas with other Palestinian groups and how the movement's ideology and theory were translated into practice. Hamas's relations with the PLO during the intifada and up to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority are examined, as are its relations with the Authority after 1994. In addition, the movement's relations with the other resistance organizations are analyzed.

Chapter four concerns the relations of Hamas with Arab, Islamic, and other states. Of particular importance are Hamas's relations with Israel. Chapter five delves into Hamas's ideological and practical positions on elections, political pluralism, and social work—issues that organically are linked to the subject matter of this study. The activities of the movement's military arm, which have been branded as terrorism in the West, also are examined. Chapter five is followed by the conclusion to the study.

Three important points need to be made. The first is that this study does not contain a detailed account of Palestinian political events during the period that it covers, since the focus is on Hamas's positions and views and responses to those events. An effort was made to avoid unwieldy length, which would have happened if such details were included. The second point is that some extracts and texts are quoted more than once, particularly passages from the Hamas Charter, because the texts in question are relevant for several topics and fit under more than one heading. The third point concerns private interviews conducted by the author with Hamas leaders and prominent figures. My purpose was to ask questions relating to theoretical issues concerning general political perspectives rather than to focus on specific events and Hamas's position on those events at the time of their occurrence. As mentioned earlier, the movement's reactions, statements, and positions on those events were taken from releases at the time, such as numbered periodical statements or statements made by prominent figures in Hamas or published press interviews with them. This serves the purpose not only of presenting a record of the positions adopted by the movement, but also of preserving the context and the flavor of Hamas's reaction, which is conveyed by the language used at the

time. Quite often, questions addressed to leaders at a subsequent period in time elicit imprecise accounts, as the responses in such cases tend to embody a fair measure of reevaluation and enjoy the benefit of hindsight due to the clarification of certain ambiguities that were present in the original context. At any rate, ultimately what is most important is what leaders and movements do, not what they say. This study has tried to probe Hamas's actual practices and to assign them an importance equal to that attached to ideological and theoretical issues.

How It All Began



HISTORIC ROOTS

The political literature disseminated by Hamas and its ideological discourse depict the 1987 founding of the organization as a continuation of the cycle of Palestinian resistance against Zionism, which began early in the twentieth century. Hamas stresses that the Islamic dimension “was characteristic of the struggle of the Palestinian people throughout, although it was overshadowed during the 1960s and 1970s by leftist attitudes that dominated the activities of the Palestinian *fidā'iyyeen*.”¹ Hamas is an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood and considers itself to be a branch of the Brotherhood in Palestine.² Yet, Hamas also views itself as a natural extension of the Palestinian resistance—in its various manifestations—to the Zionist invasion. Consequently, “it associates itself with the revolt of ‘Izzidin al-Qassam and his ‘Muslim Brethren’ *mujahideen* in 1936.”³ The pride that Hamas takes in the jihad of Sheikh ‘Izzidin al-Qassam and his followers in particular is reflected in the fact that the military arm of Hamas, which was founded in the early 1990s, has been named the Martyr ‘Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades.

Despite Hamas’s care to associate itself with the broad current of general Palestinian resistance, the characteristics, make-up, ideology, and

1. Musa Abu Marzouq, head of the Hamas Political Bureau, interview with author, Amman, Jordan, 21 April 1995.

2. According to the Hamas Charter which was made public on 18 August 1989; see Appendix, document no. 1 for a translated version.

3. Ibid.

political discourse of Hamas reflect its organizational roots and its historic ties to the Muslim Brotherhood movement in particular. Consequently, research into the historical origins of the rise of the movement must delve into the history of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. It is not intended here, however, to deal with all the various Islamic trends in Palestine, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century.⁴ Nevertheless, this study shall examine the evolving concern of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with the Palestine problem and the movement's subsequent establishment of branches in Palestine, branches out of which were to form the cadres for Hamas in the 1980s.

The establishment of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was motivated by the distinct concern of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, founded in 1928, with occurrences in Palestine. That was the first expansion of the original Egyptian Brotherhood beyond the borders of Egypt. When the Great Palestine Revolt broke out in 1936, the interest of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestine problem redoubled. The Brotherhood convened a special conference in March 1936 in order to support the rebellion. The General Central Committee in Aid of Palestine was an offshoot of the conference.⁵ In the period from 1936 to 1939, the Brotherhood was active in supplying moral and material aid to the Palestinian cause through the "Palestine Piaster" contribution campaign. It issued declarations and pamphlets attacking the British for their policies in Palestine. It also called for a boycott of Jewish magazines in Egypt. Against the wishes of the authorities at the time, it distributed *Fire and Destruction in Palestine*, a book issued by the [Palestine] Higher Arab Committee. This resulted in the arrest of Hassan al-Banna himself, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.⁶ Some sources document the active but lim-

4. For more information about the Islamic trend at that time, see Mohsen M. Saleh, *Al-tayyar al-Islami fi filastin wa atharuhu fi harakat al-Jihad 1917-1948* [The Islamic trend in Palestine and its effects on the struggle movement 1917-1948] (Kuwait: Al-Falah Library, 1988), a study originally submitted as a master's thesis at Om Dirman Islamic University, Khartoum, Sudan; and Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1999).

5. Hasan Al-Banna, *Mudhakarāt al-da'wa wal-da'iya* [Diaries of the message and the messenger] (Cairo: Islamic House of Publishing and Distribution, n.d.), p. 240.

6. For more details, see Mahmoud Abdel-Halim, *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimoon, abdathun sana'at al-tarikh: Ru'ya min al-dakhil, 1928-1948* [The Muslim Brotherhood, events that made history: An insider's view, 1928-1948] (Alexandria, Egypt: Da'wa House, 1979), pp. 88-90; Mohsen M. Saleh, *Al-Tayyar al-Islami*; and Ziad Abu Ghanimah, *Al-harakah al-Islamiyya wa qadhiyat filastin* [The Islamic movement and the Palestine question] (Amman: Furqan House, 1985).

ited participation of Egyptian members of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1936 rebellion: Youthful members of the Brotherhood were able to infiltrate into Palestine and to join the *mujahideen* in their struggle, particularly in the areas under the control of the al-Qassam group.⁷

The Brotherhood in Egypt wasted no opportunity to mobilize popular support for the Palestinian cause. It sent letters of protest to the British authorities (Britain held the Mandate for Palestine). On the occasion of the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, the Muslim Brotherhood wrote to the British ambassador in Egypt that “the cause of Palestine is the cause of every Muslim”; it warned Britain that if suppressed sentiments were to be unleashed, “England would lose the friendship of the Islamic world forever . . . we therefore hope that the British government will wake up to this fact before it is too late despite all the deception practiced by the Jews.”⁸ The Brotherhood’s efforts and its commitment to the Palestinian cause were driven by its doctrinaire perspective and faith in the concept of one Islamic nation and the brotherhood of all Muslims and the imperative to engage in jihad for the cause of God.⁹

These activities of the Brotherhood were welcome by the Palestinians and observed with keen interest by the Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husayni. He wrote to the Brotherhood praising its “blessed actions in aid of these sacred Islamic Arab lands (Palestine), for which we are grateful . . . your wise decisions and noble efforts have earned the profound gratitude and profuse praise of the Arab public in Palestine.”¹⁰ The Brotherhood received similar letters from ‘Awni Abdel Hadi, the Secretary General of the Higher Arab Committee in Jerusalem.¹¹

It is evident from the above that the Arab and Islamic dimensions of the Palestinian problem were highlighted by the deep concern of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt with events in Palestine. Conversely, the involvement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine is instructive in tracing the evolution of the Brotherhood’s ideology and organization and the expansion of its presence across the region. In particular, and as noted by

7. Saleh, *Al-Tayyar al-Islami*, p. 436.

8. Al-Banna, *Mudhakara*, p. 259.

9. For a more detailed view of the doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood and its stand on the question of Palestine, see Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, *Tasawur al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin lil-qadhiyya al-filasiniyya* [The Muslim Brotherhood’s conception of the Palestine question] (Cairo: Islamic House of Publishing and Distribution, 1989), pp. 13–38; and idem, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palestine Question, 1928–1947* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

10. Al-Banna, *Mudhakara*, pp. 243–44.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

many, the Palestine question was the driving force behind the expansion of the Muslim Brotherhood across the region.¹² Operating within an Egyptian atmosphere highly supportive of the Palestine question, the ultimate expression of the Brotherhood's concern with the Palestinian problem was its participation in the 1948 Palestine war. This support went beyond ordinary political considerations and was more than a perfunctory response. Several interpretations indicate that "the concern of the Brotherhood with the liberation of Palestine was sincere and based on deep religious conviction" that was translated into significant active participation.¹³ Perhaps the engagement of the Brotherhood in the 1948 war was the highlight of its history of jihad. The embittered Hajj Amin al-Husayni specifically exempted the organization from the blame that he assigned to the rest of the Arabs for the loss of Palestine.¹⁴

The Rise and Evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine

The first official visit by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to Palestine occurred when two members of the organization, 'Abdel Rahman al-Sa'ati (the brother of al-Banna) and Muhammad As'ad al-Hakim, toured Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria in August 1935 to spread the Brotherhood's message. The two envoys, accompanied by the Tunisian leader 'Abdel 'Aziz al-Tha'alibi, met with Hajj Amin al-Husayni.¹⁵ There is no indication that this visit resulted in the establishment of branches or chapters of the Brotherhood in Palestine, and it appears that for several years relations between the Palestinians and the Brotherhood remained limited to the exchange of letters, notably between al-Banna and Hajj Amin al-Husayni, expressing pleasantries and solidarity. It was not until 1943 that a genuine Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood organization actually was formed, the Makarem Society of Jerusalem; it was under that

12. Rabi' al-Madhoon, "Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi filastin 1928–1987" [The Islamic movement in Palestine, 1928–1987], *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, no. 187 (October 1988), pp. 10–50.

13. Bayan Nuwayhid Al-Hout, *Al-qiyadat wal-mo'assasat al-siyasiyya fi filastin 1917–1948* [The political leadership and institutions in Palestine, 1917–1948] (Beirut: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1986), p. 504.

14. Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem: Al-Hajj Amin Al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 111.

15. Al-Banna, *Mudhakara*, p. 230; for a broader account of Islamist and Arabist organizations prior to the 1948 war, see Bashir Nafi, *Arabism, Islamism and the Palestine Question, 1908–1941* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1988).

name that the Brotherhood sheltered its first true organizational framework in Palestine.¹⁶

Some studies take the presence of Palestinian delegates to the Fifth Convention of the Brotherhood, held in Aleppo in 1944, as an indication of the presence of a Muslim Brotherhood organization in Palestine in the period 1943–44.¹⁷ However, the first official branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, according to Brotherhood veterans, was established in Gaza after the end of the Second World War. It was headed by Hajj Zafer al-Shawwa. Later, the Brotherhood's branches in Gaza grew to four: one belonging to the administrative office, another in al-Rimal, a third in Harat al-Zaitunah, and a fourth in Harat al-Daraj. There were other branches in the Gaza Strip as well, in Khan Yunis and Rafah and the Burajj and Nusairat camps. Delegates from these branches became members of the Brotherhood's administrative office in the Gaza region.¹⁸

The Muslim Brotherhood inaugurated its central office in the Sheikh Jarrah quarter in Jerusalem with a big celebration on 6 May 1946. An official delegate of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, 'Abdel Mu'iz 'Abdel Sattar, attended the celebration as did Palestinian notables and prominent leaders such as Jamal al-Husayni, president of the Arab Party and vice-president of the Higher Arab Committee in Palestine; Nasser al-Nashashibi; and 'Abdel Hamid al-Sayeh. Sheikh al-Sayeh (who later would become chairman of the Palestinian National Council) attended the event and wrote in his memoirs that he declined an offer to take the leadership of the Brotherhood at the time.¹⁹ The celebration was not meant to announce the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine; it was to commemorate the inauguration of the organization's headquarters. Ample documents and letters show activities by the Brotherhood in Jerusalem and such other Palestinian cities as Jaffa, Lydda, and Ramallah antedating the celebration by several years. Among these documents are the resolutions of the general conference of Muslim Brotherhood branches in Palestine, which convened in Jerusalem on 29–30 March 1946. Taken as

16. Al-Hout, *Al-qiyyadat wal-mo'assasat*, p. 502.

17. Saleh, *Al-Tayyar al-Islami*, p. 440; see also 'Awad Khalil, "Judhour al-Islam al-siyasi fi filastin" [Roots of political Islam in Palestine], *Shu'un Filastiniyya*, no. 227 (February–March 1992), pp. 19–33.

18. Saleh, *Al-Tayyar al-Islami*, pp. 441–43.

19. For a copy of the inauguration program for the headquarters of the Muslim Brothers in Jerusalem, 6 May 1946, see the Arabic edition of this book, *Hamas: Al-Fekr wal-mamarasa al-siyasiyya* [Hamas: Its thought and political practice] (Beirut: IPS, 1997), Appendix, document no. 12, p. 342.

a whole, these resolutions indicate that there had been a consolidation of the activities of the branches in the years preceding 1946. The conference itself, which was attended by delegates of the Brotherhood's Palestinian branches, was called by members of the Jerusalem branch to debate how best to unify the efforts of the Brotherhood's members and to establish a central office in Palestine.²⁰

The influence and scope of the Brotherhood's involvement at the time can be gleaned from the records kept by some veteran members. For example, a letter from the Brotherhood to the then Egyptian foreign minister, dated 3 April 1946, protested the presence of the Egyptian deputy consul general in Palestine at a ball to aid a Zionist society. The letter demanded that disciplinary action be taken against him. The Egyptian foreign ministry responded by transferring the offending official to a post in Iran, according to the reply from the foreign ministry.²¹ Although it could be argued that the transfer decision was the result of pressure from other sources, the fact that the foreign ministry replied to the Brotherhood's letter cannot be overlooked. It indicated to a certain extent the influence the Brotherhood must have had prior to the dispatch of the letter to the foreign ministry.

In October 1946 the Muslim Brotherhood held a convention in Haifa in which delegates from Trans-Jordan and Lebanon took part. This was the first convention to be devoted to topics of general national concern, as is evident from a perusal of its resolutions, which included the following:

- the [Mandate] government of Palestine bears responsibility for the unsettled political situation,
- support for the Arab League,
- support for Egypt's demand for the withdrawal [of British forces] and the unity of the Nile River basin,
- place the Palestine problem before the Security Council,
- support for measures to save Palestine,
- denying the legitimacy of recent Jewish immigration to Palestine, and
- the spread of Muslim Brotherhood chapters throughout Palestine.²²

20. Private document entitled "Subject: Conference of the Muslim Brothers—Jerusalem," 30 March 1946 [in Arabic], and signed by Mohammad As'ad Al-Imam Al-Husseini, the secretary and manager of the Muslim Brothers; see *ibid.*, Appendix, document no. 11, pp. 330–31.

21. See *ibid.*, Appendix, document no. 14, p. 345.

22. Al-Hout, *Al-qiyadat wal-mo'assasat*, p. 503.

The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood's political awareness and nationalistic spirit grew to such an extent that its involvement in political issues overshadowed its initial preoccupation with proselytizing and social activities. It held another convention in Haifa in October 1947, in the wake of the increased onslaught of Zionist immigration and the emerging peril of the loss of Palestine. At the convention, the Muslim Brotherhood declared "its determination to defend the country by all means and its willingness to cooperate with all nationalistic bodies to that end," adding that "The Muslim Brotherhood will bear its full share of the cost of resistance."²³

The three years preceding the outbreak of the 1948 war were a fertile period for the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. It spread quickly, and its organization grew because of many factors, including "the growing popular respect and appreciation for the support given by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to the Palestinian cause . . . in addition to the fact that the Brotherhood's proposals were in general conformity with the dominant religious sentiment and social attitudes, as well as the fact that the Palestinian nationalist movement had clear religious characteristics."²⁴ In 1947, a year prior to the outbreak of the war, the Brotherhood became active in public mobilization campaigns in preparation for jihad and in disseminating anti-Zionist propaganda. In fact, the official Israeli account of the war referred to "incitement in mosques, and the festivals and meetings organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, an extreme nationalist religious organization originating in Egypt."²⁵

The Brotherhood also played an important role in uniting the two largest paramilitary organizations in Palestine, the Futuwwah and Najjadah, which had been in stiff competition with each other. The military units belonging to these organizations united under the name of the Arab Youth Organization. Mahmoud Labib, the authorized representative of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood for military affairs, was put in charge of training. However, this situation did not last long, as the British authorities expelled him from Palestine soon thereafter.²⁶

23. *Ibid.*, p. 794; see also, Hroub, *Hamas* [in Arabic], Appendix, document no. 13, pp. 343–44.

24. Khalil, "Judhour al Islam al-siyasi."

25. Ahmed Khalifa, translator from Hebrew, *Harb Filastin 1947–1948: Al-riwaya al-isra'iliya al-rasmiyya* [Palestine War 1947–1948: The official Israeli version] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1986), p. 14.

26. Saleh, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood and the 1948 War

The Brotherhood was involved in the national and pan-Arab efforts preceding the war, although it did not have a significant impact and its efforts were not memorable. Still, the Brotherhood ignored ideological sensitivities and joined forces with the national organizations and committees that sought to mobilize a patriotic response to the UN partition resolution of 29 November 1947. As Al-Hout notes, “what is most remarkable about the Brethren’s actions was their willingness to participate side by side with Communists and Christians in the activities of national committees.”²⁷ For example, the Brotherhood participated in the Jaffa National Committee “which consisted of 14 members representing the Arab Party, the Arab Front, the Communists, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Youth Club and the Arab Club. Care was taken in the choice of members to ensure representation for the various sects; in addition, five seats were allocated to leaders of nearby villages.”²⁸

The Brethren took part in the war effort when fighting broke out, both on the Egyptian front, as mentioned earlier (basically under the leadership of the Egyptian Brotherhood but with the participation of Palestinian volunteers), and on the battle fronts in Palestine itself. However, their participation remained limited and conditioned because their unconsolidated organization was still young and lacked experience and means.²⁹ Still, it is legitimate to inquire whether the effort of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in the war was commensurate with its abilities at that time. The history of its jihad within Palestine was not comparable to that of the Qassam brigades, which outdid the Brotherhood in this respect. Nevertheless, one might assume that the Brotherhood would have capitalized on the experience it acquired during this period.

According to Brotherhood veterans, the Jaffa branch of the Palestinian Brotherhood was the most active during the fighting in 1948. There existed within the branch a secret military organization that enlisted a limited number of men with the proper qualifications. The remaining members had no knowledge of this organization, which became active when the war broke out. The Brethren in that region assumed responsibility for the defense of the Bassa, Tal al-Rish, ‘Ajami, and Nuzha areas in Jaffa and for maintaining law and order within the city. They obtained

27. Al-Hout, *op. cit.*, p. 601.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Saleh, *op. cit.*, p. 464.

some of their arms by way of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, head of the Kata'ib al-Jihad al-Muqaddas (Sacred Jihad Battalions).³⁰

The Brotherhood joined the Jihad al-Muqaddas in fighting in and around Jerusalem. 'Aref al-'Aref mentions that the Jews tried to blow up the Brotherhood's headquarters in Jerusalem in retaliation; he adds that the Brotherhood lent the Higher Arab Committee money for the purchase of arms, with contributions coming from a fund the Brotherhood had established to build a stately house for itself in Jerusalem.³¹ In the villages of Ramallah and Silwan, the Brethren not only joined local formations in combat, but they also formed their own rescue squadron, which was active in the area. The Brethren also fought alongside 'Abdel Qader al-Husayni in the famous al-Qastal battle. The leader of the Brotherhood's rescue squad, 'Abdel Razzaq 'Abdel Jalil, was wounded in the engagement.³²

Current literature by Islamists on the participation of the Brotherhood in the 1948 war provides plentiful details on the subject, including the names of battle sites and local leaders who were killed. The intention is to demonstrate the extent of the Brotherhood's involvement in the war, a topic that has received increased attention in response to a stream of criticisms directed at the Brotherhood for its greatly reduced involvement in the Palestine issue during the 1960s and 1970s and even up to the mid-1980s.³³

The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood after the 1948 War

After the 1948 defeat and the loss of most of Palestine, the parts that had not been occupied fell under either Jordanian control in the West Bank or Egyptian control in the Gaza Strip. This division had a profound effect on the subsequent course followed by the Palestinian Brotherhood. The Brotherhood in the West Bank soon was incorporated into the Brotherhood of Jordan under a single organization. The Brethren in the Gaza Strip, because of their proximity to Egypt and total Egyptian control of the

30. Ibid., p. 465.

31. 'Aref al-'Aref, *Al-Nakba: Nakbat bait al-maqdis wal-firdows al-mafqood, 1947-1952* [The catastrophe: The catastrophe of Jerusalem and the lost paradise, 1947-1952] (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'asriyya, 1956), p. 290.

32. Al-Hout, op. cit., p. 467.

33. Many books and pamphlets have been written on this topic; see, for example, Abu Ghanimah, *Al-harakah al-Islamiyya* [The Islamic Movement] (Amman: Al-Furqan, 1985); Abdullah 'Azzam, *Hamas: Al-judhour al-tarikhiyya wal-mithaq* [Hamas: Its historic roots and Charter] (Peshawar: N.p., 1989); and Mohammad Abu Faris, *Shuhada' filastin* [The martyrs of Palestine] (Amman: Al-Furqan, 1990).

Strip, formed a separate organization that was in close contact with the Brotherhood's center in Cairo.³⁴ As a result, the links between Brethren in the West Bank and those in the Gaza Strip weakened. While the Brethren in the Gaza Strip took on revolutionary and military traits, the Brethren in the West Bank adopted a political and educational approach.³⁵

The Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank

Following the annexation of the West Bank to Jordan in 1950, the status of the Palestinians there changed as they became Jordanian citizens. The Muslim Brotherhood organizations in the West Bank and in the former Trans-Jordan united under the name of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan.³⁶ As mentioned above, the Brotherhood in the West Bank became a political, educational, and proselytizing organization that avoided any real military activities. It was roundly criticized for this behavior, which weakened its nationalistic credentials. What modest military formations the Brotherhood had prior to the 1948 war, notably in Hebron, Nablus, and Jaffa, were broken up and dispersed following the tragic outcome of the war.

The Brotherhood nevertheless was able to consolidate its position in the hospitable environment of Jordan. The regime tolerated its activities in the hope that they would help to counterbalance nationalist and leftist trends that acquired increasing influence in both the East and West Banks. At the beginning of the new phase in the early 1950s, the Brethren busied themselves with educational and proselytizing activities, publishing, and establishing chapters of the Brotherhood throughout the cities and towns of the West Bank. Their most significant political activity was to serve as the driving force behind the convening of the General Islamic Conference in Jerusalem in April 1953. This event was meant to be an Islamic pulpit for supporters of the Palestinian cause in the Arab and Islamic worlds, thereby keeping alive the issue in the consciences of Muslims and mobilizing support for the cause.³⁷

34. See Maher 'Abdullah, "Tajribat al-haraka al-Islamiyya al-filastiniyya" [Experience of the Palestinian Islamic movement] (paper presented at conference entitled The Future of the Palestine Question, sponsored by the Center for the Study of Islamic Future, London, December 1990).

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, *Al-Mu'tamar al-Islami al-'aam bait al-maqdis* [The General Islamic Conference of Jerusalem], (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 21. This study is considered the most important and complete documentation of the proceedings of the conference, relying on oral

Arrangements for convening the conference had been finalized in a celebration commemorating *al-isra' wal mi'raj* (midnight journey [of the Prophet to the seven heavens]) held by the Brotherhood in Jerusalem and to which it had invited a large number of participants from various countries. The Brotherhood used the opportunity to secure agreement among the participants for an annual conference in Jerusalem. It also was agreed that a permanent secretariat for the conference would be formed under the name of the Isra' wal Mi'raj Office, which was to consist of delegates from various Arab and Muslim countries to serve as a link between Palestine and the Islamic world. In addition, the International Islamic Company for the Development of Jerusalem was founded with a capital of one million dinars; it was to be headquartered in Jerusalem.³⁸

The conference met several times in Jerusalem and Damascus for two consecutive years, and it attracted Islamic delegates from China, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, and Pakistan, as well as from the Arab countries. As the conference grew in importance and became a more effective tool of mobilization, the Jordanian government was compelled to place restrictions on it. The government prevented the conference from meeting in 1955 and closed down its permanent office in Jerusalem in July of the same year.³⁹ The Jordanian government allowed the conference to resume its meetings in June 1956 and permitted its leaders to return to Jerusalem; however, the central idea behind the conference, namely, to build bridges between the peoples of the Islamic world and Jerusalem, came to naught. The conference gradually was taken over by "the establishment" and was used by the Jordanian and Saudi regimes to attack Nasir's regime in Egypt. Jordan's King Hussein himself delivered a speech at the January 1961 conference.⁴⁰

The other area of activity for the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank during the 1950s and 1960s was in contesting parliamentary elections. The Brotherhood capitalized on the tolerance of the Jordanian government—in contrast to the regime's attitude toward other political parties and movements, notably the Communists, Ba'athists, and Nasirists. The Brotherhood won seats in the Jordanian parliament, representing such Palestinian cities as Hebron and Nablus in the 1954, 1956, and 1962

sources as well as the documents of the British Foreign Office; *El-Awaisi* asserts that the Foreign Office was very disturbed by the conference and its successive meetings.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 80.

40. Amnon Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949–1967* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 17.

elections. The Brotherhood's candidate, Sheikh Mashhour al-Damen, won the highest number of votes in Nablus in 1962.⁴¹

In view of the organic ties between the organization in both banks, the relationship between the Brotherhood in the East Bank and the Jordanian regime also determined the course of the relationship between the Brotherhood and the government in the West Bank. The Jordanian Brotherhood coexisted with the regime and avoided confrontation. One of the most prominent Brotherhood members in Jordan, Yusuf al-'Azam, explained that policy in these terms: "The Brethren did not rebel against the king; they observed a truce with him because they could not fight on all fronts at once. . . . We stood by the king because 'Abdel Nasir's attacks on him were not rational, and we were suspicious of 'Abdel Nasir's ties with the United States. . . . We stood by the king out of self defense. If 'Abdel Nasir had been able to penetrate Jordan and establish a government loyal to himself there, he would have liquidated the Brotherhood in Jordan just as he had done in Egypt."⁴²

Although co-existence was the basis of the relationship between the two sides, that did not prevent turbulence in their relations over the years or prevent mutual suspicions from arising. The Brotherhood was critical of Jordan's strong ties to the West, and it staged demonstrations in 1954 to protest the presence of British officers in the Jordanian army [the Arab Legion]. It opposed the Baghdad Pact (a position that forced Muhammad 'Abdel Rahman Khalifah, the Brotherhood's ombudsman, to seek refuge in Damascus in 1955). It attacked the Eisenhower Doctrine, which the regime supported; and parliamentarians representing the Brotherhood voted against granting confidence to some cabinet appointments by the king, notably that of Wasfi al-Tal in 1963. Still, mutual interests tended to triumph over suspicions and the turbulent relationship.⁴³

The military activities of the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank under Jordanian rule mainly were confined to sympathy for and cooperation with the National Guard, a para-military Jordanian force, which the Brethren viewed as a popular force that could serve as a spearhead against Israel. However, during 1955 and 1956 the Brotherhood had begun to train with weapons that were smuggled across the Sinai. In fact, the head of the Hebron branch of the Brotherhood had struck an agreement with the

41. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

42. Abu 'Amr, *Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fil-dhaffa al-gharbiya wa qita' ghazza* [The Islamic movement in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip] (Acre: Al-Aswa, 1989), p. 23.

43. Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank*, pp. 149-51.

commander of Jordanian forces in the region for members of his branch to receive training from army instructors.⁴⁴ In general, the Palestinian Brethren in the West Bank did not constitute an effective political force; they associated themselves with the broad lines of policy pursued by the Jordanian regime, and they focused on proselytizing and education, although they did join in the struggle against Nasirist and Arab nationalist parties.

The Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip

One significant difference between the Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip and its counterparts in the West Bank after 1948 was that the former continued to be active in the national effort to end the Israeli occupation. This discrepancy between the relative effectiveness of the Brethren in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip may have been due to the increased independence the latter enjoyed, a consequence of the lack of organic links between the Gaza branch and the Brotherhood in either Egypt or Jordan. Hence, Gazan Brothers stood at the forefront of military and political engagement. More than one study maintains that the Brotherhood “emerged as the foremost political movement in the Gaza Strip until 1955.”⁴⁵ Many factors contributed to this development, including the strong hold that religion had exercised over Palestinians in the previous three decades, the political and military posture of the Brotherhood during and preceding the 1948 war, and the good relations the Brotherhood enjoyed for two years with the Free Officers who seized power in Egypt in 1952. During this period, the Brotherhood made strong inroads in the Gaza Strip and doubled its influence there.

The rapid reversal in the influence of the Brotherhood in Egypt resulted from its conflict with Nasir. The movement was banned and declared illegal, and those Brothers who were not jailed went underground. This turn of events naturally had an impact on the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip, which was under Egyptian rule. The Brotherhood there became a secret organization that was pursued by the police, as was the case with the Communists and the Ba‘thists. Enrollment in the Brotherhood dropped, and the principal cadres fled the Gaza Strip to avoid repression and to search for a source of income. Among the leaders who emigrated were Fathi al-Bal‘awi, Salah Khalaf, Salim al-Za‘nun, ‘Awni

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–69.

45. Al-Madhoon, “Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya,” p. 20

al-Qishawi, Zuhdi Saqallah, Sulaiman Abu Karsh, and Kamal al-Wahidi. Those who remained in the Gaza Strip “were not yet fully in tune with the spirit of the Brotherhood. This had an influence on the cadres and the types of activities they engaged in.”⁴⁶

A major political and nationalist success of the Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip was to help abort a 1955 proposal to resettle some Palestinian refugees in Egypt’s Sinai peninsula. The Brotherhood organized violent popular demonstrations and protests jointly with the Communists and Ba’thists.⁴⁷ Such cooperation represented an important development in relations between these parties, which had had conflictual relations in the past. This change also was induced by the strong feelings of the masses against the Sinai Project, feelings that left no option for the factions but to cooperate or lose credibility.⁴⁸

The second round of the Brotherhood’s involvement in politics and national struggle in the Gaza Strip occurred during the Israeli occupation in 1956–57, which lasted four months. Two different approaches emerged among the national forces for dealing with the occupation. While the Communists called for a strategy of “passive resistance,” the Brotherhood and the Ba’thists formed a National Resistance Front, which adopted a strategy of engagement in armed struggle against the Israelis.⁴⁹

In the first half of the 1950s, certain groups of the Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip organized military cells that were to have a great impact in the next few years and helped chart the future of the Brotherhood itself. Two secret organizations were formed to engage in armed struggle: Youth for Vengeance [*Shabab al-Tha’r*] and the Battalion of Justice [*Katibat al-Haq*]. These groups included among their top leaders some charismatic activists who would play prominent and enduring roles in the Palestinian political scene. Youth for Vengeance included Salah Khalaf, As’ad al-Saftawi, Sa’id al-Muzaiyin, Omar Abu al-Khair, Isma’il Suwairjo, and Muhammad Isma’il al-Nunu. The membership of the second group, Battalion of Justice, comprised Khalil al-Wazir, Hassan ‘Abdel Hamid, ‘Abd Abu Marahil, and Hamad al-‘Aidi.⁵⁰ These organizations in fact provided the inspiration for the idea of Fateh, the Palestine National Liberation

46. Ziad Abu ‘Amr, *Usul al-harakat al-siyasiyya fi-qita’ ghazza, 1948–1967* [Origins of the political movements in the Gaza Strip, 1948–1967] (Acre: Al-Aswar House, 1987), p. 74.

47. *Ibid.*, pp. 74, 76.

48. Al-Madhoon, “Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya,” pp. 10–50.

49. Abu ‘Amr, *Usul al-harakat al-siyasiyya*, p. 77.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

Movement. By focusing on the military aspects of resistance to Israeli occupation, they bypassed the doctrinaire and ideological issues that were bones of contention with Nasir's regime and shielded these organizations from the enmity that had developed between the Egyptian Brotherhood and the regime. All members of the Battalion of Justice later joined Fateh, as did most members of the Youth for Vengeance.⁵¹

The Brotherhood and Fateh: Reform versus Liberation (1957–67)

After Nasir outlawed the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1954, the Palestinian branch experienced a devastating blow and almost disappeared. The leaders and administrative cadres of local branches were disbanded, and prominent members with scholarly reputations or social standing withdrew from the organization. The membership, reduced to only a small number of students, teachers, and workers, went completely underground.⁵² This development represented a setback in the effort to resist Israeli occupation and liberate Palestine, which was the main objective in the Brotherhood's platform. After three years, it became apparent to the active members that carrying on under the old formula (i.e., under the name of the Muslim Brotherhood) would be extremely difficult if not impossible, particularly since the conflict in Egypt between the Brotherhood and Nasir was escalating. Even under the best of circumstances, the ultimate goal would have been unattainable. This analysis led to the conclusion that a new vision was needed to extricate the Brotherhood from the impasse and put it back on the road to the liberation of Palestine. These ideas were embodied in a July 1957 memorandum from Khalil al-Wazir to the leadership of the Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip. According to Abu

51. 'Abdullah Abu 'Azza, *Ma'a al-haraka al-Islamiyya fil-aqtar al-'arabiyya* [The Islamic movements in the Arab countries] (Kuwait: Al-Qalam Publishing House, 1992), p. 19; this book is the most complete source detailing the relationship between the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza and Fateh during the latter's emergence. Abu 'Azza headed the Brotherhood's organization in Gaza during the Israeli occupation from November 1956 to February 1957, when he was arrested by the occupation authorities. He says that he opposed the idea of creating Fateh and was instrumental in formulating the Brotherhood's position opposing it. He resigned from the Brotherhood in 1972 and later was appointed a member of the Palestine National Council, continuing to serve until the late 1980s, when he resigned to protest the resolution declaring a Palestinian state and recognizing Israel.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 41. Abu 'Azza mentions that among the first to withdraw from the Muslim Brotherhood following the decree to dissolve the group was Zafer al-Shawwa, who headed the Brotherhood's administrative office in Gaza and was also the appointed mayor of the city. He issued a statement declaring his support of the revolutionary government in Cairo and of all its measures against the Brotherhood; see *ibid.*, p. 20.

'Azza, the recommendations for a new approach included a specific proposal that "the Palestinian Brotherhood establish a special organization alongside their own which has no visible Islamic coloration or agenda but which has the stated goal of liberating Palestine through armed struggle. The new organization should have the responsibility of preparing for that struggle and should engage in armed struggle once the required capabilities are acquired."⁵³

The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood did not take Khalil al-Wazir's memorandum seriously; consequently the idea was not discussed as one might expect from studying later developments. However, the Brothers behind the idea went ahead with the project on their own initiative. They engaged actively in convincing and eventually recruiting individual members of the Brotherhood behind the backs of their leadership, arguing that the new idea was more workable than that of traditional Brotherhood thinking. Their perseverance in this endeavor created dissent within the ranks that preoccupied the Brethren for three years.⁵⁴ Finally, in 1958–59, the project came to fruition with the establishment of the Palestine National Liberation Movement—Fateh, which attracted some prominent Brethren who initially had remained loyal to the Brotherhood. These men included Salim al-Za'nun, Salah Khalaf, As'ad al-Saftawi, Kamal 'Udwan, Abu Yusuf al-Najjar, Sa'id al-Muzayin, Ghaleb al-Wazir, and others who did not become famous.⁵⁵

Rather than adopt the Fateh option for the liberation of Palestine, which depended on securing support from Arab countries in the struggle with Israel, the mainstream Brotherhood chose the alternative of consolidating the power of its existing organization in the expectation that, when it succeeded in its mission, it would liberate Palestine with the support of the entire Islamic world. The Brotherhood felt that it could appeal to the fact that Muslims everywhere had a sacred duty to save Jerusalem, which was the first *qibla* in Islam, and to liberate the land of *al-isra' wal mi'raj*.⁵⁶

By 1960, the Brotherhood, very concerned about losing its membership to the new organization, conclusively adopted an official decision

53. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

55. In his book *Filastini bila hawiyya* [A Palestinian without identity] (Kuwait: Dar Kadhima, 1981), Salah Khalaf [Abu Iyad], the third-ranking man in the PLO during the 1970s and 1980s, denies that he had any prior relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood. However, Abu 'Azza confirms a clear relationship, as does Abu 'Amr, who verifies the existence of an organizational relationship through Salah Khalaf's friends in the group; see Abu 'Amr, *Usul al-harakat al-siyasiyya*, p. 85.

56. Abu 'Azza, *Ma'a al-haraka al-Islamiyya*, pp. 85–86.

against the formation of Fateh. While the Brotherhood preserved a non-hostile attitude toward Fateh, it argued that Fateh's project was impractical, doomed to failure, and, above all, alien to the strategy of the mother organization.⁵⁷ In fact, the decision to distance the Brotherhood from Fateh marked a historical turn whereby for the first time since the 1930s the Palestinian armed resistance movement and the Palestinian Islamists split, thus originating a rift that would continue to grow over the course of the following years.

It is noteworthy that the Brotherhood's later writings pass over rather glibly this phase of the emergence of Fateh from under its wing. In fact, the Brotherhood's failure to assess seriously the 1960 decision to oppose the formation of Fateh and to distance itself from it represents an implicit condemnation of that decision. However, the indebtedness of Fateh to the Brotherhood and the initial Islamic coloration of Fateh and its early institutions are discussed. Many Brotherhood texts offer a justification for refraining from engagement in the struggle for liberation during the 1960s and 1970s on the basis of preparing the liberation generation.⁵⁸

It was nearly thirty years before the Muslim Brotherhood acknowledged that its plan to shape the "liberation generation" was unworkable and adopted a new strategy. From Khalil al-Wazir's memorandum of 1957, which the Brotherhood ignored, until the early 1980s, when the foundation for the 1987 emergence of Hamas was laid, the Brotherhood withdrew from the political-national effort to liberate the homeland. It avoided direct resistance to Israel, except for a brief effort during 1968–70 when the Brotherhood established camps in the Jordan Valley under the banner of Fateh and engaged in some significant military operations across the border with Israel. Even that effort was at the instigation of the general headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world and was not an initiative of the Palestinian Brothers themselves, according to Abu 'Azza.⁵⁹

The second half of the 1960s provided a sharp contrast of the Brotherhood mother organization and its offshoot, Fateh, moving in opposite directions. Fateh came to represent a Palestinian nationalism that had forsaken the grandiose slogans that had cast the responsibility for the liberation of Palestine on the shoulders of Arab regimes. Instead, Fateh decided that Palestinians had to seize the military initiative as a national liberation movement in order later to drag regular Arab armies into the battle. The

57. Ibid., p. 86.

58. Abu Ghanimah, *Al-Harakah al-Islamiyya*, p. 125.

59. Abu 'Azza, op. cit., pp. 123–65.

Muslim Brotherhood, however, continued its efforts in organizational, pedagogical, and proselytizing activities. The Brotherhood's priority was to win adherents and to shape their religious beliefs and conduct so as to create a generation of Palestinians that could carry out the task of liberation and rally the Islamic *umma* behind the effort. Meanwhile, Nasir's offensive against the Muslim Brotherhood escalated, not only in Egypt but throughout the region. The Egyptian president's immense public appeal, particularly among Palestinians, drove a wedge between the Brotherhood and his followers.

Within a few years after Fateh had split from the Muslim Brotherhood, Fateh rather than the Brotherhood clearly embodied the aspirations of the Palestinian people for liberation and enjoyed popular legitimacy for championing the national cause and engaging in armed struggle. The Palestinian Brothers also failed to follow the example of the Egyptian Brotherhood, which adopted guerrilla warfare to evict British forces from the Suez Canal. The former could not provide a Palestinian equivalent of the Egyptian nationalist response through guerrilla warfare against the Israeli occupation, a strategy that may have enabled them to rally the masses behind them instead of losing their influence and popularity.⁶⁰

The Palestinian Brotherhood continued to maintain that mobilization for the war of liberation had to have a proper Islamic foundation. A generation of Muslims committed to their faith and prepared for sacrifice had to be raised by shaping the character of the individual members of that generation in a true Islamic mold. This was the Brotherhood's position. The split with Fateh was portrayed as reflecting a choice between two alternatives: "Either to launch guerrilla warfare against Israel, as the PLO had done, using the same individuals who had grown up under regimes and ideologies distant from Islam—so that one is doomed to repeat the errors of the past; or to launch a comprehensive effort at cultural renaissance designed to instill true Islam in the soul of the individual and, following that renaissance, to embark on the path of liberation."⁶¹

This rather loose notion of working toward liberation gave the Brotherhood some borrowed solace from misgivings about the reason for postponing the jihad. Some objective considerations beyond the control of

60. Al-Madhoon, "Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya," p. 73, citing Hussein Abul Naml, *Qita' Gaza 1948–1967: Tatawwurat iqtisadiyya, siyasiyya, ijtimaiyya wa 'askariyya* [Gaza Strip, 1948–1967: Economic, political, social and military developments] (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1979).

61. Ibrahim Maqadima, *Ma'alim fil-tariq ila tahrir filastin* [Guideposts on the road to liberating Palestine] (Gaza: Aleem Institute, 1994), pp. 254–55.

the Brotherhood were partly responsible for this state of affairs, such as the pro-Nasir Arab nationalist tide that became dominant and was accompanied by the onslaught against the Brotherhood in Egypt and the entire region. This assault marginalized the organization. In the words of one Palestinian member, "As a result of the two-decade long campaign by 'Abdel Nasir against the Brotherhood . . . anyone who called for a return to Islam was accused of being a reactionary and a conspirator and an agent [of Arab reactionary forces]." ⁶² Thus, the ideology of the Brotherhood and political circumstances in the region reinforced each other and encouraged the Brotherhood to adopt a passive role.

The 1967 War and its Aftermath

The outbreak of the 1967 war and the quick defeat of the Arab armies on all fronts took the Arabs and Palestinians by surprise. From a regional perspective, the defeat of Egypt broke the hold that Nasirism had exercised over Palestinian politics. At the Palestinian level, the immediate impact of the result of the war was also immanent. It consolidated within Palestinian political thought the ideas of self-reliance and the pursuit of popular liberation strategies rather than dependence on regular Arab armies. Although the notion of involving regular Arab armies in the war against Israel—which had been adopted earlier by Fateh—proved a total failure, the overall outcome prompted the line of popular revolution, led chiefly by Fateh. For the Muslim Brotherhood, the war was a landmark in the ideological competition between the Islamic position and the Nasirist Arab nationalist position because the latter had been soundly defeated. Nevertheless, the Brethren, overshadowed by the war and its result, were trapped by the dilemma of mixed feelings and thoughts. On the one hand their foremost enemy, Nasir, had been weakened as a result of the failure, a fact that should have entailed some kind of satisfaction on their part. On the other hand the loss of more Palestinian territory and other Arab land to Israel was by no means an end that they liked to see. Thus, the outcome of the 1967 war did not shift the Palestinian Brotherhood away from its long-term preoccupation with educational and nonconfrontational passive activities and toward the track of armed resistance. The organization continued its prewar, out-of-the-mainstream preoccupation, thus making it easier for Fateh to lead the next phase of the Palestinian national move-

62. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

ment. However, the Islamists did benefit from the situation and set out between 1967 and 1975 on a campaign to build mosques and to “mobilize, unite, reorient, and consolidate the faith of a new generation so as to prepare it for the confrontation with Zionism;” this period came to be dubbed the “mosque building phase.”⁶³

During the years 1968–70, the Palestinian Brotherhood outside the Gaza Strip launched a significant campaign of guerrilla raids across the Jordan-Israel border. It set up four bases under the banner of Fateh in the northern Jordan Valley near the border. Apart from lending its name, Fateh had nothing to do with those bases.⁶⁴ The decision to set up the bases had been taken by the overall leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab world, not by the Gaza Strip Brethren, as mentioned above. The Jordanian (including West Bank) Brethren were the most enthusiastic, as were the ones in the Sudan; however, the Gaza branch was against the idea because the Brethren there thought it futile.

The series of military operations that the Brethren carried out across the border with Israel earned them accolades; even Arafat is reported to have demanded repeatedly: “Give me operations like the ones carried out by the sheikhs.”⁶⁵ Thus, despite the brief and modest nature of this episode, it left an imprint on the subsequent literature about the contribution of the Islamists to the Palestine cause. At that time, the Brethren were in political and ideological limbo due to the dominance of leftist ideas among the *fidai'yeen*. The Brethren were harassed with charges of being part of “the reactionary camp” and with open displays of atheism and slurs against religious values by some groups within the *fidai'yeen*.⁶⁶ The Brethren often mention these camps when they find themselves on the defensive with respect to the issue of their participation in resistance activities. The episode came to an end with the showdown between the Jordanian army and the PLO, which led to the eviction of the PLO from Jordan. The Brethren declared their neutrality in the confrontation, saying that “the

63. See the interview with Khalil al-Qawqa (an early leader of Hamas who was expelled by Israeli authorities in the initial months of the intifada) in *Al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 October 1988.

64. For more details, see 'Azzam (who was a commander of one of those bases), *Hamas*, pp. 83–91; see also the pamphlet, “Al-Haqiqa al-gha'iba: sawt al-haq, wal quwa wal huriyya” [The absent truth: The voice of truth, power, and freedom], N. p., n.d., but published in the Occupied Territories, and the context indicates that it probably was written in February 1987; it includes stories related by Ahmed Nawfal, a member of the Palestinian Brotherhood in Jordan who had a central role in the Brother's bases.

65. “Al-Haqiqa al-gha'iba,” p. 27.

66. 'Azzam, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

rifles of Muslims will be directed neither at [Jordanian] soldiers nor *fidā'iyeen*.”⁶⁷

When the PLO moved to Lebanon following the September 1970 clashes in Jordan, the Palestinian Brotherhood in the West Bank and Gaza Strip once again retreated back to its educational mission, keeping clear of “hot” confrontations (armed struggle or popular resistance) with the Israeli occupation forces. The Brotherhood avoided such activities until the early 1980s and busied itself with recruiting new members from among students and youth, still under the conviction that they were preparing a new generation.

One Brotherhood leader, in a rare admission in their writings relating to Palestine, remarked in the late 1980s that the Brotherhood “had fallen short in putting off jihad, which made it possible for secular, nationalist, and communist organizations to get ahead of it . . . it was the absence of the Islamic movement from the field that allowed revolutionary organizations to outstrip it, organizations which the Brotherhood berates for their leftist leanings, their deviation, their bungling and for brainwashing the youth.”⁶⁸

Despite the serious political and strategic cost to the Brotherhood of avoiding resistance activities, its persistent and dedicated effort during the 1970s to shape a new generation bore fruit. A wide stratum of university and high school students was mobilized, and Islamic student societies were formed and quickly proliferated so as to represent real competition for student groups affiliated with the PLO and its member organizations. Thus, the years from 1967 to 1975 represented, according to Palestinian Islamists, the phase of mosque building. The second half of the 1970s through the late 1980s came to be dubbed the phase of social institution building, reflecting the formation of Islamic student societies, clubs, and charitable societies that became the meeting point for the new Islamic youth.⁶⁹

As the decade of the 1970s drew to a close, the Islamic tide was making headway among the new generation. This development was facilitated

67. Quote is attributed to Ahmed Nawfal in “Al-Haquiqa al-ghā’iba,” p. 25.

68. ‘Azzam, *op. cit.*, pp. 90–91.

69. Al-Qawqa interview, *Al-Anba’*, 8 October 1988; for an important study of student elections in this period and the weight of competing student groups in universities and institutes of the Occupied Territories, see Jean-François Legrain, “Al-Intikhabat al-tullabiyya fi al-dhafa al-gharbiyya 1978–1987” [Student elections in the West Bank 1978–1987], in *Al-Tahawwulat al-dimoqratiyya fil watan al-‘Arabi* [Democratic change in the Arab world], Proceedings of the Third Egyptian-French Conference (Cairo: Center for Research and Political Studies, 1993), pp. 213–57.

by the failure of leftist and Marxist movements to meet their objectives, the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, and the Islamic awakening throughout the region. However, it is difficult to find evidence for the thesis that the victory of the Likud and right-wing parties in Israel elicited corresponding support for Islamists among the Palestinians.⁷⁰ It also is hard to refute the view that the same line of development among Palestinian Islamists would have taken place even if the Labor Party had continued to dominate the political scene in Israel. Rather than perceiving the rise of Palestinian Islamism as a reaction to developments within the Israeli domestic arena and their consequences for the Palestinians, this movement's rise should be viewed as an outcome of two long, intertwined processes: (a) the internal dynamics of Palestinian politics as they developed in light of the struggle against Israel and the position of the Islamists within this dynamism; and (b) the phenomenon of political Islam, which swept the region by the late 1970s and remained at the heart of sociopolitical change and tension, Palestinian Islamism being the local manifestation of a much wider tide.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the exclusive hegemony of the Brotherhood over Muslim activists was shaken. This was due to the emergence of Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami—Islamic Jihad, which embraced armed resistance to the occupation. Islamic Jihad was formed in the Gaza Strip by Brotherhood leaders who broke off from the organization in protest against its unwillingness to take on the Israeli occupation. This appeared to be a replay of the discourse launched by the founders of Fateh at the time they had split from the Brotherhood. However, the Brotherhood faced a more critical situation this time because activists did not have to forsake their Islamic identity in joining Islamic Jihad. Islamic Jihad constituted a marriage between Islam and the gun; it was a way of engaging in resistance activities in the armor of an Islamic identity. The organizers of Islamic Jihad in the early 1980s paid due attention to ideology and theorizing.⁷¹ Some of them had been impressed by the ideas, methods, and organization of the Islamic groups Jihad and *Jama'at* in Egypt and even more so by the

70. This opinion is shared by Emile Sahliyeh, *In Search of Leadership: West Bank Politics since 1967* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1988), pp. 140–41, which is cited by Abu 'Amr in *Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*, p. 14.

71. The writings and guidance of Munir Shafiq, who was then a newcomer to the arena of Islamic struggle, had a notable influence on the formulation of resistance strategy for those organizations. Likewise, a booklet by Khaled Salah al-Din, "Al-Halaqa al-mafqooda bain al-thawra al-filastiniyya wal itijah al-Islami" [The missing link between the Palestinian revolution and the Islamic trend] (N.p., n.d.), which appeared shortly before the intifada, had a great

Islamic revolution in Iran, which overthrew the shah in 1979 through mass mobilization. Fathi al-Shikaki, one of the founders of Islamic Jihad, wrote about the Iranian revolution, as did other early figures close to the movement, drawing inspiration from it and recommending a similar approach in Palestine.⁷²

The Muslim Brotherhood once again found itself face to face with the question of what ought to be their role in resisting the occupation. The recruitment of some zealous members of the Brotherhood into cells belonging to Islamic Jihad reactivated a tense internal dialogue concerning whether priority should go to social change and Islamic reform or to the liberation of Palestine. The arrest of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and some of his colleagues in 1984 on charges of possessing arms and planning military operations indicated that the debate, particularly at the level of the leadership, had been settled in favor of armed struggle. The leaders had become convinced that this not only was the right course of national action, but that it also was the right course to adopt for the sake of organizational interests. In practical terms, even if the Brotherhood was not fully convinced of the need to devote all of its programs to, and to involve itself heavily in, the wider resistance effort against the Israelis, then at least such a turn could halt further draining of its membership to the Jihad movement. Consequently, the Brotherhood established a small and secret military apparatus to acquire a cache of arms and to prepare for military action.

The role of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in this period, according to its writings, was threefold: cadre formation and mobilization, passive resistance, and military action.⁷³ *Cadre formation and mobilization* refer to creating organized support for the Brotherhood, basically through Islamic student organizations and electoral contests.⁷⁴ *Passive resistance* refers to Islamic participation in some mass demonstrations and political protests, such as the strike by the medical society in the Gaza Strip on 26 November 1981, which coincided with a comprehensive twenty-one day general strike

influence; it is considered an important intellectual and theoretical building block of the Islamic struggle thesis for the liberation of Palestine.

72. For more about these theoretical theses, see Fathi al-Shikaki, "Al-Khumaini: Al-hal al-Islami wal badil" [Khomeini: The Islamic solution and alternative] (Occupied Territories: N.p., 1979); on Islamic Jihad's contacts with Iran in the early 1980s, see Thomas Mayer, "Pro-Iranian Fundamentalism is Gaza," pages 143–55 in Emmanuel Sivan and Menachem Friedman, eds., *Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

73. "Al-Haqiqa al-gha'iba," p. 45.

74. Legrain, "Al-Intikhabat al-tullabiyya fi al-dhafa al-gharbiyya," pp. 213–57.

in the entire Gaza Strip. When a Jew forced his way into the al-Aqsa Mosque and attacked worshippers in June 1983, the Brotherhood took part in the demonstrations that broke out in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It also participated in the 1983 protest demonstrations commemorating the first anniversary of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and in the demonstrations at Bir Zeit University to protest the Israeli occupation of Lebanon;⁷⁵ two student members of the Islamic bloc, Jawad Abu Salmiyah and Sa'eb Dahab, were killed.

Military action refers to the process that began with the creation of a military unit by Sheikh Yassin, as mentioned above. It includes targeting collaborators, gathering intelligence, and creating an infrastructure of arms storage for future years. Related to their modest military effort, the Brotherhood established links with a small group of Islamists that was established inside Israel in the early 1980s. The group *'Usrat al-Jihad* (The Jihad Family) was led by Sheikh 'Abdullah Nimr Darwish, who was arrested by the Israeli authorities in 1981 on weapons possession charges.⁷⁶

Islamic Jihad's military action also was perceived as the indirect fruit of the long process of the preparation that the Brotherhood had championed for decades. Despite the clear rivalry between the mother organization and its offshoot, which endured through later years, writers close to the Brotherhood took pride in military operations by Islamic Jihad in the mid-1980s, prior to the outbreak of the intifada. They downplayed the organizational affiliation of Jihad members who were killed in military operations and stressed a wider loyalty to the Islamic movement, in which "they are the natural end-product of the Islamist movement."⁷⁷

Tying all these developments together shows that there was a radical shift in the ideology and the political practices of the Muslim Brotherhood by the mid-1980s. In fact, it could be said that the years 1984–87 were the period of building up a new confrontational perspective. The top leaders, led by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, were involved in this new shift and embraced the principle of armed resistance. The first "operational" military attempt, by Sheikh Yassin himself, uncovered in 1984 as mentioned above, had the distinction of being an operation under the personal direction of the top echelons of the Brotherhood, not a mere

75. For more details about these forms of participation, see Maqadima, *Ma'alim fil tariq ila tahrir filastin*, pp. 261–62; and "Al-Haqiqa al-gha'iba," pp. 43–47.

76. "Al-Haqiqa al-gha'iba," p. 49.

77. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

adventure mounted by secondary or marginal groups. It is worth emphasizing here that the leaders of the Brotherhood became the leaders of Hamas when it emerged in late 1987. Sheikh Yassin, who was head of the Brotherhood's Political Bureau in the Gaza Strip for a long time, became the founding father and spiritual leader of Hamas. Sheikh Salah Shehadeh, another member of the Political Bureau, became head of the first military wing of Hamas; he was arrested and put on trial less than a year after the intifada began. Subsequent publications reveal details of military cells organized by the Brotherhood, as well as the names of members and leaders of those cells, prior to the outbreak of the intifada. These cells carried out such operations as planting explosives, firing on Israeli patrols, and liquidating Israeli agents. They included, for example, the Mujahideen of Mifraqa Group, led by Yahya al-Ghoul, which attacked an Israeli army truck in June 1985; Group No. 44, organized by Salah Shehadeh in 1986; and Group No. 101, led by Muhammad Sharathah, which was at work months before the intifada began and attacked cars belonging to Israeli settlers in September 1987.⁷⁸ However, these operations had a modest impact and were not as well-known as the famous operations of Islamic Jihad during the same period.

The new line of strategy, adopted in a major decision by the leadership of the Brotherhood in Palestine in the summer of 1985, "called on all members of the Brotherhood wherever they may be in occupied Palestine, to take part in demonstrations against, and clashes with, the enemy occupying [our land] and even to organize such demonstrations and clashes."⁷⁹ This gave the green light for students affiliated with the Brotherhood to participate in the Bir Zeit University demonstrations mentioned earlier, in which two young Brethren were killed.

The literature by sources close to the Brotherhood and published following the birth of Hamas indicates that "in the second half of the eighties the Brotherhood had acquired the organizational capacity and sufficient following to engage in jihad. The theoretical perspective on the long-ranging debate concerning the priority to be accorded to the armed struggle thesis versus the social change thesis had arrived at an organic synthesis of the two. The Brotherhood tried to resolve the conflict between the two

78. For a more complete description of these activities, see the brochure "Usood Hamas: 'Ushaq al-shahada wa 'amaliqat al-jihad" [Hamas's lions: Lovers of martyrdom and giants of the holy struggle] (N.p., 1991).

79. Jihad Mohammad Jihad, *Al-intifada al-mubarakah wa mustaqbaluha* [The blessed intifada and its future] (Kuwait: Al-Falah Library, 1988), p. 41.

priorities by arguing that it was possible and necessary to try to achieve them simultaneously, and not to delay one for the sake of the other," on the grounds that objective circumstances determined the timing.⁸⁰ The Brotherhood reached this conclusion, equating the two priorities or even effectively giving precedence to the need to resist the occupation, at about the same time that the intifada broke out in December 1987, a development that also saw the birth of Hamas.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE INTIFADA AND THE CREATION OF HAMAS

The formation of Hamas almost coincided with the outbreak of the intifada. This is why Hamas made 8 December 1987 the official date for its emergence, although its first communique was not released until several days later. This temporal coincidence really indicates a remarkable degree of prior causal interaction of the two events. This is not to imply that the turn by the Muslim Brotherhood to active resistance against the Israeli occupation precipitated the intifada, but it was an auxiliary causal factor for popular rebellion. In a sense, the joint eruption of the intifada and emergence of Hamas was the culmination of two parallel, but not separate, curves of changes, one national and one partisan. While the first reflected the general Palestinian mood toward the deadlock that was facing their national cause, the second represented the increasing consciousness of resistance and confrontation among the Palestinian Islamists as shown above.

With regard to the curve of changes at the national level, a number of major developments counted heavily in making the conditions ripe for the intifada. Outside Palestine, several major and frustrating developments led to a general sense of despair among Palestinians under occupation. Foremost of these were the eviction of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 and its shift from military to political action. The decreasing Arab interest in the Palestine cause was evident at the 1986 Arab summit in Amman. Within Palestine, the increasing socioeconomic and political pressures caused by the conditions of the Israeli occupation were tremendous and pushed the situation to the boiling point.

80. Husam al-Nasir, *Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas): Al-Insilaq wa mo'adalit al-sira'* [Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas: The launching and plan of struggle] (London: Muslim Palestine Publications, 1990), pp. 3–4.

On the eve of the outbreak of the intifada, Israel's policy regarding the Gaza Strip and West Bank was remarkably arrogant and highhanded, formulated in the full flush of victory, and indicating that Israel believed it had acquired a firm grip on Palestinian civil society in addition to its political and military control over the land of Palestine. However, as Palestinians sensed that their political options had been foreclosed and their economic situation had deteriorated quite precipitously, there was a built-up sense of resentment awaiting the spark of revolution. In addition, a new generation of Palestinians had grown up since the 1967 war; this generation had not directly experienced defeat as had their parents and was not cowed by it. These Palestinians constituted fertile soil for rebellion.

Rashad al-Shawwa, the mayor of Gaza, summed up the situation very accurately in an interview broadcast on Israeli radio, 10 December 1987, the third day of the intifada: "One must expect these things after twenty years of debilitating occupation. People have lost hope. They are frustrated and don't know what to do. They have turned to religious fundamentalism as their last hope. They have given up hoping Israel will give them their rights. The Arab states are unable to do anything, and they feel that the PLO, which is their representative, also has failed."⁸¹

A Hamas pamphlet, justifying the creation of the organization and reflecting the perception of the Islamists on the situation at the time, provides the following rationale:

In the seventies there were many indications that the PLO may be prepared to accept a lesser settlement than is indicated in the Palestine National Charter. Then, in the eighties, following the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran war, the Palestinian cause was marginalized at both the Arab and international levels . . . And the policies of the Zionist entity have become more obdurate and arrogant with the encouragement and support of the United States of America, which signed a strategic cooperation agreement [with Israel] in 1981. In this period, the Golan Heights have been annexed, Israel destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor, and it then invaded Lebanon and laid siege to Beirut in 1982, which constitutes the greatest insult to the Arab *umma* since the 1967 war. . . the Islamic movement in Palestine perceives a great challenge stemming from two factors:

81. Quoted in Aryeh Shalev, *The Intifada: Causes and Effects* (Tel Aviv and London: Westview Press, 1991), p. 13.

First: The retreat of the Palestinian cause to the lower rung in the ladder of Arab priorities;

Second: The retreat of the Palestinian revolution [PLO] from pursuit of the strategy of armed struggle until Palestine is liberated to acceptance of the settlement that has been forced on the Palestinian people.

... In the light of these two retreats, and the accumulation of the negative effects of the tyrannical and repressive Zionist occupation of the Palestinian people, and the fact that the Palestinian people inside Palestine, but not outside it, were ripe for resistance, there arose the need for a Palestinian solution based on Islamic jihad, the first manifestations of which are found in *Usrat al-Jihad* in 1981, and Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's group in 1983.⁸²

At the partisan level, the curve of changes encompassing the regional and domestic developments that accounted for the rise of the Palestinian Islamic tide and conditions conducive to the embodiment of resistance was profoundly stretching upwards. In the wake of the Islamic awakening sweeping the region and the notable eclipse of leftist and secular nationalist movements, a wave of religiosity spread in the Occupied Territories, and an activist generation of "mosque youth" arose who were ready to enlist in any resistance activity. These young men, most of them born after the 1967 war, engaged in confrontations with the Israeli authorities, blocked streets, and took part in demonstrations and other intifada activities.

The Brotherhood had ignited unrest in the mosques during 1982–83, which resulted in tempestuous demonstrations flowing out of the mosques in the wake of inflammatory Israeli actions, such as the incursion into the al-Aqsa Mosque. As mentioned earlier, Sheikh Yassin put together an organization for military operations that was discovered in 1984. Islamic Jihad began operations in the mid-1980s, which created a new atmosphere in the Gaza Strip and united the Islamic and nationalist dimensions of armed struggle. Then there was the decision of the Brotherhood in the summer of 1985 to revolutionize the masses and to create or seize opportunities for a general popular uprising.⁸³ Other mass demonstrations followed in 1985–86. As the outbreak of the intifada drew nearer in 1987, the Muslim Brethren started issuing signed communiques that exuded a new spirit of resistance and bore various signatures, such as *Harakat al-Kifah al-Islami* [the Islamic struggle movement], *Al-Murabitun 'ala Ard al-Isra'* [the vigilantes of the land of the Prophet's

82. From the Hamas "Introductory Memorandum;" see Appendix, document no. 3.

83. Husam al-Nasir, *Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya*, p. 4.

midnight journey], or *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya* [the Islamic resistance movement].⁸⁴

Six members of Islamic Jihad managed to escape from Gaza Central Prison in May 1987. The six remained in the Gaza Strip and carried out some very daring raids on Israeli army patrols and soldiers; four of them were killed in an Israeli ambush in October of that year. Public anger was ready to boil over, particularly after the Israeli army stormed the campus of the Islamic University in Gaza where thousands of students had gathered for a prayer service for the four. The Israeli troops opened fire, wounding dozens of students.

On 6 December, an Israeli settler was stabbed to death in the Gaza town square by a member of Islamic Jihad. This created furor among the Israelis, and in the hysterical atmosphere that followed, on 8 December, an Israeli truck ran down some Palestinian workers on their way back home, killing four and wounding nine others. On the same day, mass demonstrations broke out in Jabaliya, from which three of the workers originated. The spark spread to other areas where public anger had been building for months and was ready to boil over. Therefore, 8 December is considered to be the official start of the intifada.⁸⁵

On the evening of the following day, the Political Bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza met and agreed that the previous day's incident, and the public reaction to it, presented the right moment to translate their new conviction into practice and to assign top priority to the confrontation with the Israeli occupation.⁸⁶ At that meeting, the first communique of *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya* (The Islamic Resistance Movement, whose acronym in Arabic is Hamas) was written, and those present—Sheikh Yassin, 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, Salah Shehadeh, Muhammad Sham'ah, 'Isa al-Nashshar, 'Abdel Fattah Dukhan, and Ibrahim al-Yazuri—became the founders of Hamas.⁸⁷

84. Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari point out that the Muslim Brothers used the appellation "Islamic Resistance Movement" before the outbreak of the intifada. See their book *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), p. 221.

85. For more details about the succession of events that preceded the intifada, as related by Islamists, see Ahmed bin Yusef, *Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas): Hadathun 'aber am badilun da'im* [The Islamic resistance movement (Hamas): An ephemeral event or a permanent alternative?]; see also the pamphlet "Al-intifada: al-thawra fi 'amain sifat wa itijahat" [The intifada in two years: Characteristics and trends] (Tampa, FL: Islamic Palestine Committee, n.d.).

86. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, interview about the decision of the Muslim Brotherhood to establish Hamas, *Filastin al-Muslima* [Muslim Palestine] (London), October 1990.

87. Bin Yusef, op. cit., p. 28.

The communique was distributed in the Gaza Strip on 11 and 12 December and in the West Bank on the 14th and 15th. Hamas applied the term *intifada* [uprising] to the mass demonstrations, saying that “the *intifada* of our steadfast people in the occupied land constitutes a rejection of the occupation and its oppression” and adding that the *intifada* was a new beginning that would “prick the conscience of those who are panting after an emaciated peace and pointless international conferences.” The communique was a declaration that “our people know the right path—the path of sacrifice and martyrdom—and would inform the world that the Jews were committing Nazi-style crimes against our people and would drink from the same cup.”⁸⁸

New organizations belonging to Hamas quickly were formed, or pre-existing organizations that had been part of the Brotherhood were modified to suit the new tasks. It is noteworthy that the linkage between the pre-Hamas and post-Hamas periods can be seen in the fact that organizations that later came to be known as arms of Hamas in fact had predated Hamas by several years. The clearest example of this is the security apparatus known as *Majd* (Glory), which existed at the time Hamas was founded but which Israeli security forces only discovered later. According to Hamas members, *Majd*, which is headed by Yahya al-Sinwar, in fact had been founded in 1983 and had been charged with the task of liquidating spies and fabricating explosive devices.⁸⁹ In addition, there is the mass action committee, which was charged with organizing demonstrations, strikes, and confrontations; the military apparatus known as the Palestine Mujahideen, to which a number of military operations had been attributed; and the political and information wing, which draws up general lines of policy and issues official communiqués and publications.

With the outbreak of the *intifada* and the enthusiastic response of the Brotherhood to it through the establishment of Hamas, which issued the first communique of the *intifada*, the principal organization representing the Islamic movement in Palestine once again took up the banner of political action and dedicated itself to resisting the occupation with all its strength.⁹⁰ This was a new phase in the long history of Palestinian

88. See Appendix, document no. 1, for full text of the communique.

89. For more details about this organization during the early years of Hamas, see Bin Yusef, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

90. Some studies of the *intifada* and the role of the Islamists in it do not do justice to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Instead, they try to emphasize the late participation of the Islamists and date Hamas's launching to the issuance of its charter in August 1988.

struggle, one with its own flavor and its special ambiguities. Many of the fundamental lines of policy adopted by Fateh—notably maintaining a posture of neutrality among Arab states, observing the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of Arab states, determining the organization's position toward third parties on the basis of their positions on the Palestine problem, and its attitude toward Arab, Islamic, and even Western states—later were embraced by Hamas.

Political Perspective on the Conflict

2

Several studies on the ideology and political worldview of Hamas contend that Hamas sees the ongoing conflict in Palestine as a narrow doctrinaire struggle.¹ The general interpretation (among others) in these studies is that Hamas's principal motivation for declaring war on the Zionist colonial project in Palestine is because it is a Jewish enterprise in conflict with Islamic society in Palestine. The inference drawn from this view is that the struggle is in fact an ideological conflict between Islam and Judaism. However, a study of the literature produced by Hamas pertaining to its perspective on the struggle reveals that Hamas's position is more multidimensional than this narrow interpretation would indicate.

There is no denying that most important documents of Hamas—its Charter, political memoranda, and communiques—have a doctrinaire flavor. The movement uses Islamic discourse to mobilize and energize the masses and to criticize official Palestinian and Arab organizations for their positions on negotiations with Israel. However, taken as a whole and over time, the pronouncements of Hamas have vacillated between depicting the struggle as a purely ideological one and portraying it as resistance to a foreign occupying power and thus a means of combating tyranny and driving out the occupier. This vacillation was seen in another way as a dilemma

1. See, for example, Meir Litvak, *The Islamization of Palestinian Identity: The Case of Hamas* (Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1966); Stephen C. Pelletiere, *Hamas and Hizbollah: The Radical Challenge to Israel in the Occupied Territories* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College: Strategic Studies Institute, 1994); and Pinhas Inbari, *The Palestinians Between Terrorism and Statehood* (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Papers, 1996).

that faced Hamas: either it had to give precedence to “Islamicizing Palestine or Palestinianizing Islam.”² If one looks at the Hamas Charter, its original and most basic document, one finds that religious discourse is dominant. Although one also sees a focus on fighting for one’s rights, land, values, and justice, the document relies on the spirit of Islamic jihad and its considerable potential to galvanize support. Jihad, as set forth in the Hamas Charter, is designed to prevent the infidels from ruling over the land of Islam. Thus, the issue is not jihad against the infidel per se. The intent of another passage of the Charter, which refers to the sacred Islamic nature of the cause, is to appeal to the broader Islamic world beyond the borders of Palestine. In quest of support, “We must instill in the minds of Muslim generations that the Palestinian cause is a religious cause. It must be solved on this basis because Palestine contains the Islamic holy sanctuaries.”³ In the final analysis, and as noted by Rashid Khalidi, Hamas and other Palestinian Islamist organizations “subsume Palestinian nationalism within one or another form of Islamic identity.”⁴

While such passages indicate the centrality of the doctrinal basis of the struggle, one must not subsume the entire struggle under that rubric. In fact, Hamas’s doctrinal discourse has diminished in intensity since the mid-1990s, and references to its Charter by its leaders have been made rarely, if at all. The literature, statements, and symbols used by Hamas have come to focus more and more on the idea that the core problem is the multi-dimensional issue of usurpation of Palestinian land, and the basic question is how to end the occupation. The notion of liberating Palestine has assumed greater importance than the general Islamic aspect.⁵ Hamas’s view of the conflict has evolved to where it now perceives the conflict as “a struggle against the alliance of hegemonic colonialism (*isti’mar*) and Zionism directed against our entire nation . . . which finds multifarious expressions in the mechanisms of domination.”⁶

There are several instances in which the doctrinal dimension of Hamas’s discourse has assumed prominence, occasions when an emotional

2. Menachem Klein, “Competing Brothers: The Web of Hamas-PLO Relations” in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Efraim Inbar, eds., *Religious Radicalism in the Greater Middle East* (London: Frank Cass, 1997).

3. The Hamas Charter, Article 15; see Appendix, document no. 2.

4. Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction and Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 148–49.

5. Abdel Sattar Qasem, “Al-Fikr al-siyasi li harakat Hamas” [The political thought of Hamas], *Al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya*, Vol. 3, No. 9 (1995), pp. 112–28.

6. Musa Abu Marzouq, former head of Hamas’s Political Bureau, interview with author, Amman, 21 April 1995.

response and escalating tensions may have overpowered calm, theoretical reflection. Virtually all of these instances have been reactions to Israeli assaults on Islamic holy shrines or against worshippers engaged in prayer in the holy places. For example, after the massacre at the al-Aqsa Mosque in October 1990, when twenty Palestinians lost their lives during clashes with the right-wing Zionist group Guardians of the Temple, Hamas issued a statement referring to the “battle between Islam and Judaism.”⁷ There also was an angry response to the February 1994 massacre in the Abraham Mosque at the Tomb of Abraham in Hebron, an incident in which 29 Palestinians were shot to death by a Jewish settler as they knelt for dawn prayers during the holy month of Ramadan.

These scattered incidents echoed in the movement’s discourse. Such incidents also aroused religious indignation among Palestinians and Muslims as a whole, not just within Hamas. Nevertheless, one can say that Hamas’s perspective on the struggle in Palestine, including its religious and doctrinal dimensions, was more or less in line with (albeit far to the right of) that of Palestinian and Arab political culture, which sees a strong connection between Zionism and Western imperialism. According to this view, imperialism seeks to establish its hegemony over the region in order to serve its own political and economic interests and to nip in the bud threats to its hegemonic position emanating from cultural aspects of the Arab nationalist movement and from a potential cultural renaissance in the region.⁸

Seen from this perspective, the conflict with Israel is due to acts of aggression, not to differences in religious ideology. In this connection and in its discussion of Judaism as a faith, Hamas affirms that “in practice, it does not adopt belligerent positions against anyone on the basis of his creed or ideology. Hamas does adopt a belligerent position, however, once that creed or ideology is translated into aggressive or destructive actions against our *umma* and nation.”⁹

In another theoretical explanation of the struggle, Hamas has stated that “the struggle that is in progress between Arabs/Muslims and Zionists in Palestine is a cultural struggle for destiny that only can end when its

7. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 66, 31 October 1990.

8. Arab and Palestinian literature that maintain these views is very extensive; recent reiterations of these dominant perceptions were presented at the conference “Arabs and the Confrontation with Israel: Toward a Strategy and Blueprint for Action,” held in Beirut, 10–13 March 1999, which has received detailed coverage in the journal *Al-Mustaqba al-‘Arabi*, no. 243 (May 1999): 52–135.

9. Interview with the Leadership of Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), *Filastin al-Muslima* [Muslim Palestine], April 1990, pp. 24–27; see also the interview with Sheikh Basam Jarrar in *Al-Nahar*, 25 December 1993.

cause, Zionist settlement in Palestine, stops. The belligerent Zionist settler movement complements the Western design to separate the Islamic *umma* from its cultural roots and to impose Zionist-Western hegemony over it through the realization of the Greater Israel plan, so that it then can dominate our entire *umma* politically and economically. That would consolidate the divisiveness, underdevelopment, and dependency plaguing the Arab and Islamic *umma*.¹⁰

In Hamas's view the Zionist-Western alliance is based on a mutuality of interests that emerged "when the leaders of Western imperialism discussed the affairs of our *umma* and our region and discovered that the object of their long cherished wish would be served by supporting the Zionist entity. The latter could be instrumental in the service of their interests, which are based on stealing our resources and depriving us of the bases for unity, pride and dignity."¹¹ The strategy that Zionism and imperialism use to secure this objective, contends Hamas, is to single out each Arab country sequentially. That is, "world Zionism and the forces of imperialism cleverly are causing one Arab country after the other to drop out of the battle with Zionism so that in the end the Palestinian people will be isolated from their allies. Egypt, to a very large extent, dropped out of the struggle when it concluded the treasonous Camp David agreements. Now they are trying to entice other countries to conclude similar agreements and drop out as well."¹²

Such theorizing about the instrumental relationship between the Zionist movement (and its goal of establishing a Jewish entity in Palestine) and the objectives of Western imperialism led Hamas to explore the question of the functional division of responsibilities among those who must bear the costs of Zionist and imperialist projects. Some writings that convey Hamas's perspectives offer a romanticized account of the complementarity of the Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic roles in standing up to Zionist and Western plans, as can be seen in the following quotation:

Based on an understanding of the organic relationship between the two projects, which amounts to the fact that the conflict in its general context is one between the entire Islamic *umma* with its Islamic cultural program and the forces of world imperialism with its agenda of Westernization, the Islamists in Palestine took their point of departure from this dichotomy and used it to define their *raison d'être*, their purpose, func-

10. Hamas, "Introductory Memorandum;" see Appendix, document no. 3.

11. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 107, 5 February 1994.

12. Ibid.

tion, and goals: placing themselves in the service of jihad against the whole imperialist project. The Islamists considered themselves . . . and those who worked with them on the basis of this shared understanding as the vanguard of the force that seeks to destroy world imperialism. This is to be achieved by attacking the Zionist entity, which is the bridge-head of imperialism in the region, while drawing external support from the main body of Jihad forces, the entire *umma*. . .¹³

The theory of linking the struggle for the liberation of Palestine and the *umma* indicates that this struggle

should be done in tandem with the liberation of neighboring parts of the Islamic *umma* from either direct or indirect imperialism (in the sense of dependency on the West). Thus, the end result of the liberation of such countries will be the establishment of states based on Islam; these will place themselves in the service of the goals of Islam and automatically will become part of the struggle with the Zionist/colonialist enemy in Palestine. Parallel to that, progress should be made toward the unity of Arab and Islamic countries by uniting those countries that have become truly Islamic.¹⁴

Following this portrayal of the distribution of tasks for the “the liberation of Palestine,” the theory takes up tactical details of activities by Islamic countries in connection with “liberation,” from the perspective of a comprehensive jihad. According to the author,

To be more specific about the distribution of roles and the dimensions of the battle, the parallel and comprehensive jihad should be concentrated on several fronts. This jihad . . . should be understood in the broad sense of encompassing . . . armed struggle, operations and combat, social science, the triumph of truth and social justice, the achievement of unity, etc. There should be a broad understanding of the changes desired in all fields, as these are all necessary for a multi-dimensional and multi-goal-oriented military, political, ideological and social jihad in the service of the common goals of liberating the *umma*, and its heart, Palestine, and of achieving the unity and renaissance of the *umma*.¹⁵

The pan-Arab and pan-Islamic dimensions of the Palestine problem were central factors in Hamas’s political vision of the struggle and its evolution.

13. Husam al-Nasir, *Harakas al-muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas): Al-intilaq wa mu’adalat al-sira* [Islamic resistance movement (Hamas): The launching and plan of struggle] (London: Muslim Palestine Publications, 1990), pp. 18–22.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

This was reflected clearly in the movement's political discourse and in repeated calls for adopting the Palestinian cause as the foremost cause for Muslims throughout the world because of Palestine's unique sanctity and the special status it has in Islam. It also is reflected in the constant emphasis placed on the fact that the burden of liberation cannot be borne by a Palestinian resistance that is denied real Arab and Islamic support. In this regard, one finds evidence of the line of thinking that originated in the 1970s and which maintained that liberation should attend change, that is, an Islamic state first should be established outside (Palestine), and such a state should take on the lion's share of the responsibility for liberation. Even after the Palestinian intifada broke out and Hamas engaged in it wholeheartedly, the limitations on how far it could take the process were well understood. According to a statement by the movement's leaders, "Hamas never expected the intifada to lead to the liberation of Palestine. We are well aware that fundamental historic conditions must be met for liberation to occur. These are linked organically to the level of political development and the cultural resurgence of the *umma* as a whole, not just in Palestine. The role of the intifada was to bring us a few steps closer to the satisfaction of those conditions and to speed progress toward the realization of power and resurgence."¹⁶

THE STRATEGY OF HAMAS

The literature produced by Hamas reveals the broad lines of the movement's strategy for conducting the struggle. The lengthy extract below from that literature offers a direct description of such a strategy.

Based on our understanding of the struggle with the Zionist enemy, who is associated with the Western Project to bring the Arab Islamic *umma* under the domination of Western culture, to make it dependent on the West, and to perpetuate its underdevelopment, and being aware of the complexities of the international and regional environment with the clear imbalance of power favoring the Zionist-American alliance, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) bases its strategy of resisting the Zionist settler occupation of Palestine on the following:

1. The Palestinian people are the direct target of the Zionist settler occupation. Therefore, they must bear the main burden of resisting the unjust occupation. This is why Hamas seeks to mobilize the full potential of the Palestinian people and channel it into steadfast resistance against the usurper.

16. Abu Marzouq, interview with author, 21 April 1995.

2. Palestine is the terrain for confrontation with the enemy. The Arab and Islamic countries are regions from which our Palestinian people can draw support, particularly political, informational, and financial support; but the bloody confrontation with our Zionist enemy must take place on the sacred soil of Palestine . . .
3. There must be incessant resistance to and confrontation with the enemy in Palestine until we achieve victory and liberation. Jihad for the cause of God is our objective in that confrontation. The best method of resistance is to do battle with the soldiers of the enemy and destroy their armor.
4. It is our view that political action is one of the means for pursuing jihad against the Zionist enemy. Its objective should be to strengthen the endurance of our people in their jihad against the occupation; to mobilize the forces of our people and our *umma* in defense of our cause; to defend the rights of our people; and to present their just cause to the international community.¹⁷

THE PARTIES TO THE STRUGGLE

In the first two years of Hamas's existence (1987–89), the preliminary identification of friends and foes presented no great difficulty; the picture was rather oversimplified. In subsequent years, Hamas's discourse reflected a new sensitivity to the idea that it was unwise to expand the list of one's enemies; and thus the movement became aware of the virtue of trimming down their number and neutralizing its enemies wherever possible. In its presentation of the identity of the parties to the conflict, the Hamas Charter is a good example of the earlier phase, which was influenced by the traditional stereotype of a Crusader-style world Jewish conspiracy against Islam. This phase coincided with unrestrained analyses of Jewish control of the world through money, influence, and organizations. For example, under the heading "Forces Abetting the Enemy," the Charter mentions "enemies" with all the generality and vagueness implicit in the term, although the subject concerns Jews who "have planned well to get where they are . . . [and] have amassed huge fortunes that gave them influence, which they have devoted to the realization of their goals. Through money they gained control over the world media . . . and . . . financed revolutions throughout the world in pursuit of their objectives."¹⁸

Free rein is given to the imagination to discover Jews behind every great event in world history. Jews are cited as having been behind the

17. Hamas, "Introductory Memorandum;" see Appendix, document no. 3.

18. The Hamas Charter, Article 22; see Appendix, document no. 2.

French Revolution, the Russian/Communist Revolution, and most other revolutions. In addition, Jews are said to be able, through the use of money, to establish “clandestine organizations, such as the Masons, the Rotary and Lion’s clubs, etc., to destroy societies and promote the interests of Zionism.” The Charter even accuses Jews of establishing “the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They were behind the Second World War, in which they grew fabulously wealthy through the arms trade. They prepared for the establishment of their state; they ordered that the United Nations be formed, along with the Security Council, in place of the League of Nations, so that they could rule the world through them.”¹⁹

After the first two years, Hamas’s thought and practices transcended the uncompromising positions that had led to a mythical account of “Jewish influence in the world.” Such language vanished from the movement’s literature and political discourse, and its dealings at the international level ceased to reflect such positions. Since the early 1990s, this change can be attributed to the input of Hamas’s “outside” leadership. A number of leading personalities who have lived abroad and been exposed to wider experiences than their counterparts in the Gaza Strip (who formulated the Hamas Charter) have re-oriented Hamas’s political thinking and influenced the formulation of its discourse. The new attitudes have been reflected in Hamas’s practice, such as its establishment of contacts with Western states and international bodies. Examples of such contacts include, in humanitarian matters, the case of the arrest of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, and in political matters, the case of the deportees to south Lebanon, whom the UN Security Council ruled should be allowed to return.

In the years that followed, Hamas’s political view of the “enemy” and of Israel’s supporters became more sophisticated. Concerning the “principal enemy,” Hamas’s perspective evolved to differentiate clearly between Judaism as a religion and Zionism as a political movement. It based its policy on the premise “that the primary enemy of the Palestinian people as well as the Arab and Islamic *umma* is the Zionist entity and the Zionist movement.”²⁰ Enmity is directed at the Zionist movement because it is an “aggressor” rather than because of its religious beliefs. The following text, which is attributed to the leadership of Hamas, concisely outlines Hamas’s

19. Ibid.

20. “Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyya fil-‘alaqat al-siyasiyya” [Hamas’s interim policies in political relations], an internal Hamas memo shown to the author by members of the movement in Amman, 16 April 1995.

view of the distinction between Judaism and Zionism and goes beyond the generalities of the movement's original opinions:

The non-Zionist Jew is one who belongs to the Jewish faith, whether as a believer or due to accident of birth, but does not relate to the above ideas and takes no part in aggressive actions against our land and our *umma*. The Zionist, on the other hand, is one who embraces the aggressive Jewish ideology and becomes an instrument for the realization of those ideas on our land and against our *umma*. On this basis, Hamas will not adopt a hostile position in practice against anyone because of his ideas or his creed but will adopt such a position if those ideas and creed are translated into hostile or damaging actions against our *umma* and our nation.²¹

Hamas's view of international politics and alliances also became more sophisticated. By the early 1990s, it no longer sought to antagonize others as readily as in the past. It adopted a policy whereby "the movement has no quarrel with any foreign nation. It is not the policy of Hamas to attack or undermine the interests or possessions of various states."²² It softened its position with regard to international organizations, adopting a much more rational and diplomatic approach. It stressed that it "respects resolutions issued by international organizations and bodies unless they usurp or contradict the legitimate rights of our people to their homeland, their property, and their right to jihad until they are free and enjoy self-determination."²³ In making this transition, Hamas's discourse came to differentiate between "the principal enemy"—Israel—and the Western forces allied with it or supporting it. The purpose was, as indicated above, to reduce the number of Hamas's enemies.

For the confrontation with the enemy, Hamas envisions a broad front, which has the responsibility of liberating Palestine. This front consists of three concentric circles of resistance to the Zionist-Western aggression against Palestine and the entire Arab and Islamic region. Specifically, these are "the Palestinian circle, the Arab circle, and the Islamic circle. Each of these circles plays a role in the struggle against Zionism, and each one has its own responsibilities. It would be an unmitigated error and sheer ignorance to neglect a single one of these circles."²⁴ The Palestinian circle

21. Hamas leadership interview, *Filastin al-Muslima*, April 1990.

22. Hamas, "Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyya."

23. Hamas, "Introductory Memorandum."

24. The Hamas Charter, Article 14; see Appendix, document no. 2.

includes Hamas, of course, and the Palestine Liberation Organization, with its leftist and secular guerrilla organizations and which is “closer than any other group to the Islamic Resistance Movement; it includes the fathers, brothers, relatives, and friends [of our members].”²⁵ Within the Arab and Islamic circles, Hamas drew a distinction between the governments and the people. It focused on the popular dimension, and particularly on Islamic movements. Hamas’s dealings with these three circles will be discussed in later chapters.

THE NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE

By way of introduction to this topic of how Hamas views the nature of its struggle against Zionism, one can examine three dimensions of its thought and praxis. The first dimension pertains to the regional and international environment and its influence on the Palestinian problem at the time of the emergence of Hamas and extending to the mid-1990s. The second dimension concerns the theoretical complexities challenging the Islamic movement in general, such as the dialectic of religion, politics, and social change, and the extent to which the behavior of the movement should be determined by political considerations or by religious values and principles. The third dimension relates to the administrative and organizational context of decision making by Hamas.

The International Context

A series of important changes at the international and regional levels have had an impact on the Palestinian problem since the birth of Hamas in 1987. These include the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc at the end of the 1980s and the subsequent preponderant shift in the balance of power in favor of the United States and the Western bloc. This development had the direct effect of weakening the Palestinian cause at the international level because the United States could deal as it pleased with the problem without fear of any significant opposition to its policy, which was biased toward Israel.

The Palestinian cause also lost ground on several fronts where progress had been achieved during the Cold War. For example, the Movement of Non-aligned Nations and the General Assembly of the United Nations

25. Ibid.

had represented supportive fora where scores of states could be found that opposed U.S. policies and backed Third World causes, including the Palestinian cause. However, these organizations also lost their significance when the Eastern bloc collapsed; the Movement of Non-aligned Nations no longer has a role to play or influence to exercise. The moral and political victories won in the General Assembly, including condemnations of Israel's expansionist and aggressive policies and the dozens of resolutions supporting the Palestinian cause, all became empty shells. In the General Assembly in particular, a major defeat was the November 1992 abrogation of the resolution equating Zionism with racism. Many countries that had supported the Palestinian cause in the past under the protection of the Soviet Union could not withstand the political and economic pressures that the United States brought to bear on them to alter their position on Israel.

As the bipolar international system collapsed, Israel was able to improve its foreign relations, particularly with African and Asian countries, the nations of Eastern Europe, and the new Turkic republics in former Soviet Central Asia; all of these states had been traditional supporters of the Palestinian cause. American and Western pressures, Israeli diplomacy, and Israel's offers of technical aid, especially to developing countries—all this in the absence of any Arab or Islamic counteroffensive to halt the slide—had their effect. These changes not only undermined support for the PLO but also created an environment that was hostile to the acceptance of a new Palestinian “fundamentalist” organization, such as Hamas, which was seeking to become a spokesman for the same cause.

This new imbalance of power, favoring Israel, undermined the great surge of international support for the Palestinian cause resulting from the intifada of 1987 and after. The intifada had shown the world the brutal face of Israeli occupation, and it demonstrated the sweeping resistance to the occupation by the Palestinian people. However, the above-mentioned changes in the balance of power kept the leverage that could be gained from world sympathy to a minimum. Furthermore, the impact of the new balance of power on the Middle East was a weakening of the influence of regimes that had been dependent on the Soviet Union and a corresponding increase in the influence of the United States and its allies. All talk about an Arab military option in the struggle with Israel ceased, while plans for a peaceful or negotiated solution proliferated. The Gulf War later destroyed the most significant Arab military power, Iraq, and created new Arab divisions that had very negative consequences for the Palestinian cause. In the wake of that war, with the Arab world at its weakest, the Madrid Conference opened in October 1991.

The strength of Hamas and its political clout increased just as international state support for the Palestinian cause was ebbing and the Arab military option in the battle with Israel had virtually been eliminated. This state of affairs led to a sense of almost total political isolation on the part of Hamas, just a few years after its birth. Not only was there no influential ally for the Palestinians—or for Hamas—at the level of major powers, but also for Hamas there was no regional ally with any real influence over the fate of the Palestinian cause. Even those countries that had severe differences with the PLO were reluctant to develop an alliance with Hamas due to the new international realities, especially the dominant position of the United States. The latter country championed a peace settlement in the Middle East that was perceived by Hamas as virtually identical to the Israeli perspective.

These international factors had a clear impact on Hamas's conduct of the struggle. The movement was well aware that it could not follow a path modeled on the Palestinian resistance of the 1970s, when there was a Third World movement supported by the Soviet Union that opposed American policies in many parts of the world. The only factor partially to offset what Hamas perceived as a gloomy international outlook was the growing Islamic tide in the region. Hamas hoped that this wave would lead to the adoption of choices that were at variance with the international balance of power, dampen its negative impact on the Middle East, stiffen resistance to Israel, and mobilize [Islamic] potential for the battle of liberation.²⁶

Politics versus Morality

The second point that needs to be stressed in this introduction to Hamas's understanding and conduct of the struggle (which is equally valid for any other Islamic movement) concerns the theoretical challenges facing political action by Islamist movements in the modern world. This leads to the dialectic of interests and ethical principles, morality, and politics, the propriety of establishing alliances with non-Islamic parties, and adherence to the constraints imposed by Islamic law on the political behavior of groups and individuals. In the most general sense, one can detect an attempt by

26. Expressions of these hopes are manifest in Hamas's epistles and congratulatory notes to other Islamic movements on their successes, electoral or otherwise. These include, for example, its congratulatory statements to the Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria on winning the aborted parliamentary elections in 1990 and to the Refah Party of Turkey, and the statement of support to Sudan in its war against rebels in the south. These and other examples are discussed in chapter 4, "Hamas and the Islamic World."

many Islamic movements, whether conscious or not, to transfer individual morality (which is consistent with Islamic values) to the political activities of groups, states, and international organizations without regard for the huge differences between ordinary individual and group political behavior. For example, Hamas generally rejects sayings such as “there is no morality in politics” and “interests come before principles.” Islamic thought addresses this unyielding political reality from the perspective of the “model” of ethics, virtue, and truth.

One can read in the behavior of Hamas and other Islamic movements that, as they acquire experience, the scales begin to tip in favor of interests. However, in general Hamas’s conduct seems to be haunted by the ghost of individual morality and the belief that the movement can engage in politics based on principles. The “nature” of Hamas’s dealings with the Palestinian Authority (PA) following its establishment in the Gaza Strip is informative. Despite the political conflict with the PLO and the intense struggle with it for control of the Palestinian street (ongoing since the beginning of the intifada), Hamas received the first contingents of Palestinian police officers in Gaza and Jericho in May 1994 in a fraternal and benevolent spirit, “because they are part of the people, they are our brothers.”²⁷ Hamas seemed to be undeterred by the common knowledge that the principal task of the police force would be to prevent any military operations against Israel, a function that created ambiguity about the prospects of a clash between the police and Hamas. The PA set down roots, expanding its police and security forces gradually and establishing its presence. Hamas, which strongly opposed the Oslo agreements, hoped that its fraternal attitude toward the police would allow it to establish a cozy relationship with the force, without asking on what foundations such a relationship could be based. It was clear that there could not be two parallel authorities ruling over Gaza and that power, not love, would decide the issue in favor of one or the other.

Once it had consolidated its position, the PA carried out a series of sweeping arrests within the ranks of Hamas. It established a state security court that passed long and severe sentences on leading figures in the movement despite Hamas’s policy of not turning its guns on the PA. In fact, Hamas protected the PA from public anger on extraordinary occasions, such as during the Palestine Mosque incident in November 1994, when the police shot and killed 14 Palestinians. In an outpouring of anger, the crowd

27. Ibrahim Ghosheh, *Al-Sabeel*, 23 August 1994.

wanted to tear down Gaza Prison, but leading figures in Hamas calmed the people. In another well-known incident, when Yasir Arafat came to pay his condolences to the family of Hani 'Abed, an Islamic Jihad leader whom Israel had assassinated in November 1994, the assembled crowd began to shout anti-Arafat slogans. Once again, Hamas leaders calmed down the crowd and prevented an attack on Arafat's motorcade.

Asserting this ethical stance, Mahmoud al-Zahhar, a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, said with respect to establishing good relations with the PA and with Arafat: "I want to try . . . to appeal to an emotion that is present in every human being, the emotion of love. I do not believe that there is a human who is totally bad, who is so consumed by rancor that he lives his whole life out in hatred. In brief, the conflict is not a personal one. We have spoken to him [Arafat]. He knows a lot about people, and he can tell if we are sincere in wanting to solve the problems or not."²⁸

Arafat exploited this tendency in Hamas. He became increasingly confident that Hamas had placed restraints on itself and had drawn red lines it would not cross as a barrier to civil war. Indeed, Hamas seems to have forgotten that red lines are drawn to deter the enemy, not to immobilize oneself. The repeated assertion by Hamas, that "we will not cross the red line to civil war," in fact gave the PA a green light to go as far as it pleased in chasing down members, particularly those in the Hamas armed wing (the Qassam Brigades), putting them on trial, and restricting Hamas's influence, whether in mosques, charitable societies, or in the media. As a result, Hamas's idealistic method of dealing with the PA came into conflict with the PA's realist approach to Hamas, a realism that consistently followed the prescription: amass as much power as possible and use it decisively.

Other examples that illustrate this conflict between morality and expediency—principles on the one side and political interests on the other—can be traced in the history of relations between Hamas and Fateh during the intifada and the occasional clashes between them. During the very stiff competition, Hamas's Islamic restraints constituted red lines that the movement would not cross, including the prohibition on the use of deadly force even in the event that Hamas members were killed. In fact, four members of Hamas died in sporadic clashes with Fateh, but no member of Fateh fell to the bullets of Hamas (these clashes will be reviewed in detail

28. "Where Do We Go from Here?," interview with Mahmoud al-Zahhar, *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya* [Journal of Palestine Studies], no. 20 (Fall 1994), p. 95.

in the chapter on Hamas's relations with Palestinian guerrilla organizations). The main reason for this is that it was extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine who had fired the fatal bullets in these clashes and there had been no *fatwa* [religious opinion] permitting Hamas to kill anyone other than the actual person directly responsible for the killing.

At another and intimately related level, some *fatwas* issued by Islamic *'ulama* [clergy] close to the Palestinian Islamic movement illustrate the depth of complexity that still needs to be resolved concerning the relationship between religion and politics and the interaction between the two. An example is to be found in the *fatwa* that prohibited participation in the elections of the self-governing assembly.²⁹ Although not adopted by Hamas, that *fatwa* illustrates the religious anxiety that still plagues political activity among Islamists. To a certain extent, *fatwas* turned into swords that hang over the details of actual political behavior, particularly in a period when there is no temporal Islamic authority to issue *fatwas* binding on all. In practice, the *fatwa* has been degraded and is no longer of any practical use: the American-led Western alliance that attacked Iraq had many *fatwas* in its favor, and Iraq fought back against the alliance using another set of *fatwas*.

In brief, Hamas ran up against the poverty of contemporary Islamic *fiqh* [jurisprudence] in relation to political issues. An internal Hamas memorandum refers to this quite clearly: "political relations normally are governed by shifting pragmatic interests rather than by enduring abstract theoretical positions based on principle. Most people perhaps still need to be informed about the perspective of the tradition of Islamic *fiqh* regarding acting according to one's interests in the general context of *shariah*. This is still unploughed territory. Many young men with a committed Islamic conscience were shocked when the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria struck an alliance with other (non-Islamic) political forces. This only demonstrates the need for greater public awareness on this issue."³⁰ Along with acquiring more experience, Hamas has shown more ability to disentangle the dilemma of principles versus interests. As noted by Jarbawi, "Hamas

29. A *fatwa* [formal religious opinion] issued by religious scholars in Jordan in 1992 made it Islamically unlawful to participate in the self-rule elections. There are several similar *fatwas*, among them ones issued by Sheikh Yusef al-Qardhawi, a prominent Egyptian scholar with a following across the Arab world, banning travel to Jerusalem (in 1996) and forbidding participation in the Israeli Knesset elections (March 1995).

30. Quoted from an internal Hamas document, untitled and undated, dealing with interaction with others, seen by the author in Amman, 10 April 1995.

has demonstrated a significant amount of pragmatism, particularly in finding a balance between the movement's principles and its interests."³¹

The Decision-Making Process

By virtue of the movement's history, the main group of Hamas members is in the Occupied Territories. Consequently, its commanders in the field also are there. The movement's principal leaders, however, are divided between the Occupied Territories and the outside. These two components of the leadership share responsibility for decision making, whether at the top level of the Unified Consultative Council [*majlis al-shura al-muwah-had*] and the Political Bureau, or at the next level of the planning and information agencies. Decision making is undertaken through a complicated mechanism, due to the vulnerability of Hamas leaders in the Occupied Territories to arrest.³²

There appears to be a considerable degree of commitment to the principle of consultation in decision making. It would be difficult to single out an individual Hamas leader who could monopolize the decision-making process or impose his views on the others. This state of affairs has tended to become well established because of the constant emphasis placed on consultation by the founder and spiritual leader of the movement, Sheikh Yassin. He is the only individual in the movement who has the power to impose his personal views on others. However, Sheikh Yassin has stressed in his letters from prison to the leaders and members of Hamas that they should stick to the principle of collective decision making: "It is impermissible for any individual or group to monopolize the right to make decisions that would determine the future course of our movement. Any decision adopted by the majority will be binding on everyone."³³ A factor that contributes to the emphasis on consultation and collective leadership is the absence of any leader (apart from Sheikh Yassin himself) who has the charisma that would allow him to dominate the process and impose his views. From the perspective of Hamas's own leaders, this is a positive state of affairs since "Hamas is an institutional movement, and is not tied to any one person."³⁴

31. Ali Jarbawi, *Hamas' Bid to Lead the Palestinian People* (Annandale, Virginia: United Association for Studies and Research, 1994), p. 15.

32. Abu Marzouq interview, 21 April 1995.

33. A letter from Sheikh Yassin addressed to Hamas leaders and members from inside Kfar Yona jail, 3 October 1993; most of his letters were published in *Al-Wasat* magazine (London), No. 92, 11 November 1993.

34. 'Imad al-Alami, interview, *Filastin al-Muslima*, August 1992.

Another distinctive feature in the case of Hamas is the considerable contribution of the movement's branch in the Occupied Territories to the decision-making process. This contrasts with the cases of the PLO and the various Palestinian guerrilla organizations, whose leadership outside the Occupied Territories used to monopolize decision making in practice. Decisions by Hamas, despite the repeated blows suffered by the movement, have continued to carry a domestic flavor and remain linked to the pulse of the man in the street to a reasonable degree. This linkage prompts some observers to speak of a "pragmatic" or vacillating tendency in Hamas, when in fact it propels Hamas to be politically realistic within the constraints of the possible and to limit the use of grandiose and ill-fitting slogans such as those manufactured outside the Occupied Territories.

In this regard, one ought to contrast the moderation of the views of the Hamas leadership inside the Occupied Territories compared with those of its leadership on the outside, particularly with respect to Hamas's relationship with the PA. This difference can be attributed to the fact that such decisions, when taken by the outside leadership, do not involve them in a direct clash with the PA, as opposed to the inside leaders who must cope with the movement's day-to-day affairs. Occasionally, the difference between the two sets of leaders becomes very visible, as happened in the case of the decision to participate in the January 1996 elections for the Legislative Council. Hamas tends to play down the significance of these differences, arguing that they are natural consequences of the difficulty of communicating with each other as well as the differences in location and perspective.³⁵

At any rate, this division in Hamas between the inside and the outside tends to slow down the decision-making process. This occasionally is harmful to the movement, because it reduces its mobility and initiative. However, it is useful to Hamas at other times, because it protects the movement from the consequences of ad-hoc and ill-considered decisions. This state of affairs affects the conduct of the struggle in various ways, as does the international context and the conflict between Islamic principles and political expediency discussed above.

EVOLUTION OF HAMAS'S VISION OF HOW TO CONDUCT THE STRUGGLE

Against the background of the three premises on the nature of the struggle outlined above, one could underline a set of principal characteristics

35. Sheikh Yassin, interview, *Filastin al-Muslima*, April 1997, p. 18.

that dominated Hamas's conduct of the struggle. There are five such characteristics, each of which is discussed below.

Trying to Strike a Balance between an Interim and Historic Solution

An intractable dilemma that always has faced Palestinian political thought was how to reconcile the "historic solution" of liberating the entire land of Palestine with the notion of an interim solution of establishing a Palestinian state on only part of Palestine, i.e., the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hamas's thought was not exceptional in this respect and got caught in this dilemma. Thus, the organization attempted to find its own formula for combining both solutions, to preserve its principles, and to maintain a firm foot in reality.

Hamas views the struggle with Israel as a long-term and historic one. Victory in the struggle has many objective and historic requirements, and it is connected integrally, as mentioned earlier, with deeply rooted variables relating to the dominant political, economic, and social structures in the region. According to contemporary Islamist movements, the condition for victory requires the supremacy of Islam in government and politics, leading to the emergence of an Islamic state and an Islamic renaissance, which can stand up to the Western strategic depth of the Zionist project.

Final victory is therefore far away. The Arab-Israeli wars and the different rounds in the conflict over the past half-century have been interim, not decisive, engagements. They could not have been otherwise, because the objective historic conditions required for victory had not yet materialized. Nevertheless, these rounds are part of the general battle and indications of the conditions necessary for victory. These views form the basis of the Hamas position: "the best way to conduct the struggle with the Zionist enemy is to mobilize the potential of the Palestinian people and use all means available to keep the jihad and the issue alive until such time as the requirements for victory materialize, the Arab and Islamic renaissance takes place, the will and the political purpose of the *umma* are united, and its full potential can be tapped to provide the necessary power."³⁶

This perspective expands the time horizon of the struggle and is based on the certainty that victory will come to the *umma* in the future. For this reason Hamas "seeks to escape the tyranny of the moment, because no

36. Hamas, "Introductory Memorandum;" see Appendix, document no. 3.

matter how important an event may seem, no matter how unforeseen it may be, and even if it should take up the entire political horizon for the moment, in Hamas's historic perspective that event remains limited and definite in scope."³⁷ This perspective means that Hamas is not overpowered by any particular phase of the struggle, nor is it totally engrossed by it, seeing as it is not the decisive final phase. For example, the intifada "is not the final stage of confrontation with Israel but only a phase. We therefore do not wish to invest our entire capital in a stone throwing war, or in any war that we know will not lead to the overthrow of Israel."³⁸ Hamas, which determines how much effort to put into any confrontation on the basis of its overall significance, does not regard any struggle as "the battle" to which everything must be dedicated with total disregard for the consequences; nor is any battle worth sacrificing the entire movement.³⁹

For example, Hamas's position on the Oslo Agreement can be seen as a reasonable balance between the present stage and the long-term historic view. Despite the danger posed by the agreement, the exaggerated statements by Hamas concerning it, and its declared intention of trying to abort it, Hamas has not declared war against it or said that the agreement only will pass "over our dead bodies." Hamas could have sent out thousands of its followers and supporters in powerful waves of demonstrations against the agreement, but it did not do so. That should not be surprising since the type of confrontation Hamas has chosen from the beginning can be described as "a dualistic approach based on maximum protest realizable through minimum of contact."⁴⁰

Yet this act of balancing the long-term historic perspective against the demands of the evanescent present sometimes favored one over the other. Occasionally, the broad historic view overshadowed practical politics. At other times pragmatism triumphed at the expense of the long-term vision. This vacillation could be observed in relation to the Oslo agreements. Some interpreted the vacillation as Hamas's way of striking a balance, but often it masked simple confusion.⁴¹

37. Muhammad Nazzal in Khaled Hroub, *Al-Islamiyyoon fi filastin: Qira'at, mawaqif wa qadhbaya ukhra* [The Islamists of Palestine: Readings, positions, and other matters] (Amman: Dar al-Bashir, 1994), p. 8.

38. Khalil al-Qawqa, interview, *Al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 October 1988.

39. Nazzal, in Hroub, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

40. Rab'i al-Madhoon, *Al-Hayar*, 16 September 1993.

41. Ali Jarbawi thinks that the position of Hamas on Oslo is a balanced one: The movement kept all its options open while simultaneously protecting its principles and interests; see Jarbawi, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–26.

Moderating the Tone and Behavior of Hamas

In view of the changing international circumstances and their effect on the region, the peace process gained momentum, and Hamas's radical opposition to it appeared to be a clear aberration. It went beyond the opposition of those who objected to the Madrid-Oslo formula on the basis of particular provisions of the agreement while accepting the principle of a peaceful settlement. Only a few parties objected to the formula and to the principle of settlement per se, and Hamas was the most prominent among them. This position of being the odd man out affected the manner in which Hamas chose to express itself. Hamas moderated its political discourse as well as its behavior.

It is noteworthy, for instance, that the mode of expression chosen by Sheikh Yassin in making known his rejection of the Oslo Agreement was calm and moderate. He wrote in a letter from prison:

No doubt our Palestinian people are agitated and unhappy today. They are saddened and pained by the ignominy, capitulation, and abasement of the Palestinian cause at the hands of a group of our own people who signed [documents] recognizing the state of Israel, thereby relinquishing all our lands, traditions, holy places, and culture which Israel has usurped. To put the best face on it, let us say that they tried and failed, but let them not saddle us with this error and its attendant calamities.⁴²

Hamas clearly refrained from accusing the individuals who signed the agreement of treason. Instead, the organization focused on the capitulation embodied in the agreement. During the period covered by this study, the strongest language used by Hamas to describe the subsequent security accords with Israel was "treasonous agreements," but it avoided naming individuals or leaders who negotiated those pacts.

An internally circulating memorandum by Hamas defines the limits of political discourse and warns members on three issues: "Discourse should not be simply for posturing; it should not be a form of flexing our muscles in competition; [and] it should not breed new enemies and disputes."⁴³ The memorandum emphasizes that Zionists are still the enemy, even after the signing of the Oslo agreements:

We are a people under occupation. All the visible catastrophes we have suffered are due to the occupation. It sometimes may seem to us that

42. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, "Letters," *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

43. "Al-Risala" [the epistle], an internal Hamas document dated 6 April 1994.

some of our own people are the cause of some of the tragedies that have befallen us, . . . but the truth is the truth . . . The Zionist enemy is the root and the basis of all the suffering of our people, whether this concerns those who remain residents of our sacred land, or those who have been dispersed far from the precious soil of our homeland. Our political and informational discourse must focus on the fact that the Zionists are both our foremost and our only enemies, that the central purpose of our people is to resist the Zionist occupation. This is extremely important, because it focuses attention on the truth, so that one does not stray away from it, and it spares us from becoming embroiled in marginal battles and conflicts that will divert us from our primary task, which is liberation from occupation.⁴⁴

As for the practical positions adopted by Hamas, the mode of expression was also moderate and nonviolent. Hamas did not react to the Oslo Agreement by organizing demonstrations, turning its weapons against the PA, or resorting to the assassination of officials. To its credit, it kept its pledge, since the date it was established, to stay away from political assassinations.⁴⁵

This conscious attempt to appear moderate even while declaring its opposition to the settlement with Israel is the same attitude that Hamas adopted toward various Arab-Israeli agreements and the multilateral and bilateral tracks in the peace talks. It made an effort to couch condemnation in principle in noninflammatory language and to find more acceptable formulations. It is noteworthy in this respect that there is an important difference between Hamas's mode of expression in relation to the Oslo agreements and to the Arab-Israeli agreements. Hamas was much more openly critical, outspoken, and condemnatory with respect to the former than to the latter. In the case of the Arab-Israeli agreements, Hamas was more calculating and tried to avoid the inevitable backlash that would have followed a more verbally violent position on the Jordanian-Israeli agreement or Syria's participation in the Madrid and Washington talks.⁴⁶

44. *Ibid.*

45. This pledge was reaffirmed in the Hamas leaflet, "La lil-ighiyal al-siyasi" [No to political assassination], dated 22 September 1993.

46. Hamas's efforts to deal with Arab-Israel talks and agreements are discussed in detail in chapter 4.

Not Antagonizing States In or Outside the Region

Hamas has chosen to avoid antagonizing Arab or Western states through its statements or behavior. Its recent discourse has tended to minimize the number of its antagonists. It is aware that the mere declaration of its position was sufficient to create reservations among most parties. Its actions also have been consistent with the policy of not carrying the battle with Israel beyond the occupied land. It has refrained from forming local affiliate organizations in various countries so as to avoid being dragged into side battles. Writing about Palestinian-Jordanian Islamic movements, Musa al-Kilani, who enjoys close ties to Jordan's establishment, states that "the thing that set Hamas apart from other Palestinian nationalist organizations is that it has avoided involvement in the internal affairs of host Arab countries. . . . [T]his has gained it a lot of credibility, and made it difficult for Arab states to pick a fight with the movement, seeing as it had been conciliatory towards their policies."⁴⁷

As mentioned above, Hamas considers its battle to be with Israel and Zionism and has declared its policy of not picking fights with regional and international powers. Hamas has learned from the lessons of the revolutionary Palestinian left in the 1960s and 1970s. Thus, it has not declared open war on the West or attempted to strike at Western interests in the region; and it has avoided actions abroad such as the hijacking of planes, the taking of hostages, or the assassination of Israelis in European or other foreign cities. This policy has been productive to the extent that many Western and other countries did not follow the example of America, which in 1993, under pressure from the pro-Israel lobby, put Hamas on its list of international terrorist organizations. The more common attitude among many Western nations has been to classify some actions by Hamas as terrorist but to avoid classifying the whole organization as a terrorist movement.⁴⁸

Avoiding Political Isolation

Being isolated politically was a clear concern for Hamas in its conduct of the struggle. The specter of being the odd man out politically and of rowing against the official tide in favor of a settlement that was sweeping most

47. Musa Ziad al-Keylani, *Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fil urdun wa filastin* [Islamic Movements in Jordan and Palestine] (Amman: Al-Risala Press, 1995), pp. 205–206.

48. Author interview with a European diplomat who wishes to remain anonymous, London, 16 July 1997.

of the region caused Hamas to be wary of being forced into political isolation. This was particularly so during the period when there were rising hopes for a settlement, and political and media campaigns were underway to promote the peace process. Hamas tried therefore to expand its base of support. At the Palestinian level, it collaborated with those guerrilla organizations within the PLO that were opposed to the settlement; this collaboration later developed into the Alliance of Palestinian Forces. At the Arab and Islamic levels, it tried to mobilize popular forces into opposition to a settlement with Israel, so that it would not become politically isolated and rendered marginal. This attitude furthermore was consistent with Hamas's general policy of mobilizing Arab and Islamic resources. One Hamas leader explained:

We are not advocates of isolationism from reality. Our policy is to react with and influence reality. . . . That does not mean, however, that we are going to be preoccupied by any *fait accompli* manufactured by others; nor are we going to follow in their footsteps wherever they may lead, not deviating from their path while forgetting the true path to our goal. Excessive preoccupation with realism has led the Palestinian cause to where it is now. On the other hand, idealism may not advance us a single step toward the liberation of Palestine . . . the magnitude of the struggle demands a strategic vision on our part . . . in addition to interim tactics for dealing with reality. This does not mean that we should become mired in reality or that our vision should become so myopic that we are unable to see beyond our feet. We should keep a foot in reality to launch ourselves toward our strategic objective with firm steps.⁴⁹

Sheikh Yassin, the spiritual guide of Hamas, may be regarded as the principal theorist of nonisolationism in the movement. In his letters from prison cited above, he addressed the general debate about participation in elections and came out in favor of participation: "If the council shall have the authority to legislate, why should we not practice opposition within this council as we do in the street? We can demonstrate that Islam has a presence which must be reckoned with and not leave our foes an unchallenged opportunity to do as they please."⁵⁰ Nonisolation was the argument put forward by a powerful trend within the movement to justify participating in the elections for self-governing institutions in January 1996.

49. Khaled Masha'ai (head of Hamas's Political Bureau), "Shurout wa ihtimalat qiyam intikhabat naziha" [Conditions and possibilities of conducting fair elections], a working paper for a conference entitled "Palestinian Self-Rule Elections," published by the Center of Middle East Studies, Amman, 1994.

50. Yassin letter, dated 3 October 1993, and included in *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

Ismail Haniyah, a prominent Hamas personality in the Gaza Strip, justified participation: "Taking part in the elections will guarantee us a legitimate political presence when the elections are over. We will be sure to be informed about and participate in the making of laws by the elected council under which civil society will be governed."⁵¹

Betting on Popular Participation

The literature of Hamas stresses the popular dimension of the battle. Its vision of the struggle assigns popular participation the most important role in the future, when the issue is expected to be resolved. Below is the position of Hamas on the role of popular participation:

Despite the capitulation by Arab governments, the Palestinian cause has been fortunate to attract the participation of [Arab] peoples and has benefited from their initiative during the decades of struggle with the Jewish enemy. Truthfully, the bright pages of our struggle in the land of Palestine is part of the history of the Arab and Islamic peoples; it is not the history of governments and regimes. While the *umma* can be considered the strategic depth of the Palestinian cause and of Hamas as a movement, the popular forces within the *umma* are the core of that depth. They are the real reservoir of strength of our movement in its long struggle with the Zionist enemy. For this reason, Hamas believes it is imperative to consolidate its ties with popular forces and institutions in the Islamic Arab *umma* and to appeal to their goodness, pride, and generosity. It also seeks to establish a solid basis of understanding, awareness, and broad vision that will be a common denominator in the *umma's* strategic battle of destiny against the destructive Zionist project.⁵²

Hamas always has been keen to pursue the popular option and to work with Islamic and mass movements in the region to counter the consequences of the Oslo Agreement and other probable treaties. Hamas is betting on those movements and sees them as an important part of the future of the region in the coming decades. The outstanding questions are whether Hamas's wager is a winning one, and how popular choice will evolve in the future. Aspects of these questions will be dealt with in subsequent chapters on Hamas's relationship with popular groups and its relationship with the Arab and Islamic circles.

Part of Hamas's direction of the struggle has to do with safeguarding the movement's achievements. Hamas always has been concerned about

51. Haniyah, letter to author, 2 March 1996.

52. "Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyya fil-'alaqat al-siyasiyya."

the institutions and social and cultural infrastructure it has established in the Occupied Territories. Charitable societies, schools, and *zakat* [religious tax] committees have contributed greatly to expanding the movement's grass-roots base, not to mention Hamas's presence at and control over a large number of mosques, which are strongholds for the movement. Hamas's policy has been to isolate this infrastructure from the front line of the conflict and to use it as a source of support and supply in the rear lines. Following the signing of the Oslo Agreement and the establishment of the PA in the Gaza Strip, Hamas took the position that any attempt by the PA to dismantle that infrastructure would lead to a violent struggle.

Seeking to define the nature of Hamas's relationship with the PA, Sheikh Yassin warned in October 1993 that the PA should not attempt to "lay its hands on the Islamic institutions and mosques, or Islamic bookstores . . . We have declared our rejection of self-rule in civilized and non-violent ways. In the event [the authority is formed] we shall represent the opposition, which has a right to its own institutions. There can be no encroachment on these institutions, and if there is, it will not be a simple matter, in my opinion, and should be resisted violently."⁵³

However, in reality, the PA has crossed the red line, and Hamas's response has not been proportionate to the threats it had made. Sheikh Yassin himself, after four years of maintaining the old position, simply erased the red line: "We never shall clash with the authority, even if they torture us, even if they shut down our institutions, arrest us, even if they kill us. I uphold the principle embodied in the word of God, 'If you reach your hand out to kill me, I shall not reach out my hand to kill you, for I fear God, the Lord of the universe.'⁵⁴

Hamas's policy of safeguarding past gains, which limited the extent to and manner in which it could express its opposition, impacted its relationship with other Palestinian organizations. Many of these organizations were more radical than Hamas in terms of their political discourse against the PA. They called for stronger actions, either collectively through the alliance of the "Ten Resistance Organizations" or at the individual level of each faction. Hamas, however, has shown reluctance and carefully calculated potential gains and losses. Because Hamas's main organization is located primarily inside the Occupied Territories, its leaders, unlike those of the other factions, believe that their movement "bears the consequences of any collective decision by the ten organizations, whereas the

53. Yassin letter, 3 October 1993; see *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

54. Sheikh Yassin, quoted in *Filastin al-Muslima*, November 1997, p. 21.

impact of such a decision on the other organizations is limited . . . We therefore are compelled to consider carefully the impact of any decision on our movement to ensure that the decision will multiply our influence in the field, not diminish it.”⁵⁵ Consequently, one can say that the previous achievements of Hamas constituted a liability, while the scope of the movement and the large number of its followers slowed it down and deprived it of a measure of flexibility. Referring to this factor, Ali Jarbawi argued that “the movement tried to keep its options open. Being a large political force, it had a sense of being responsible for protecting its varied interests, and it moved cautiously in taking any decision.”⁵⁶ Although acting slowly in taking decisions benefited the movement in many instances, it represented an important opportunity cost in other instances.

In addition, Hamas tried to set a new example for Palestinian political action in the context of the historical development of the Palestinian national movement. This new model, according to Hamas’s leaders, could be characterized by its Islamic dimension and “political integrity and adherence to principle in one’s actions.” This model was motivated by what Hamas had “discovered” in terms of “the prevalence of prevarication, to the extent of being dishonest in one’s dealings with others, not living up to one’s commitments to one’s charter and contractual agreements, giving priority to interest over principle in a blatant manner, and the past hegemony of certain factions within the PLO over other organizations, as well as the triumph of individualism and self-interest in government and the monopoly of authority, and the pursuit of personal gain and selfishness.”⁵⁷

In contrast, Hamas tried to put forward an “Islamic model,” particularly with respect to ethical conduct, keeping one’s word, and not setting oneself above others. In practice Hamas respected agreements with others. During the years of the intifada, when Hamas and Fateh were engaged in intense competition that led to clashes, a number of agreements had to be concluded between them. The agreements did not last very long, but Hamas was not the party that violated them. However, Hamas’s success in putting forward a new model was limited, particularly in dealing with Palestinian guerrilla organizations. (Issues pertaining to Hamas’s relationship with Fateh and the other Palestinian organizations will be discussed in chapter 3.)

55. Nazzal, quoted in Hroub, *Al-Islamiyyoon fi filastin*, p. 16.

56. Jarbawi, *Hamas’ Bid to Lead the Palestinian People*, p. 8.

57. All quotes in this paragraph are from Marzouq interview with author, 21 April 1995.

THE HISTORIC SOLUTION AND THE INTERIM SOLUTION

The following analysis focuses on Hamas's position(s) on the liberation of "all Palestine" from Israeli occupation and whether this liberation has to be total or can be partial. This is a core issue of Hamas's political thought, and it represents a major distinction in its thought from the political program of the PLO and the PA. Hamas's literature discussing what usually is known as the long-term and short-term options is extensive. First, there is the long-term solution—or what can be called the historic solution—for the Palestine problem. This amounts to declaring the objective to be winning back Palestine within its historic borders, that is, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and then to seek that goal. Second, there is the short- or medium-term solution, which can be called the interim solution to the problem. This means declaring that one is willing to accept Palestinian or Arab or Islamic sovereignty over only part of the historic territory of Palestine, alongside a sovereign Israeli state, and then working to achieve this end. As has been developed in Hamas's thought, this interim solution could be achieved either through war or through peaceful means and usually is coupled with the idea of an armistice.

Before examining the details of each position, an introductory remark needs to be stressed. That is, Hamas's two positions have not evolved in sharp sequence over time. Both positions have existed within the movement almost since its formation and have appeared in its discourse over the years. For example, one can find discussion of an interim solution, of a Palestinian state, and even of an armistice in the first year of the intifada, a time when Hamas was at its zenith and the struggle was being waged under the slogan of liberating Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. Later, in Hamas's tenth year, one also can find an insistence on the historic solution and adherence to the idea of Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. But this insistence in fact is expressed in tandem with recurring proposals to accept an interim solution or an armistice. Yet, this situation ought not to obscure the fact that the details of an interim solution in Hamas's later thought are more concrete and mature.

The Historic Solution: Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River

The Hamas Charter refers to Palestine as Islamic *waqf* (religious trust land). It is thus inalienable property granted to

Islamic generations until Judgement Day. No Arab state nor all Arab states combined, no king or president nor all kings and presidents, and no organization nor all organizations, whether Palestinian or Arab, have the right to dispose of it or relinquish or cede any part of it, because Palestine is Islamic land that has been entrusted to generations of Muslims until the Day of Judgement. Who, after all, has the right to act on behalf of Islamic generations until the Day of Judgement?⁵⁸

Even before the Charter was issued in August 1988, Hamas communiqués conveyed the same general sense, insisting that “Palestine is an indivisible unit, from its north to its south, its coast to its mountains, its sea to its river.”⁵⁹

This “historic solution” position remained constant for years after the Charter was issued. It was restated from time to time, particularly in speeches designed to mobilize opinion against the PLO policy of accepting agreements that recognized the existence of Israel, as well as in Hamas’s literature directed at the Arab and Islamic hinterland. Hamas found itself obliged to reaffirm this position on several occasions when it was accused of having retreated from it. The most significant instance came in the wake of political speculation occasioned by the April 1994 initiative from its Political Bureau, which some interpreted to mean that Hamas had opted for an interim solution and abandoned its old position. Following the stir caused by the statements of then Political Bureau head Abu Marzuq, Hamas issued a clarification affirming that “the movement still believes that the Palestinian people have a right to Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan; that jihad is the path to liberation; and that negotiating with the enemy is totally unacceptable.”⁶⁰

It is clear that this position has remained central to Hamas even as its political position evolved. It is the thread that bound its position from its inception to all its later positions in subsequent years. This position was based on several considerations. To begin with, there was the ideological conviction stemming from an “Islamic perspective” on the sanctity of the territory of Palestine. In addition, there was and still is a perceived need for a political alternative to the course charted by the PLO, which has adopted

58. The Hamas Charter, Article 11; see Appendix.

59. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 10 of 12 March 1988.

60. Special Hamas leaflet, “Bayan hamm sader ‘an al-maktab al-siyasi li harakat hamas hawl al-tarawwurat al-akhira” [An important statement issued by Hamas’s Political Bureau about the latest developments], 21 April 1994.

an interim solution and is involved in negotiations. Hamas felt that the basic contribution it had to make in the Palestinian arena was to reestablish the commitment to historic fundamentals. What had befallen the PLO also cast a shadow on Hamas. The movement saw the PLO as responding in phases to changing circumstances in the region and throughout the world. It had accepted UN resolutions and embraced notions for a compromise settlement that involved establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel. Hamas regarded the prospect of following the same road with great trepidation, especially in view of the fact that the PLO's gradual softening of its position had yielded meager results.

The early years of the intifada had fueled an enthusiasm and vigor that helped to consolidate Hamas's position. The movement immersed itself in the daily events of the uprising, which it saw as one link in the chain leading to liberation. It vehemently rejected attempts to make political capital out of the intifada, as the PLO had done. Hamas drew some reassurance from sticking to a position based on principle, reiterating the call for the liberation of all Palestine, and repeating continuously that the intifada was a step on the road to liberation. Yet this sense of reassurance was a form of avoidance, because it obscured the need to find the other links in the chain for after the intifada. The question of what happens after the intifada remained problematic throughout the years of the uprising. There were only two "paths" for the answer: Either one had to be a realist in dealing with regional and international situations, which meant exploiting the intifada for political gain, but which Hamas rejected outright; or one had to wait for a change in the regional and international situations that would make it possible to forge the next link in the chain. This change would have to come from outside Palestine, such as military action from a state surrounding Israel. However, there were no expectations that this would happen in the foreseeable future. In practice, Hamas adopted the second path—waiting for change, which offers no answer to the question that is directly relevant to the present: what comes after the intifada?

The increasing strength of Islamic movements in the region during the late 1980s contributed, albeit indirectly, to the avoidance of this difficult question by raising hopes that the waiting time could be cut short and that external links in the chain leading to liberation could be forged. In particular, the growing power of Islamists in Algeria and the Sudan, in addition to Iran of course, had a strong impact on the minds and spirits of Islamist activists, who began to hope that a change in the regional

balance of power was about to occur. These developments offered Hamas a glimmer of hope on an otherwise bleak horizon, and the progress achieved by the Islamists in the Middle East encouraged it.⁶¹ Furthermore, the strength of the Islamists in Jordan and the strong representation that they won in parliament following elections in the late 1980s contributed to the tendency to avoid the difficult question of what comes after the intifada and to be content with a restatement of the principled position: from the Mediterranean to the Jordan.

Related to Hamas's call for the "historic solution" was the failure of the movement's leaders to offer a convincing answer to the question of what was to become of the millions of Jewish colonial settlers in Palestine. The most detailed explanation on this issue came from Sheikh Yassin, who suggested that all should live in equality in Palestine, but the majority should rule once all Palestinians who had been driven out or emigrated had been allowed to return.⁶² This idea, however, was not developed in terms of the right to self-determination, elections, and other civil rights measures that could have earned it international legitimacy. Nor did it constitute a cohesive view that Hamas could put forward, even as an abstract solution, which would have allowed the movement some room for maneuver and offered it some protection from the aggressive Israeli information campaign portraying the Arabs and Hamas as being bent on the destruction of Israel.

By analogy to the proposal formally adopted by the PLO in 1974 calling for a secular democratic state in all of Palestine—and thereby rescuing the PLO from the theoretical problem of what to do with the Jews in Palestine—Hamas has proposed a greater Islamic state in the region. This state would be established at a future date; Jews could live in it as citizens, but the proposal provides for no sovereign Jewish entity. The thinking was that the Jewish majority in Palestine would disappear once millions of Arabs in neighboring countries became part of this greater Islamic state.⁶³ This proposal was more an attempt to answer Islamic and hypothetical questions about what position to adopt concerning the status of Jews in the future than an effort to devise mechanisms for creating a functional modern, sovereign state with clearly demarcated borders.

To summarize: Hamas did not abandon its position of advocating the historic solution. That position was not eclipsed either but continued in tandem with the other position pertaining to an interim solution. Some-

61. Hamas's response to the successes of Islamic currents are discussed in chapter 4.

62. Sheikh Yassin, interview in *Al-Nahar*, 30 April 1989.

63. Sheikh Yassin, interview in *Sawt al-haq wal huriyya*, 5 January 1990.

times the historic solution took the lead, particularly during periods of great vigor as when the movement was launched, but it fell behind at other times, notably in the post-Oslo period, when Hamas came under attack.

Interim Solution with Armistice: A Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Since the first few months of its existence, Hamas has adopted a wavering position in favor of an interim solution in tandem with its core position calling for liberating Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan. The primary reason for this is that the movement was founded in the Occupied Territories, where Hamas leaders had a problem of openly declaring their central position, especially to the Israeli media. Broadly speaking, Palestinian resistance discourse in the Occupied Territories, as enunciated by the movements' leaders and central figures, has focused on terminating the occupation. Calls for the destruction of Israel or for liberating all Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan have been conspicuous by their absence, but such calls could lead to arrest on charges of incitement.

Hamas initially was the object of intense scrutiny by the media due to interest in a new and very energetic movement. The Israeli media in particular sought interviews with Hamas figures, as well as with those close to the movement on the understanding that they were Islamists, not that they were members of or spokesmen for the movement. Those interviews provide the first thoughts by Hamas and its leaders on the interim solution. Those ideas were rather hesitant, vacillating between the principle couched in the central position and the practical realities under which Hamas had to exist on a daily basis, the omnipresent Israeli military occupation that could not be defeated easily.⁶⁴

The harsh realities on the ground that made Hamas's historic solution akin to a dream rather than a political program compelled the organization to choose between two alternatives: a) either to deal with the full range of developments on the Palestinian scene, particularly the peace process that is very alien to its historic solution; or b) to turn its back on these developments because they essentially were linked to compromise settlements that Hamas rejected outright. In making its choice, Hamas tried to bridge the two so that it would gain a voice in developments while simultaneously emphasizing that "discussing details [of settlement plans]

64. Israeli media interviews with Sheikh Yassin are quoted and discussed later in this chapter.

does not signify acceptance of the plans themselves.”⁶⁵ These “details”—which greatly concerned Hamas in terms of its gains, losses, and potential role—included elections, the extent of Israeli withdrawal, the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, and the declaration of a Palestinian state; all constituted structural components for interim solutions.

Hamas’s “ideas” on an interim solution for the West Bank and Gaza Strip date back to the early months of its formation, taking shape in a proposal that Mahmoud al-Zahhar presented in March 1988 to Israel’s then foreign minister, Shimon Peres. At the time Zahhar was reputed to be a leading Hamas member in the Gaza Strip, but he did not act as an official spokesman for Hamas. Rather, he spoke in his general capacity as an Islamist who was close to the movement. The proposal in fact outlined both a short-term and long-term solution. Zahhar’s short-term solution involved four main points:

1. Israel would declare its willingness to withdraw from the territories it occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem in particular.
2. The Occupied Territories would be placed in the custody of the United Nations.
3. The Palestinian people inside and outside Palestine would name their representatives to the peace talks in whatever manner they choose. Israel may not object to the choice unless the Palestinians also have the right to object to the representatives of Israel.
4. At the time agreed by both sides, negotiations are to begin among the representatives concerning all issues relating to all rights.⁶⁶

Zahhar’s long-term solution called for discussing the final situation of the Palestinian problem within wider circles than the Palestinian and Israeli ones, specifically to involve the community of Islamic peoples at large. However, his proposal did not receive the political attention or the media coverage it deserved, despite its uniqueness and significance. Apparently this was because the proposal was presented at a time when Hamas lacked

65. Abu Marzouq, interview with author, 21 April 1995.

66. Zahhar in Zakaria Ibrahim, *Masharee' taswiyat qadhiyat filastin min 'aam 1920 hatta nihayat 'aam 1991* [Proposals for the settlement of the Palestine question, 1920–1991] (Gaza Strip: N.p., 1991), pp. 109–110. Ibrahim states that Zahhar presented the proposal to Peres, who had called Zahhar in March 1988 to discuss the causes of the intifada and Zahhar’s views of how to end it; Zahhar resubmitted the proposal to Peres in June 1988 in the presence of Dr. Ibrahim al-Yazouri, the secretary of the Islamic Assembly in Gaza, Dr. Riyadh al-Agha, and Zuhair al-Rayyes.

the significance that it enjoyed at later stages, an importance that would prompt other parties to pay more attention to what it had to say.

Hamas's political thought on an interim solution became sharper over time, and related references and ideas became more frequent in its discourse. This occurred in tandem with the advancement of the peace process and partly as a defensive means to counter the consequences of its military action. For example, the movement's representative in Jordan, Muhammad Nazzal, stated in January 1993 that Hamas was prepared to accept a peaceful solution in return for Israel's withdrawal from the territories it had occupied in 1967, so long as this was not conditioned on Hamas recognizing Israel.⁶⁷ However, the movement was unable or unwilling to resolve the ambiguities that emanated from remaining faithful to its fundamental historic position and accepting an interim solution. Nevertheless, it did reap political dividends by taking advantage of the maneuverability gained from the ambiguities in its position, creating a dual and contradictory image of a pragmatic and principled movement.

Hamas made its acceptance of an interim solution contingent on a number of ideological and factual conditions that helped to differentiate its position from that adopted by the PLO several years earlier. The former head of Hamas's Political Bureau summed up five pillars or guidelines on which Hamas based its support for an interim solution:

First, [Hamas] does not reject the interim solution on principle, but rather depending on the resulting entitlements. Second, the main dispute concerns recognition of the Zionist entity and its continued existence on the soil of Palestine. Third, in our opinion, the best method in practice to achieve progress beyond the interim solution, in terms of liberating parts of Palestine, is jihad and armed resistance, the most prominent example of which has been the Palestinian intifada. Fourth, there is a way of accepting an interim solution that is consistent with the *shariah*, namely, an armistice (*hudna*). This differs from a peace agreement in that the armistice has a set duration, and it does not require acceptance of the usurpation of [our] rights by the enemy. Fifth, the Palestinian people must be allowed to select the strategies determining its destiny through free plebiscites and unrestricted elections for a representative legislature [*al-intikhabat at-tashri'iyyah al-mutlaqah*]. They must be offered a choice concerning the proposals for a political settlement and the choice of an elected and representative leadership. Hamas will adhere to whatever the people choose—whether they choose to accept or to reject the political proposals before them—and will accept the results of the choice of leaders who will be the legitimate representatives of the people and

67. *Al-Rai'* (Amman), 31 January 1993.

who will be in charge of implementing the programs on the basis of which they were elected.⁶⁸

These guidelines will be discussed separately in order to place them in the context of the span of Hamas's existence, to explain how they have developed, and to show how they have been put into practice. Before doing so, however, it is essential to state that, while these guidelines are to be found either grouped together or scattered throughout Hamas's literature and in the statements of its leaders, their best materialization was the so-called April 1994 initiative of the movement's Political Bureau. This dealt with an interim solution, an armistice, and the establishment of a Palestinian entity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Its main points are as follows:

1. The unconditional withdrawal of the Zionist occupation forces from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including Jerusalem.
2. The dismantling and removal of settlements and the evacuation of settlers from the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem.
3. The holding of free general elections for a legislative body among the Palestinian people inside and outside [Palestine] so that they can choose their own leaders and their real representatives. This legitimate elected leadership alone shall have the right to speak for our people's will and aspirations. It alone shall decide on all the subsequent steps in our struggle with the occupiers.⁶⁹

The remarkable aspect here is that "these points are grouped together in the form of an agenda or initiative. This is the first time in Hamas's history that the movement provided a (non-historic) concept [of a solution] in the form of a proposal or an almost comprehensive solution."⁷⁰ The other new aspect was the external one, that is, the increasing concern with all things relating to Hamas. Thus, the April 1994 initiative received far greater attention than al-Zahhar's 1988 proposal had gotten. Simply stated, the movement had become a major political force, and considerable

68. Abu Marzouq interview, 21 April 1995.

69. Statement issued by the Hamas Political Bureau, 26 April 1994; for full text, see Appendix, document no. 4.

70. Khaled Hroub, "Harakat Hamas bayn al-sulta al-filastiniyya wa Israel: min muthalath al-quwa ila al-mitraqa wal sindan" [The Hamas movement between the Palestinian Authority and Israel: From the triad of power to the hammer and anvil]. *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya*, No. 18 (Spring 1994), p. 32.

attention was attached to the positions it adopted in view of the changing political context and developments at the Palestinian level and in Israel and the region. Bearing these points in mind, we now can examine the five pillars in detail.

Acceptance in Principle of an Interim Solution

The first pillar is not to reject the principle of an interim solution. The literature produced by Hamas during its first year, as well as the statements made by its leaders, indicate that the notion was accepted from the beginning and was not the result of the post-Oslo phase. If one follows Hamas's literature from the movement's formation, one finds a realistic attitude very early on, an awareness that the Palestinian "dream" cannot be realized immediately and an acceptance in principle of an interim solution. The best evidence of this is found in the statements of Sheikh Yassin during the first two years of Hamas's existence, before he was imprisoned. For instance, he spoke of his acceptance of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip "or on any inch of Palestine that we liberate . . . but without relinquishing our remaining rights" as a preliminary stage.⁷¹ In the same interview he rejected the view that there are not sufficient bases for a Palestinian state. Several years later (end of 1993) in his letters from prison, Sheikh Yassin once again reaffirmed his faith in a step-by-step or interim solution.

The debate revolving around an interim solution remained prominent in Hamas's discourse, but it was conditional on not making concessions regarding the fundamental position that all of Palestine was Islamic land. Theorizing continued to clarify the idea. The following excerpt from an interview with Muhammad Nazzal, a prominent Hamas figure in Jordan, indicates how far Hamas has moved in coming to terms with complex political reality:

We are not opposed in principle to a solution by stages. However, we also have grown accustomed to the use of the term "step-by-step" as a euphemism or cover for capitulation. We now are talking about an interim solution while ignoring the issue of Jerusalem or putting off discussion of the issue . . . The agreement does not address the question of Jerusalem either in a positive or a negative way. In the second place, in speaking of an interim solution, we would like the enemy to clarify his

71. Sheikh Yassin interview, *Al-Nahar*, 30 April 1989.

position regarding [Security Council] resolutions 242 and 338. Does Israel understand these resolutions to mean that it will have to withdraw and that a Palestinian state will be created? If these resolutions mean that, then “step-by-step” here refers to implementation in stages rather than negotiation in stages . . . but what guarantees will be sufficient to compel Israel to withdraw and establish a Palestinian state?⁷²

The Condition that There Should be No Recognition of Israel

The condition that there should be no recognition of Israel has been a constant factor in any interim solution acceptable to Hamas. It has appeared whenever an interim solution was discussed. However, the form in which this condition has been expressed has varied with time and place and according to the source. Official communiqués have continued to stress this point. Even in recent years, statements by Hamas concerning an interim solution and political initiatives have stressed this condition. Hamas leaders have expressed the same condition in various ways. In particular, Sheikh Yassin’s statements have employed two methods with regard to this issue. Prior to his arrest, he avoided giving a direct answer to the question of whether there should be recognition of Israel. This changed following his arrest. In the earlier period, when he used to dodge the question, neither accepting recognition nor calling for the destruction of Israel, he was accused of incitement and placed under arrest. The following excerpt from an interview is one of many available examples of this tactic on his part:

Q: Don’t you want a Palestinian state from the Mediterranean to the Jordan?

Y: I want a Palestinian state.

Q: Where will its borders lie?

Y: Palestine has well-known borders. Those are the borders of a Palestinian state.

Q: What of Israel then?

Y: Israel is in Palestine.

Q: Can you explain to us your concept of a Palestinian state?

Y: A Palestinian state should be established on every inch of Palestinian soil that we liberate, without any concessions regarding our remaining rights.

72. Nazzal interview, *Al-Ayyam*, 13 September 1993.

Q: Do you recognize Israel?

Y: If I were to recognize Israel, it would be all over. I would have no rights left in Palestine.

Q: What if Israel were to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza? Would you recognize it?

Y: We shall cross that bridge when we come to it.

Q: But should Israel be recognized in that event?

Y: It is up to the representatives of the Palestinian people to answer that.

Q: Who are they?

A: Those whom the Palestinian people shall elect.⁷³

In an interview with Israeli television, he linked the idea of recognition of Israel with the prospect of negotiating with Israel in the following manner:

Q: If Israel were to speak of the rights of the Palestinian people, is there a chance that Islamic groups would engage in a dialogue with Israel?

Y: We shall cross that bridge when we come to it. If [Israel] speaks, we shall speak. When Israel speaks we shall give our opinion of what it has to say.

Q: Does that mean the Islamic groups would be prepared to negotiate with Israel if Israel were to agree to do so?

Y: Israel is willing to negotiate with anyone, but on the terms and conditions it imposes. If Israel were to stipulate the terms and conditions that the Palestinian people want, there could be negotiations under those circumstances. However, it is too early to talk about negotiations.

Q: In principle, are the Islamic groups willing to negotiate with Israel?

Y: If Israel were to agree to grant the Palestinian people their rights and to make a declaration to that effect beforehand, then we could discuss the matter.⁷⁴

Sheikh Yassin's second approach was one of being more explicit about refusing to recognize Israel. This approach became characteristic of his

73. *Al-Nahar*, 30 April 1989.

74. Interview aired on Israeli television, 10 September 1988, and cited in *Al-Nahar*, 11 September 1988.

statements after his arrest, indictment, and trial for forming Hamas. In a brief interview with Israel television, as well as during his trial, Sheikh Yassin answered a reporter's question as to whether he considers Palestine from the Mediterranean to the Jordan to be Islamic land:

Y: That is a doctrinal question, and doctrine is an indivisible whole. According to the text of the Quran, "Praise be to the Lord who took His servant, whom We have blessed, on a midnight journey from the Holy Mosque to the al-Aqsa Mosque."

Q: And is jihad the path to that?

Y: Because we no longer have the means, we cannot get our rights either through peace or otherwise. What are we to do?⁷⁵

Forcing the Withdrawal of the Israeli Army and Termination of the Occupation

Hamas believed in a strategy of force to compel Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a belief that was central to the question of an interim solution. This strategy was based on the movement's view that Israel would not withdraw its forces completely, particularly from the West Bank, nor would it give Palestinians the minimum of their rights through peaceful means. Thus, Hamas's ideology requires it to force Israel to pull out its forces through an intifada and armed struggle. It relies on the logic of force "because force is the only language the enemy understands. Force is what convinced the enemy, following the years of the blessed intifada, to withdraw from every bit of our territory, which we turned into hell for him, his soldiers and his settlers. If that defeatist group which is in charge of the PLO leadership had put its energies in this direction, instead of wasting its efforts and its funds pursuing the path of defeat, then the enemy would have withdrawn under the blows of the *mujahidin*."⁷⁶

Hamas's political discourse indicates that the intifada provided a historic opportunity to apply unprecedented pressure on Israel from within. The cost of the intifada to Israel caused it seriously to entertain the idea of withdrawing from the Gaza Strip as a first step. According to Hamas, this idea would not have arisen "had it not been for the heroic resistance of the Palestinian people through the intifada with the Islamic forces at

75. Aired on Israeli television, 3 January 1990, and cited in *Al-Mujtama'*, 17 February 1990.

76. Hamas leaflet, "Sit sanawat min al-jihad al-'azim wal intifada al-mutawasila" [Six years of great struggle and continuous uprising], 17 December 1993.

their vanguard. This is due to the fact that the intifada received serious support, and all efforts were directed toward escalating the resistance and increasing its efficiency. [Had this line been pursued] instead of squandering those efforts in the theatrics of settlement, Israel would have been compelled to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, without [the Palestinians having to submit to] humiliating conditions, such as those that accompanied the Oslo Agreement."⁷⁷

Since the first year of the intifada, this belief can be seen in any reading of Hamas's objectives for the intifada and the movement's declared goals. Sheikh Yassin, in reply to a question concerning what he hoped to achieve through the intifada, said: "In the first place, I want a total Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, then to have these territories placed under the supervision of the United Nations. Afterwards, the Palestinians will be able to choose their representatives."⁷⁸

The Armistice

The idea of an armistice or truce (*hudna*) as part and parcel of an interim solution came up later in the history of Hamas and was not part of its position in the early years. It represented a new element in Hamas's political thought and its vision of the struggle as a whole. It is an exception to the general rule mentioned earlier that Hamas's positions on an interim solution are both new and old and are parallel to each other, appearing in new garb periodically but remaining unchanged in their essence.

Armistice refers to the idea of signing a truce with Israel for a fixed duration, such as ten or twenty years. During this period, both parties will undertake not to attack one another. According to Hamas, the basic difference between the concept of an armistice and a peace treaty is that the latter is not of limited duration but is open-ended. A treaty therefore would involve capitulation of Palestinian rights and acceptance of the usurpation of those rights by Israel, according to Hamas. In contrast, an armistice, while constituting a realistic acknowledgement of the imbalance of power favoring the other side, puts a freeze on the situation as far as rights are concerned. In theory it provides an opportunity to alter the balance of power, which could make possible an adjustment in the status of rights at the termination of the period.⁷⁹

77. Abu Marzouq interview, 21 April 1995.

78. Sheikh Yassin interview, *Yediot Aharonot*, 16 September 1988.

79. Sheikh Yassin, *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 1995.

The basic reference to an armistice occurs in Sheikh Yassin's letters from prison, referred to earlier. The letters include a dialogue with Talab al-Sane', one of the Arab members of the Israeli Knesset. In the passage quoted below, Sheikh Yassin speaks clearly about his vision of an armistice:

Q: What would you do if you were asked to sign an agreement with Israel?

Y: We could sign an armistice agreement for ten or twenty years on condition that Israel shall withdraw unconditionally from the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem, returning to the borders of 1967, and allowing the Palestinian people the full freedom of self-determination to decide their future.⁸⁰

After that exchange, the concept of an armistice assumed an important position in Hamas's political discourse and its vision of a solution. Most well-known Hamas leaders inside and outside the Occupied Territories began to refer to the concept. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, a Hamas leader inside the Occupied Territories, indicated his acceptance of the essence of Sheikh Yassin's idea: "With respect to the armistice as an interim solution, we are not opposed to the idea, because it safeguards the right of the Palestinians to demand that their homeland be returned to them. An armistice in this context means not recognizing Israel. Sheikh Yassin set a time limit on it, namely ten years, which is consistent with the Hudaibah truce and is not inconsistent with religious law."⁸¹

Among the leaders of Hamas outside the Occupied Territories, the April 1994 statement by Abu Marzouq is the most significant indicator of the adoption of the armistice principle: "As a resistance movement, it is our opinion that if the enemy's government wishes to extricate itself from this impasse, it should not seek to impose surrender on the Palestinian people. There could be a peace treaty or an armistice that would provide an exit from the complicated situation in the region and allow disengagement from the crisis."⁸²

The topic of an armistice assumed greater significance after the establishment of the PA and the arrival of its police in the Gaza Strip and Jericho in May 1994, in accordance with the Oslo Agreement. The new situation created a major dilemma for Hamas insofar as the continuation

80. Sheikh Yassin letters, *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

81. Quoted in *Al-Sabeel* (Jordan), 10 November 1993.

82. As quoted in *ibid.*, 19 April 1994.

of military operations against Israeli targets was concerned. The newly constituted PA (and of course Israel) considered these operations to be a major obstacle to progress in the peace process, particularly in relation to the transfer of authority in the West Bank. The PA asked Hamas to cease its military operations in the Gaza Strip and not to use it as a staging area; Hamas refused.

The continuation of activities by Hamas and the insistence by the PA of rigorously implementing the security aspects of the Oslo Agreement as a way of demonstrating its competence and of preparing for the next phase led to an escalation of tensions between them. These tensions almost brought Hamas and the PA to the brink of civil war. This situation gave new meaning to the idea of an armistice as a means of avoiding an explosive inter-Palestinian situation. "Armistice" assumed more significance for defusing potential clashes with the PA, in addition to its original relevance for the conflict with Israel. In this regard, one finds several initiatives by Hamas leaders, particularly initiatives by those inside the Occupied Territories such as 'Imad al-Faluji, a prominent Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip until he was expelled in December 1995. He proposed a cessation of attacks by Hamas for ten years on condition that Israel agree to democratic elections in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank; it withdraw from those territories, including East Jerusalem; and it evacuate the Jewish settlers.⁸³ In a similar vein, Nizar 'Awadallah (another Hamas leader who was released in 1995 after six years in detention) proposed "a necessary temporary armistice so as not to put the Palestinian Authority in a difficult situation. This is particularly so because no one was willing any longer to tolerate the existing state of affairs between the Authority and Hamas."⁸⁴

A statement on the subject of an armistice by Sheikh Yassin was made in mid-1995 (that is, one and one-half years after he first brought forth the idea) in an interview with *Maariv* newspaper during an intensive Israeli campaign against Hamas and a wave of arrests of its members. In response to a question concerning the prospects of peace with Israel, the sheikh said: "One can envision an agreement for a limited period, let us say 15 years, but not forever . . . I cannot commit future generations to that course of action. They will have to decide for themselves."⁸⁵ Limiting the armistice to a fixed duration was abandoned, practically speaking, when Sheikh

83. *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 6 March 1990.

84. *Ibid.*, 24 May 1995.

85. Sheikh Yassin's response to the Israeli journalist as reprinted in *Al-Hayat*, 3 June 1995.

Yassin invoked the possibility of “renewing” the armistice. Following his release from prison and in response to a question concerning the state of affairs at the end of an armistice, he said: “When the armistice expires . . . we shall look to see whether there still are unresolved problems between us. If there are outstanding problems, then the armistice is over. However, if the problems between us have been resolved, we will renew the armistice.”⁸⁶

The armistice concept also assumed special importance for the al-Qassam Brigades; the military wing of Hamas, particularly after the operations of 1994–95, which elicited widespread condemnation. In a series of communiqués, Hamas mentioned an “armistice” that would grant immunity to civilians from violence. Hamas stated that it would not target civilians, as long as Israel pledged to do the same.⁸⁷

Hamas’s concept of an armistice is not free of controversy. Debate on this subject centers on whether, in fact, there is such a major difference between an armistice and a peace treaty. The defenders of the armistice idea among Hamas’s cadres stress that it is of limited duration and can be timed to last until the *umma* overcomes its weakness. But the defenders of the peace treaty approach put forward the argument that a peace treaty reflects the balance of power at the time; any change in the balance (such as the overcoming of weakness) will reflect on the treaty, leading to its amendment or even its abrogation. Therefore, the difference between the two concepts simply may be a semantic one, despite the historical and religious legacy that the term *hudna* (armistice) connotes, but the term “peace treaty” lacks.⁸⁸

A Popular Referendum

The idea of a popular referendum has come to form an integral and important aspect of the interim solution idea for Hamas. As Hamas sees it, a referendum is the only mechanism that reasonably can lead to a national consensus or even a quasi-consensus on the issues that will determine the fate of the Palestinian people. It is clear that Hamas’s attachment to this idea stems from its belief that if such a referendum were to be implemented it would endorse its own popularity and bestow more legitimacy on its political agenda. Hamas leaders have used the referendum concept, in

86. Sheikh Yassin interview, *Filastin al-Muslima*, November 1997.

87. Hamas’s pledge not to target Israeli civilians is covered in greater detail in chapter 5.

88. Hroub, *Al-Islamiyyon fi filastin*, p. 40.

many forms and on many occasions, to defend their political ideas. By saying that they would back down if a majority were to support alternative ideas in a referendum, Hamas leaders have been able to maintain their positions for the time being. Sheikh Yassin has maintained ever since Hamas was founded that the will of the Palestinian people should be given top priority, even if it went against the views of Hamas, and even if it went against the Islamic form of a Palestinian state. He has stated clearly: "If the Palestinian people express their rejection of an Islamic state, I shall respect and honor their will."⁸⁹

Calls for a referendum have tended to coincide with important political events and rose to a fever pitch after the failure of the Washington talks subsequent to the 1991 Madrid Conference. Hamas maintained that the opinion of the Palestinian people should be consulted concerning this issue. Such consultation "only can be done through a general popular referendum inside and outside [Palestine] in an atmosphere that is free of pressure or coercion, so that the Palestinian people will have a say in whatever affects its future, determines its fate and the fate of generations to come."⁹⁰

Following this statement, Dr. Haidar 'Abdel-Shafi, the head of the Palestinian delegation to the Washington talks, called for a referendum of the Palestinian people to determine whether to continue with the negotiations. Hamas welcomed 'Abdel-Shafi's call, deeming it a victory for the movement's political stance: "'Abdel-Shafi's request for a referendum constitutes a basic change and an indication of the success of Palestinian popular pressure in making the people's position known. In the next phase, the Madrid/Washington team should reconsider its calculations and review its position and go back to the Palestinian people to ask them to decide the issue."⁹¹

This position was crystallized in the seminal April 1994 initiative by Hamas's Political Bureau, outlined above, which demanded general elections for a Legislative Council. The victors in those elections would decide the course for the Palestinians. In addition, the statements by the former head of the Political Bureau, which set the stage for the initiative, detailed the essential commitment to the choice of the people, no matter what it may be, and Hamas's readiness to abide by it. This was to be achieved

89. Sheikh Yassin interview, *Al-Nahar*, 30 April 1989.

90. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 90 of 5 September 1992.

91. Ibrahim Ghosheh, quoted in *Al-Quds*, 22 September 1990.

through “free elections in which the Palestinian people would choose their elected leaders, who in turn will express the aspirations of the Palestinian people regarding the future of the struggle. If Hamas wins the elections, it will implement its well-known position on the struggle. If Hamas is in the minority, it will express its opinion freely, but will respect the opinion of the elected majority.”⁹²

92. Abu Marzouq, *Al-Sabeel* (Jordan), 19 April 1994.

The Political Relations of Hamas with Palestinian Groups

3

The PLO as the umbrella of the Palestinian resistance groups and factions (*fasa'il*) always has been dominated by Fateh, the strongest and most powerful group, which is led by Yasir Arafat.¹ This fact makes it necessary to emphasize two important points at the outset. First, any discussion of Hamas's relations with the PLO is really a discussion of Hamas's relationship to Fateh. There have not been distinct differences in Hamas's policy toward the PLO and Fateh (or vice versa for that matter). Consequently, formal relations between the PLO and Hamas used to be reflected in the field as the mode of conduct between Fateh and Hamas, which quite often were characterized by patterns of tension and rivalry and sometimes even physical clashes. Thus, since its foundation,

1. The map of Palestinian national resistance organizations (*fasa'il*) always has been complex. New factions keep emerging, older ones splinter, and alliances and mergers occur. Aside from the Islamists, however, the Fateh movement always has dominated the national camp. Other groups, in terms of their relative strength and popularity, include the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC). A long list could be made of the factions with lesser influence and presence, especially in the Occupied Territories—the Palestinian Liberation Front (PLF), the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), the Arab Liberation Front (ALF), the Vanguard of the Popular Liberation War Organization (Sa'iqa), Fateh-Revolutionary Council, and the Communist Party (several splinters), among others. The Madrid/Oslo negotiations divided the Palestinian organizations into two camps between 1991 and 1993. Fateh and several smaller groups supported the peace process, while the PFLP, DFLP, and the PFLP-GC, as well as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, opposed the process. For a full and helpful “genealogical diagram of Palestinian organizations” see Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. XLII–XLIII.

Hamas has been bedeviled by the issue of what type of relations it should establish with this dual PLO/Fateh structure of Palestinian political hierarchy.

The first section of this chapter examines Hamas's relations with the PLO and Fateh. Four subsequent sections look at Hamas's political relations with the Palestinian Authority (PA), the other Palestinian factions, Palestinian Christians, and the Islamic movement inside Israel.

HAMAS AND THE PLO/FATEH

Hamas's options with respect to its relations with the PLO and Fateh have been limited and laden with political pitfalls. With respect to the PLO, three principal options were available: to join the PLO and work from within the organization, in hope eventually of taking it over; to work outside the PLO in the expectation of creating a credible alternative and replacing the organization in the long run; or to remain outside the PLO but not set itself up as a viable alternative, in effect to remain torn between the first two alternatives. With respect to Fateh, the general tenor of relations from the beginning of Hamas's existence—and even before Hamas was formed as a distinct organization—has been virtually continuous competition and a high degree of tension. This characteristic is present even in professional associations and universities, where intense competition surfaces during electoral campaigns for office. It also applies in the domain of politics and resistance and was especially visible during the intifada and resistance to occupation. The competition has historic roots dating back to the 1950s when Fateh split from the Muslim Brotherhood; that split created a bitter feeling among both the leadership and rank and file members of the Brotherhood, as discussed in chapter 1.

Before taking up these three alternatives, it is useful to examine the ideological position of Hamas with respect to the PLO and how that position has evolved since the founding of Hamas. In this process, we also shall analyze the PLO's position on Hamas and how it has evolved with time.

Hamas's View of the PLO

The position of Hamas with respect to recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people has passed through various stages in keeping with political developments, the peace process in particular. Hamas initially expressed some reservations in its Charter about recognition of the PLO. These reservations deepened with the convening

of the Madrid peace conference, leading to the movement's shelving of the recognition issue. In the wake of the Oslo and Cairo agreements, these reservations culminated in accusations of a total sellout on the part of the PLO and a Hamas declaration that the PLO no longer represented the Palestinian people or its aspirations. Hamas made clear, however, that its attacks on the PLO and its charges about the PLO having sold out the Palestinian people were leveled not at the organization as a whole but rather at its "power-usurping" leadership. Thereby the door was left open either for the implementation of the reforms that Hamas repeatedly advocated or for Hamas's participation in the PLO. It also is noteworthy that once the PA took control of the self-rule areas in mid-1994, the intensity of Hamas criticism of the PLO declined significantly. In fact, references to the PLO dropped out of Hamas's statements, and criticism came to be directed against the PA.

The initial position, which is made explicit in the Hamas Charter, was an amicable one: The PLO was spoken of in glowing and positive terms, and its departure from the Islamic position was treated with delicacy. The Charter described the PLO as being "as close as it could be to the Islamic Resistance Movement. After all, did it not include among its membership the fathers, brothers, relatives and friends of Hamas members? How could a good Muslim turn a cold shoulder to his father, brother, relative or friend? We have but one homeland, one affliction, one shared destiny, and one shared enemy." The Charter then addressed the PLO's "secularist line," criticizing it severely while attempting to leave the door ajar for some future development. "[T]he day that the PLO shall adopt Islam as a way of life, we shall be its soldiers and fodder for the flame with which it shall consume the enemy."²

Despite the lengthy discussion of the PLO, the text of the Charter does not offer a true and clear position concerning the legitimacy attached to the PLO's representation of the Palestinian people. Hamas's position on that issue is portrayed more accurately elsewhere, particularly in the "Interview with Hamas Leaders," published in *Muslim Palestine* magazine (in Arabic) less than a year after the publication of the Charter. The response to the magazine's query whether Hamas recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people proved to be an attempt to strike a precarious balance. The answer offered a clear endorsement of

2. The Hamas Charter; for an English translation of the complete text, see Appendix, document no. 2.

the PLO as “a nationalist framework for integrating the members of the Palestinian people, with their various leanings, and leading them to the total liberation of Palestine, as is stated in the Palestine National Charter.” However, Hamas did not endorse the PLO’s current political line, which it saw as a readiness to recognize Israel in return for the establishment of an independent state on part of the territory of Palestine.³

Hamas’s “Introductory Memorandum” is consistent with the position of reserved recognition for the PLO. In it, Hamas stresses that it is not setting itself up as a substitute for any one and expresses the view that the PLO represents a nationalist achievement that should be safeguarded. More significantly, Hamas declares that it has no objection to integrating itself into the PLO framework as long as the PLO remains committed to the liberation of Palestine and to nonrecognition of Israel.⁴ It is significant that the three positions outlined above were very carefully formulated and fall into a different category than the impromptu statements by Hamas leaders and prominent figures, which are subject to the pressures of the need to issue a statement or to the pressures of the moment.

When the Madrid Conference convened with the participation of the PLO in 1991, Hamas stressed its reservations regarding the legitimacy of PLO representation and ignored its earlier recognition of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. Hamas repeatedly declared that the PLO delegation, which had met with U.S. Secretary of State James Baker in preparation for the conference, “lacked legitimacy.”⁵ Hamas subsequently refused to recognize the legitimacy of the resolutions of the Palestine National Council (PNC) meeting in Algeria in September 1991; those resolutions endorsed participation in the Madrid Conference. Hamas’s position was that the PNC, as it was constituted at the time it made the endorsement, did not have the authority to adopt such a fateful decision on behalf of the Palestinian people. Consequently, Hamas held that any delegation formed on the basis of the resolutions from the Algiers conference was illegitimate and did not represent the Palestinian people.⁶

Nonrecognition of the legitimacy of the delegation to the Madrid Conference developed into reservations concerning the legitimacy of the PLO and its role as sole representative of the Palestinian people. These reservations clearly and prominently came out into the open at the January

3. *Filastin al-Muslīma*, May 1990, pp. 24–27.

4. Hamas, “Introductory Memorandum” (ca. 1993); see Appendix, document no. 3.

5. See, for example, Hamas, Periodic statement no. 77 of 3 August 1991.

6. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 79 of 7 October 1991.

1993 meeting between Hamas and the PLO arranged by Hassan al-Turabi in Khartoum, capital of Sudan. The Hamas position irritated Yasir Arafat, who was taking part in the meeting, and was one of the reasons why the meeting failed.⁷ Between the Madrid Conference in October 1991 and the Oslo Agreement in September 1993, Hamas's reservations concerning recognition of the legitimacy of the PLO strengthened. Following announcement of the Oslo accord, Hamas virtually denied the PLO any representative legitimacy, declaring that the PLO did not have a right to claim to represent the Palestinians because it had "abandoned Palestinian fundamentals."⁸ Later, after the PLO signed a second agreement with Israel at Cairo, the head of the Hamas Political Bureau at that time elaborated on the organization's views on this issue:

In the past, the legitimacy of the PLO and its right of representation stemmed from its close adherence to the unchanging national rights of our people and its defense of those rights. That legitimacy never was based on an electoral mandate or the free selection of a leadership for the people. Nevertheless, it had been acceptable to regard the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the people due to its close adherence in the past to the fundamental national aspirations of the Palestinian people and due to its well-appreciated struggle for liberation, self-determination, and the expulsion of the occupiers. However, now that the PLO has distanced itself permanently from those objectives—selling them out completely by signing the Oslo and Cairo agreements—and considering that new forces have appeared on the scene, mainly Islamic ones, which are more committed to our people's national aspirations, it is no longer reasonable or rational to adhere to the image of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative, particularly in the case of the clique that now exercises hegemony over the organization. This is particularly true because the PLO never enjoyed a prior electoral mandate; had there been such a popular mandate stemming from free and democratic legislative elections to give it legitimacy, the evaluation of this matter would have differed.⁹

The PLO's View of Hamas

The PLO's view of Hamas has to be deciphered from a number of positions—some of which complement each other, and others which are

7. *Al-Safir* (Beirut), 20 February 1993.

8. See, for example, Hamas's special statement issued after the announcement of the Oslo Declaration (Gaza-Jericho First Agreement) entitled "Al-Islah al-watani al-shamil huwa al-hal" [Comprehensive national reform is the solution], 28 August 1993.

9. Musa Abu Marzouq, interview with the author, Amman, 21 April 1995.

directly contradictory—that were formulated at different stages. There is considerable diversity in these positions, which range from pretending that Hamas does not exist (particularly true right after Hamas’s founding at the beginning of the intifada) to accusing it of operating outside the sphere of legitimate Palestinian action, and thereby serving the Israeli occupation in one way or the other. The PLO has acknowledged the power of Hamas and officially invited it to join the PLO and the PNC. It also has attempted to co-opt and weaken Hamas by promoting divisions within it or even attacking it.

These different attitudes on the part of the PLO toward Hamas sometimes overlapped; which one dominated depended on the circumstances and the dictates of changing policy. Thus, the simultaneous maintenance of disparate positions, encountered earlier with respect to the historic and interim solutions for the Palestinian problem propounded by Hamas, has an analogue here in the case of the PLO and its positions on Hamas. For example, Arafat has charged that Hamas was established with the direct or indirect support of Israel and has reiterated this accusation since the formation of Hamas, although the occurrence of such accusations seems to correlate with the amount of tension between Hamas and the PLO at any given time. Parallel to this, from the first appearance of Hamas in December 1987 to the holding of Palestinian elections in January 1996 and the subsequent formation of a Palestinian cabinet, the PLO has recognized Hamas as a force to be reckoned with and as having Palestinian grass-roots support. It has invited Hamas to join PLO organizations or the PA, both inside and outside the Occupied Territories. First, during the Palestinian uprising, the PLO invited Hamas to join the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada; later, in the post-Oslo phase, the PLO invited it to join the first Palestinian cabinet or subsequent cabinets at the time of reshuffles. Outside the Occupied Territories Hamas has been invited to join the PNC.

One crucial juncture that demonstrates how these positions intertwined was the period during which the PLO invited Hamas to participate in the April 1990 meetings of the preparatory committee working on reconstituting the PNC. This invitation was envisaged as a preliminary step to Hamas’s admission to the PNC and constituted the first official recognition by the PLO of Hamas as a nationalist Palestinian group that was due respect and had to be dealt with in that capacity. Hamas, however, declined this invitation. Three months later the PLO recognition was overtaken by a vituperous campaign, launched in *Filastin al-Thawra* (the official organ of the PLO), that accused Hamas of deserting the unity of nationalist ranks and of trying to deviate from “the commandments, the organic structure

and the laws of the Palestinian family.”¹⁰ Furthermore, the PLO’s statements focused on the idea that Hamas had been established to satisfy an Israeli aim, or at least that it had been established with the consent of Israel in order to weaken the PLO. This charge would evolve as Hamas’s relations with Islamic parties—notably Iran—developed, and the PLO’s statements, particularly those by Arafat, came to center on the accusation that foreign parties were meddling in Palestinian affairs through Hamas, which owed loyalty to foreigners.¹¹

However, prior to the Madrid-Oslo process, the PLO did extend recognition to Hamas and credited it with a role in the national struggle. Statements indicative of this position were made in tandem with other statements supporting the charges and allegations mentioned above. For example, Arafat expressed the view that Hamas has the right to adopt whatever opinion it chooses because that is consistent with “pluralism and the freedom of opinion.”¹² Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyyad) went even further, praising Hamas because “its base [of support] is among the purest of bases supporting the armed struggle.”¹³

With respect to the methods used to co-opt Hamas, a number of statements by the PLO, and by Arafat in particular, prior to the Madrid Conference asserted that Hamas was part of the PLO and that it was represented by a number of PNC delegates, who had attended the 1988 PNC session in Algiers, at which the Palestinian peace program was adopted.¹⁴ Later, when the PA was formed and elections were held for the Palestinian council, Arafat said that Hamas had participated in the elections and had won five seats,¹⁵ despite vehement denials of this by Hamas and its reiteration of its boycott of those elections. In addition, the PLO maintained constant contacts with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, in an effort by Arafat to convince the Egyptian Brotherhood to bring pressure to bear on Hamas either to ease up on its opposition or to rally to the banner of the PLO. Following the establishment of the PA in May 1994, the tactics of co-optation changed from offering to share power with

10. Quoted from the extended lead editorial in *Filastin al-Thawra*, “Likai la tadhi al-haqiqa: radduna ‘ala hamas” [That the truth not be lost: Our reply to Hamas], 8 July 1990. This editorial was especially important because it expressed the official PLO position in its official publication.

11. See, for example, Arafat’s statements in *Al-Quds al-‘Arabi*, 24 September 1992; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 28 February 1993; and *Al-Hayat*, 5 March 1996.

12. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 2 March 1990.

13. *Al-Watan al-Arabi* (Paris), 31 April 1989.

14. Interview, *Filastin al-Muslima*, August 1990.

15. Interview, *Al-Hayat*, 6 February 1996.

Hamas—by giving it a number of seats in the PLO—to creating divisions within Hamas by encouraging some of its prominent figures and rank and file to split off from the movement and establish a separate Islamic party (discussed below under “Hamas and the Palestinian Authority”).

Mention should be made of allegations by Hamas that there have been attempts to weaken it and to exile and sometimes to liquidate its members.¹⁶ For example, there were fights between PLO and Hamas members inside the prisons of the Occupied Territories during the first three years of the intifada.¹⁷ Because Hamas and the PLO each refrained from recognizing the other during this period, newly arrested Hamas members were deprived of an opportunity of joining a Hamas group in the prisons and detention centers, which were organized by the PLO. Only the resistance groups belonging to the PLO were recognized in the prisons, and each new inmate was required to join one of these organizations. Hamas and Islamic Jihad prisoners generally chose to join the cell blocs containing inmates affiliated with Fateh because this group was perceived as being ideologically closest to Hamas. Even though they had joined voluntarily, once in the Fateh cell blocs they were expected to participate in cultural and political programs for Fateh members and to adhere to instructions from Fateh leaders. Islamist prisoners refused to obey those instructions that they considered inconsistent with religious beliefs. Consequently, Fateh leaders imposed the same penalties on them that they imposed on others who violated the rules. This situation led to a bitter struggle between prisoners loyal to Fateh and those loyal to Hamas.

Conditions for a Relationship with the PLO

The Hamas Charter set as a condition for its participation in any organization belonging to the PLO that the latter abandon its secular line as well as its political agenda for a peaceful settlement with Israel. However, as Hamas gained experience and its political thought evolved, it began to focus solely on rejection of the PLO’s political agenda and what such a position required. Thus, Hamas tacitly acknowledged (although it never said as much verbally or in writing) that it had transcended its insistence that the PLO abandon secularism in order to be consistent with its own declared commitment to democracy and pluralism. This condition was

16. Ibrahim Ghosheh, interview with author, 26 April 1995.

17. These incidents are discussed in more detail below in the section “Relations with Fateh.”

conspicuously absent from the list of four Hamas conditions for joining the PNC. These conditions were that the PLO had to stop making one concession after another to Israel; that there should be no legitimization of the Zionist presence in any part of Palestine; that Palestinian organizations be allocated seats commensurate with the actual size of their membership; and that real democracy should be practiced with respect to freedom of expression for the leadership in the discharge of its responsibilities.¹⁸

Reality was, in fact, more complex than simply putting forward a set of conditions that, if satisfied, would have led to Hamas's automatic participation in the PNC and PLO. In actuality, the precise nature of the appropriate form of relations with the PLO has been the subject of major contention within Hamas and has given rise to a number of perspectives, each of which assumes different requirements. By monitoring the discourse and the practice of Hamas in this regard, it is possible to group these perspectives under the three major choices mentioned earlier: set itself up as an alternative to the PLO, work from within the PLO, or do nothing.¹⁹

It would be best to discuss each of these approaches in the light of Hamas's treatment of the possibility of its joining the PLO as laid out in the memorandum addressed to the PNC in April 1990. According to that memorandum, Hamas believes that it can deal objectively with the issue of participation in the PNC if a number of conditions are met. These conditions included most notably the PNC's adherence to the principle that Palestine from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River belongs to the Palestinian people by right. Other conditions were that the PNC refuse to grant legitimacy or recognition to the Zionist entity; that it endorse the military option; and that it grant Hamas a number of seats in the PNC commensurate with its perceived weight in Palestinian society and politics (which Hamas estimates at 40 to 50 percent of the total number of PNC seats).²⁰ Keeping these conditions in mind, one now can deal with each of the three choices envisaged by Hamas for its relations with the PLO.

18. For the text of the Hamas Memorandum to the PNC, dated 6 April 1990, see the Arabic version of this book, Appendix, document no. 4, pp. 318–21.

19. See further Khaled Hroub, "Hamas wa monazzamt al-tahrir: faradhiyyat al'alaqa" [Hamas and the PLO: Premises of the relationship], *Filastin al-Muslima* (September 1990): 24–26.

20. Hamas Memorandum to the PNC, 6 April 1990.

Option 1: Hamas could take over the PLO from within, join the PLO, change it, and “inherit it.”

This option is based on the fundamental assumption that it is possible to duplicate Fateh’s experience with the PLO after 1967. In the late 1960s, Fateh joined and then took over the PLO, changing it from an official diplomatic organization created by the Arab states into a guerrilla organization with a mass base of support. The premise of this option is that the current PLO (since the late 1980s) again has exhausted its agenda and no longer expresses the aspirations of the Palestinian masses or the rising generations, just like the early and official PLO in the late 1960s when it had run out of steam and no longer reflected the aspirations of the Palestinian people at that time.

Two sets of objections can be raised to this hypothetical situation, the first concerning issues of principle, the second having to do with practicalities. In addition, there are doubts as to whether the PLO in fact has exhausted its potential and whether the historical analogy is exact. The objections on principle concern the political direction adopted by the PLO after its exit from Beirut, a strategy that clearly relied on political and diplomatic action revolving around Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. This line of policy had become more acceptable among Arabs and Palestinians after the 1981 Fez summit. This tendency on the part of the PLO predated the formation of Hamas. It was a response to international as well as regional circumstances and to pledges of support given to the PLO by many parties provided the former chose to pursue the diplomatic path, publicly amended its position, and recognized Israel. Regional circumstances were propitious for the adoption of this line by the PLO; it did not have to buck the tide. With the adoption by the PNC of a peace agenda at its 1988 session in Algiers, the trend toward a settlement based on a two-state solution, which involved the explicit recognition of Israel, was consolidated. It was no longer feasible for the PLO to abandon this policy, as Hamas was demanding in order to capitalize on the opportunity offered by the intifada.

Following the Gulf War (1990–91), the tide turned against the Palestinian cause. The resulting Arab divisions led to further deterioration and indifference, which offered Israel an historic opportunity to embrace the Madrid process, which was built on the ruins of Arab solidarity. The absence of even minimal Arab cohesion suited Israel. Under the circumstances, retreat by the PLO from its role in the “peace offensive” was never a realistic possibility. Because the PLO could not seriously entertain a

demand to abandon the peace process, this meant there could be no reconciliation of the conflict of principle between Hamas's vision of an historic—or even interim—solution, which rejected any recognition of Israel, and the PLO's vision of a two-state solution, which involved recognition of Israel. Under the circumstances, the demand that Hamas submit to the PNC and the leaders of the PLO as a condition for its participation was impossible to satisfy.

In view of this hard reality, hypothetically the only option for Hamas was to agree to join the PLO while not endorsing the peace process and then to work from within the PLO to change things. This scenario encountered very complex objections that pushed the internal Hamas debate into considering the possibility of setting up Hamas as an alternative or rival to the PLO from the outset and then trying to replace it instead of joining it (see Option 2 below). The most important objections concerned the mechanism of participation and how well Hamas was to be represented in the PLO. Hamas demanded that elections should be the mechanism for participation in the PNC, because it believed this was the only way to get a true reflection of the level of Palestinian grass-roots support for any organization. If this proved to be unworkable, Hamas felt that estimates should be based on the results of elections such as those held by professional associations and student bodies or on the extent of participation in the intifada and the number of martyrs lost by Hamas or the PLO.

The PLO rejected both aspects of these methods as proposed by Hamas for determining the level of representation: the mechanism of elections and the principle of weighing popular support. It maintained that Palestinian elections would be very difficult if not impossible to hold, whether in the territories under Israeli occupation or among Palestinian communities abroad where the obstacles were legion. As for trying to gauge public support as Hamas had proposed, the PLO rejected the idea as being inconsistent with the method used to assign seats in the PNC. The seats are divided among three categories: factions in the resistance movement and other organizations inside Palestine, popular organizations and associations outside Palestine, and independents. Hamas belongs to the first category, but in that category Fateh is the largest organization and 40 seats are assigned to it. The second largest organization is the PFLP, which has 15 seats. The PLO proposed that Hamas should have a number of seats somewhere in between Fateh and the PFLP, which would have made it the second largest organization in the PNC. However, according to Hamas, the remaining seats—which number over 400—would be controlled directly or indirectly by Fateh, particularly in the case of the independents, who are

appointed by a special committee that is under the total control of Arafat.²¹ The seats reserved for the popular organizations, such as student and women's unions and professional organizations, are held by groups located in the Palestinian diaspora, where there are no organizations affiliated with Hamas. Thus, Hamas cannot join these bodies and compete for their elective leadership, which would provide opportunities to win seats assigned to them in the PNC.

In the final analysis, the normative and practical obstacles were of such a magnitude that a huge gap existed between the Hamas preconditions for joining the PNC and the PLO's responsiveness to those demands. The PLO offered Hamas between 17 and 20 out of more than 400 seats in the PNC; Hamas felt that this offer was "ridiculous" and did not merit consideration.²² This response put a swift end to the only serious attempt by Hamas to join the PLO and undermined the option of working from within the PLO. In fact, that option reached its nadir with the PLO's signing of the Oslo Agreement and the establishment of the PA, both of which magnified the disparity between the two sides and made the conflict more acute.

Option 2: Hamas could set itself up as a rival to the PLO, challenge its legitimacy, and become the alternative to the PLO.

The option of becoming an alternative to the PLO derived from a conviction that Hamas has no choice but to engage in a battle with the PLO over which one is the legitimate representative. Consequently, Hamas should present itself frankly and clearly as a replacement for the PLO. To do this, Hamas must be prepared in advance for the problems this position will cause at all levels. This idea never has been stated openly, but it can be read between the lines in Hamas's literature and its discourse. From this perspective, Hamas believes that it is an appropriate replacement for the PLO, particularly after the PLO abandoned the principles on which it had been founded and which served as the source of its legitimacy. Nevertheless, Hamas has been reluctant to move seriously in this direction, believing that a new national consensus is needed on the issue. Hamas

21. Ibrahim Ghosheh, interview with author, 26 April 1995.

22. Ibid.; according to Ghosheh, PNC chairman Sheikh 'Abdul-Hamid al-Sa'ih made this offer to Hamas in 1993.

should be part, even at the vanguard, of this new consensus but should not allow itself to be isolated in that position.²³

The PLO has responded angrily to scattered hints in Hamas's literature that the organization is presenting itself as an alternative to the PLO. Despite repeated denials by Hamas that it was putting itself forward as a replacement for anyone, the movement's discourse has continued to hover around this issue. For example, a booklet distributed by Hamas in the Occupied Territories described Hamas "and its great Islamic agenda, which makes it suited culturally and socially and in practice to forge unity among the Palestinian people through the establishment of justice and peace in the land of Palestine."²⁴ The PLO considered this passage to be a tacit notice by Hamas that it was setting itself up to replace the PLO, and the issue became the declared motive for a campaign against Hamas in the PLO newspaper, *Filastin al-Thawra*.

In fact, other Hamas writings revolve around the same issue, especially those issued after the convening of the Madrid Conference in 1991 and the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, for example, said that "the Palestinian people now have become leaderless, and therefore, it is necessary to find [new] leadership. If the PLO claimed that it represented the Palestinian people when it was pursuing the liberation of Palestine, then with what right can it claim that it represents the Palestinian people now that it has recognized Israel and given all of Palestine to it."²⁵ Accusations against the PLO intensified, and references to the unrepresentative nature of the PLO became more frank. For instance, one Hamas release stated: "Let the Oslo team . . . know that they do not represent our people, they are not even part of our people. Let them leave us alone, and our people will know what to do with our enemy. Our people are quite capable of choosing their representatives and leaders."²⁶ Similar assertions can be found in communiqués released by Hamas at heated moments, such as the one issued after the rally held to denounce the events of the so-called "Black Friday" (18 November 1994) during which 14 Palestinians were shot to death by Palestinian police at the Palestine Mosque. The communiqué maintained that the rally had been a popular

23. Abu Marzouq, interview with the author, 21 April 1995.

24. Hamas, *Bain 'alam al-waqi wa'amal al-mustaqbal* [Present pains and future hopes] (Chicago: International Center for Research and Study, 1991).

25. Quoted in *Al-Destour*, 13 September 1993.

26. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 110 of 3 April 1994.

referendum and a true expression of the will of the Palestinian people, who, Hamas believes, reject surrender and the Oslo and Cairo agreements.²⁷

Despite the indications cited above, there is insufficient evidence to support the claim that Hamas was determined to pursue this line to the end. References to replacing the PLO are not numerous and tend to be hesitant, whereas there are numerous flat assertions in its Charter and “Introductory Memorandum” that Hamas does not consider itself to be a replacement for anyone. Nor was there any practical way to translate into action the notion that Hamas is an alternative to the PLO. The only instance that approximates an attempt in this direction was when Hamas submitted a proposal to the ten Palestinian guerrilla organizations in the resistance movement after the Madrid Conference. The proposal called for the establishment of a body, “The Palestinian Higher Coordination Committee,” which was to have the task of coordinating the activities of opposition Palestinian organizations and supporting their efforts. The proposal only mentioned the PLO at the end of a presentation on the positive effect that the committee would have on the Palestinian cause in general. Hamas argued that the establishment of the committee would strengthen the hand of those organizations opposed to the political settlement and would minimize the concessions the PLO could make in the negotiations.²⁸ A number of the organizations, particularly those belonging to the PLO, expressed reservations about Hamas’s proposal, seeing such a committee as representing an encroachment on the prerogatives of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians. According to Abu Nidal al-Musallami of the PFLP, “from our side, we declare our categorical rejection of this proposal because it stems from a point of view claiming, in essence, that conditions are ripe to create an alternative to the PLO.”²⁹

Further, it became clear that international and regional circumstances, as well as the complexity of Palestinian alliance formation, convinced Hamas that trying to replace the PLO would be an arduous route. Nevertheless, this idea had taken root, and even Hamas leaders spoke of it. The legitimacy of the PLO and its status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people came to be based on international and Arab

27. Hamas, special statement, “Al-Islah al-watani” [National Improvement], 26 November 1994.

28. For the full text of this April 1992 proposal, see the Arabic version of this book, Appendix, document no. 7, pp. 328–31.

29. Quoted in *Al-Hadaf*, 17 May 1992.

recognition of the PLO to a much larger extent than it derived from recognition extended to it by the Palestinian people. Hamas believes that once the PLO responded positively to all the U.S. terms for a political settlement, the existence of the organization became necessary for the balance of power and for the policies and interests of the major powers in the region, which ultimately corresponded to Israel's interests.³⁰

Option 3: Hamas simply could refrain from adopting a clear position.

The third option means in practice that Hamas refuses to join the PLO framework but does not set itself up as an alternative. This situation is not new in Palestinian affairs; many other organizations also fall into this limbo. However, what is unusual about Hamas being in this position is its considerable power and weight in Palestinian affairs; this influence has made it possible for Hamas to consider the other two options. This "in-between" position has characterized the first decade of Hamas's existence. This option has its own theoretical implications, and it has had both positive and negative repercussions for Hamas.

At the theoretical level, the Hamas Charter gave no justification for the PLO or the other nationalist organizations to fear its creation, and it made an attempt to reassure nationalist forces in the Palestinian arena that Hamas would be a source of aid and support for them even though it remained outside the PLO framework.³¹ Later on, the movement took a closer look at itself and its activities outside the PLO framework and made public assurances that this situation did not imply that Hamas was going to clash with the PLO, as there was room for all groups. According to Hamas, it was working to bring about the unity of Palestinian nationalist ranks, and it was not setting itself up as a replacement for anyone. Furthermore, it reiterated that the PLO was a nationalist achievement which should be safeguarded, that it had no objections to joining the PLO framework on the basis of Hamas's well-known conditions, and that it banned the use of violence or armed force as a means of settling disputes in the national arena.³²

This choice on the part of Hamas—indecision—had several positive consequences for the movement but also had several negative repercus-

30. Ghosheh interview, 26 April 1995.

31. Hamas Charter; see Appendix, document no. 2.

32. Hamas, "Introductory Memorandum;" see Appendix, document no. 3.

sions. On the positive side, this option allowed the movement a great deal of flexibility and freedom in the political positions it could take and in the way it expressed itself. Such flexibility would not have been possible if Hamas had joined the PLO, because doing so would have limited the room for political maneuver, albeit bringing Hamas closer in line, relatively speaking, to the official position of the PLO. Nor would such flexibility have been possible if Hamas had chosen to set itself up as an alternative to the PLO, because that would have required Hamas to put forth a clear and detailed alternative political strategy in order to gain it legitimacy regionally and internationally. This option, too, almost certainly would have limited the room for political maneuver. In addition, the middle-of-the-road option of not adopting one or the other position allowed Hamas to maintain a modicum of relations and keep channels open to all parties, including the PLO itself. Thus, even though tension and competition dominated their overall bilateral relations, the fact that Hamas refrained from setting itself up as an alternative to the PLO permitted cooperation between them on issues of common interest at important historic junctures (such as when Israel exiled Islamist leaders to south Lebanon or when the PA assumed power in the Gaza Strip).

The indecision option did entail negative consequences. Most importantly, the middle-of-the-road position amounted to taking the easy way out, and Hamas did not gain any new political experience as a result. Throughout its existence, there have been hardly any junctures from which Hamas gained political knowledge. In effect, the movement is standing still, if not frozen in place. In contrast, the PLO has moved forward with the peace process and achieved a cumulative build-up of changes favoring its program, including the gaining of international and regional support for the line it has been pursuing.

Another negative aspect paradoxically arose from the growth in the influence of Hamas, particularly in the period just before the exile of Islamic leaders in December 1992 to south Lebanon and lasting for the duration of the exile, or about one year. Hamas carried out a number of military operations inside the Occupied Territories during this period, which corresponded to a slowing down of the peace process and the erosion of confidence in it. The growth of Hamas's influence gave urgency to the secret Oslo negotiations. PLO leaders wanted to curtail the growing influence of Hamas and to gain access to the territory of Palestine as quickly as possible. Consequently, haunted by the specter of losing its influence and control over grass-roots Palestinian support, the PLO made additional and otherwise unnecessary concessions to Israel.

HAMAS AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

Hamas's position on the Oslo Agreement, which provided for the establishment of the PA, was only verbally violent. Hamas did not use physical violence against the newly created PA in the Gaza Strip, nor did it exploit the weakness of the PA in its early days to undermine or impose its own conditions on it. It is true that the statements and releases by Hamas were accusatory and hostile in tone, but the translation of such positions into action remained ineffectual.

In the first year of the PA's existence, Hamas frequently approached the PA with verbal toughness. Many statements by the leaders of Hamas both inside and outside the Occupied Territories lay out the essence of this position. In brief, Hamas undertook not to use violence against the self-governing authority but instead to engage in opposition through peaceful means and to direct its military effort against Israel. Hamas did not deviate from this position even as tensions between it and the PA increased following the guerrilla operations launched from the Gaza Strip by the 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades against Israeli targets.³³ The PA was in principle responsible for security in Gaza and for preventing guerrilla attacks against Israel. Hamas-PA tensions reached a critical point on several occasions, particularly after wide scale arrests of Hamas members.

A second approach toward the PA was specific to the period of the arrival of the Palestinian police in the Gaza Strip. Hamas extended a warm welcome to the police officers and, because the PA had failed to make preparations for their housing and basic necessities, provided accommodations for them at its own school buildings and charitable societies. In that short "honeymoon," Hamas leaders heaped praise on the police, in the hope that this unexpected welcome would establish good will among the rank and file of security forces whose first task was expected to be to check Hamas's policy of armed attacks. Despite the tensions that arose between Hamas and the police a few months after their arrival into the area administered by the PA, Hamas continued to refer to the Palestinian police as comprising nationalist and honorable men who, in the final analysis, would take a stand alongside Hamas's fighters to defend the people from

33. Ibrahim Ghosheh, interview, *Al-Sabeel* (Jordan), 23 August 1994; see also the Hamas statement addressed to the Palestinian police after the 1995 Beit Hanoun incident, during which four Palestinian policemen were killed by Israeli soldiers, "Hawla al-majzarah al-sohyouniyya bi haq al-shurtah al-filastiniyya" [On the Zionist massacre of the Palestinian police], dated 3 October 1995.

Israel. Hamas continued to differentiate in this way between policemen as individuals and the police as an institution with a command structure, blaming the political leaders for the repression of and the campaign against Hamas.

The third—and most important—approach was at the level of official contacts with the PA in order to deal with the numerous conflict situations in the field. In the initial months following the establishment of the PA, Hamas went to some lengths to emphasize that the purpose of those contacts, as well as the occasional talks with Arafat, was to defuse situations and resolve unresolved issues, not to pursue a political dialogue.³⁴ Nevertheless, as isolated incidents proliferated in the Gaza Strip, more parties became involved, and these contacts gradually took on a political character. The visit by Arafat to the Islamic University in Gaza in April 1994, where he met with a number of prominent leaders of Hamas (albeit in their occupational rather than political capacities), was considered at the time an important turning point in relations between Hamas and the PA. In fact, the PA, in response to instructions from Arafat, had granted a publishing license to 'Imad al-Faluji, a prominent Hamas figure, to issue a weekly paper as the official organ for Hamas.

The fourth approach was to bring matters to the brink of civil war and to allow a variety of clashes to occur. This was a unilateral strategy employed by the PA against Hamas. The PA initiated numerous incidents in the form of campaigns of arrest, the closure of institutions belonging to Hamas, and the humiliation of some Hamas leaders, such as Mahmoud al-Zahhar; there were strong suspicions that security forces were involved in the assassination of members and commanders of the 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades, such as Muhyiddine al-Sharif. These incidents heated up the situation.

With time, Hamas felt a need for a dialogue to defuse the situation, particularly in the wake of each operation carried out by the Qassam Brigades inside Israel. Immediately after each incident, the Israeli authorities vented their fury at the PA, accusing it of allowing Hamas elements to plan and prepare for their operations from within the area controlled by the PA. As its operations began to require greater sophistication, Hamas's four approaches for dealing with the PA became conflated. It

34. See the clarification issued by the Hamas Political Bureau about a meeting between its leaders and the PA, dated 21–22 September 1994; the meeting was attended by Mahmoud al-Zahhar and Ismail Haniyah representing Hamas and Arafat, Al-Tayyeb Abdul-Rahim, Zakhariya Al-Agha, Mohammad Dahlan, and Abdullah Al-Ifranji for the PA.

retained verbal attacks while attempting to neutralize the Palestinian police, and it liaised with the PA to resolve problems in the field even as its activities verged on the brink of civil conflict. It became obvious that Israeli pressure on the PA made it impossible to avoid the need for a political dialogue to deal with the central problem facing both Hamas and the PA: the continuation of Hamas's operations against Israel and their effect on the PA and Hamas. Hamas announced its readiness to conduct with the PA a comprehensive dialogue with an open agenda.³⁵ In fact, even as tensions reached a zenith, Hamas kept open its lines to the PA through the mediation of Sheikh Sayyed Abu Musameh and 'Imad al-Faluji, who ceased to represent Hamas policies after being expelled from the organization in December 1995 due to his political position that Hamas had to participate in the PA's power structure.³⁶

The second half of 1995 passed somewhat peacefully, particularly because operational activities by Hamas virtually ceased, due either to technical reasons—as Hamas claimed—or to an unwritten agreement between Hamas and the PA. The “understanding” was meant to calm the situation and allow time for the PA to develop and to propose a plan for normalizing bilateral relations. This exceptional period of quiet and the continuation of the dialogue led to a major reconciliation effort between the PA and Hamas in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum at the beginning of October and to a major round of talks in Cairo at the end of December.

The talks in Cairo, at which Arafat personally headed the PA's delegation and to which Hamas sent an enlarged delegation representing the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and communities abroad, were a truly extraordinary event. They occurred at a very sensitive juncture for Hamas and Palestine as a whole: the redeployment of the Israeli army in the West Bank outside of the cities, villages, and refugee camps had begun; and elections for the Legislative Council of the PA had been set for 20 January 1996. Furthermore, the venue of the meeting had regional significance, was indicative of Hamas's importance, and boosted its prestige. While the PA came to Cairo in the hope of convincing Hamas to halt, or at least to freeze, its guerrilla operations and to participate in the elections, Hamas hoped that the dialogue in Cairo would be the beginning of a “sound” relationship between itself and the PLO.³⁷ More specifically, Hamas did not

35. Ibrahim Ghosheh, *Al-Destour*, 23 April 1995.

36. See further Hamas, Press statement, 10 December 1995.

37. Hamas leaflet, “Tasrih sahafi howl al-hiwar ma'al-sulta al-filastiniyya” [Press release about the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority], 12 December 1995.

bring to the table a clear and specific political agenda, apart from demanding the release of Hamas detainees and a condemnation of repressive measures used by Palestinian security forces.

The Cairo meeting did not fulfill the expectations it had created. It only produced a few general declarations expressing support for national solidarity, condemning internecine fighting, urging the use of dialogue for dealing with each other, and encouraging all efforts to be directed at securing the release of prisoners in Israeli jails; a joint committee was formed to deal with emergencies.³⁸ Apart from these generalities, both sides made a few commitments. The PA promised to release detainees, let up the pressure on Hamas, and resort to dialogue; Hamas promised not to campaign for a boycott of the coming elections, declaring that "its aim was not to place the Authority in an embarrassing position."³⁹ The PA interpreted this declaration as a temporary commitment to freeze guerrilla operations.

Hamas kept its word during the January 1996 elections for the Legislative Council. It did not call for a boycott of the elections, although it boycotted the voting itself. Nor did it carry out any operations before or during the elections, despite the assassination of the head of its military arm, Yahya 'Ayyash, two weeks before the elections. Although the assassination produced a charged atmosphere once again, and unknown dangers loomed, it seemed briefly that developments were headed in a new direction.

The situation changed once again when Hamas carried out its promise to seek revenge for the assassination of 'Ayyash by carrying out a number of suicide bombings in Jerusalem, 'Asqalan, and Tel Aviv only ten days after the elections. Hamas and the PLO were back to square one. In the wake of these bombings, relations between the two sides reached their nadir. The PA mounted a large-scale campaign of arrests of Hamas members; 900 were jailed, including some of its important leaders. Hamas was harassed, several charitable institutions belonging to the movement were closed, and Hamas's activities were restricted. The campaign spread in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, particularly after the March 1996 Sharm al-Sheikh Conference. In an unprecedented incident, the Palestinian police raided al-Najah University in Nablus on 3 March 1996 and arrested the student

38. Final Communique of the Cairo Dialogue Meeting, dated 21 December 1995; it was signed by Salim Za'noun, head of the PA delegation, and Khaled Mash'al, head of the Hamas delegation.

39. *Ibid.*

union board, which was dominated by Hamas. They fired on the president of the student union, Muhammad Subha, and arrested him. In brief, 1996 was a very bad year for Hamas in view of the blows it received from Israel and the PA.

At this stage the dialogue broke down, but it resumed in 1997 and took on new life after the peace process ran into trouble due to the intransigence of the Benymin Netanyahu government and its refusal to carry out Israeli obligations under the Oslo Agreement. The PA met in so-called national dialogue sessions with guerrilla groups opposing the peace agreement, notably in Nablus in April 1997 and in Ramallah in August of the same year. Hamas boycotted the first session, demanding the release of its detainees as a precondition for participation, but it sent a large delegation to the second one. These talks did not yield tangible results. The PA wanted to use them to demonstrate to Netanyahu that it had other options, while Hamas saw them as yet another opportunity to express its rejection of the Oslo Agreement.

Having examined Hamas's views and how it conducted relations with the PA, it now is appropriate to review the perspective of the PA, particularly the evolution of its position on Hamas. In the first year of its existence, the PA proceeded cautiously and cunningly to build a firm base for itself. The first two months were spent in getting acclimatized to the homeland and taking the pulse of the opposition. As the security forces consolidated their presence, the PA gradually asserted its authority over the opposition. It adopted an increasingly hard line, particularly on such issues as confiscating arms and tracking down military cells belonging to the opposition, although it avoided addressing these subjects publicly. In tandem with this line, the PA sought to co-opt the opposition. It offered Hamas four positions in the leadership of the PA, which was the same number of seats held by Fateh, and sought to persuade it to accept this offer; Hamas refused.⁴⁰ The PA nevertheless opened lines of communication with prominent figures in Hamas, seeking to soften the movement's position on participation in power and in the forthcoming elections. On occasion, to promote the same objective, the PA waged a media campaign against Hamas, questioning its loyalty by accusing it of cultivating relations with Iran and owing allegiance to a foreign power. This increasing pressure on Hamas forced the latter to retreat. The PA scored points against Hamas by capitalizing on the very real dilemma in which the movement

40. Ghosheh interview, 26 April 1995; see also *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 1 June 1994.

found itself. Either Hamas could pursue guerrilla activities, risking a clash with the PA that might lead to civil war, or it could freeze such activities, which would undermine its credibility in pursuing a resistance alternative. This was a bitter choice for Hamas, particularly because—at least in the short term—time worked to the advantage of the PA, which proceeded to consolidate and multiply its security forces and to sink its roots into Palestinian society.

The red line that Hamas had drawn for itself in order to avoid a civil war at any cost encouraged the PA to continue along the same line of policy, confident that Hamas would not retaliate through violent means no matter how far the PA went, which was in fact an accurate assessment.⁴¹ Hamas did not retaliate for the “Black Friday” incident in which fourteen of its supporters were shot to death by the Palestinian police. It did not retaliate for the assassination of its military wing leaders—Kamal Kahil, who was killed on 4 April 1995; ‘Omar al-A‘raj and ‘Abdullah al-Razainah, who were killed in May 1996; and Muhyiddin al-Sharif, who was killed on 29 March 1998—despite the involvement of PA agencies in their assassinations. Nor did it retaliate for the arrest and interrogation of scores of its members, including prominent Hamas figures such as Muhammad Sham‘ah, al-Zahhar, and Abu Musameh and the shaving of their beards in order to humiliate them while in detention. Hamas also did not retaliate later when the PA mounted raids on its mosques, agencies, and even the Islamic University.

The PA had seized the initiative, and it proceeded to besiege Hamas’s traditional centers of influence, such as the mosques, charitable societies, and institutions in civil society. Restrictions were placed on sermons, the use of mosques (which the PA had placed under the control of its religious endowments agency, or *awqaf*), and the activities of alms collection (*zakat*) committees; other Islamic institutions that were influenced indirectly by Hamas were placed under close scrutiny. Meanwhile, Hamas had no way of fending off the PA attacks, which came from all sides. It could do no more than issue press releases condemning what was happening.

The PA was so anxious to establish its authority over Palestinian society that its violations of liberties in certain areas actually exceeded those committed under direct Israeli occupation. On one hand the PA was under direct pressure from Israel to crack down on Hamas, pressure that became particularly intense following the suicide bombings in March and April

41. Discussed earlier in chapter 2.

1996. On the other hand the PA took advantage of the international green light emanating from condemnation of the suicide bombings. The reaction to the bombings culminated in the March 1996 antiterrorism summit at Sharm al-Sheikh in Egypt and gave to Israel and the PA free rein to take any measures they chose against Hamas without being called to account by world public opinion.

Another approach that the PA used against Hamas was to try to split the movement by encouraging some of its members to form an independent Islamic political party which would attract religious elements from Hamas itself as well as its supporters. The party would share power with the PA, either directly through membership in governing institutions or indirectly by putting up candidates for the elections to be organized by the PA in accordance with the Oslo Agreement.⁴² Hamas leaders pointed out that Arafat had used the same tactics against other factions in the Palestinian resistance movement in Jordan and Lebanon, but they maintained that this method would not work against Hamas because “its roots run much deeper than Arafat thinks,” and the first decade of Hamas’s existence proved that the movement was able to withstand both internal and external pressures to dissolve it.⁴³

In brief, the PA’s strategy of gradually tightening the noose around Hamas at all levels was meant to weaken the movement militarily and politically and to undermine its grass-roots support, as well as to contain its influence. The PA carried out sweeping campaigns to arrest members of cells belonging to the ‘Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades. It also blamed Hamas for the delay in the withdrawal of Israeli troops from, or their redeployment in, the West Bank. It even accused Hamas of being in cahoots with the Likud Party to help get Benyamin Netanyahu elected and to secure the defeat of the Labor Party and Shimon Peres in May 1996. In other words, it charged Hamas with torpedoing the peace process, in addition to being allied with Iran. The PA also tried to cut off Hamas’s grass-roots support by controlling its popular services, charitable work, and links with the mosques.

42. See further Khaled Hroub, “Hamas: la mafarr min al-hizb al-siyasi fil-nihaya” [Hamas: in the end, there is no getting around the formation of a political party], *Al-Hayat*, 28 June 1995; see also *Al-Hayat*, 15 January 1996. Three Islamic parties (the National Islamic Path Party, the National Islamic Union Party, and the National Islamic Salvation Party) were formed, most of whose founders were former members or close associates of Hamas.

43. Ghosheh interview, 26 April 1995.

HAMAS AND THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE ORGANIZATIONS

The Ideological Dimension

The Hamas Charter treats the issue of relations with Palestinian resistance organizations more as a moral than a political issue. Under the section "Patriotic Movements in the Palestinian Arena," the Charter explains that there is mutual respect between Hamas and these groups; Hamas understands the circumstances under which these groups emerged and developed, respects them as long as they do not owe allegiance to either the "Communist East" or the "Crusading West," and expresses readiness to cooperate with them to resist Israeli occupation.⁴⁴ In practice, however, this theoretical position is divided into two different attitudes: one for those organizations that are in the same camp (as Hamas) of opposition to the political settlement; and another attitude toward those organizations, notably Fateh, that support the peace process. Nevertheless, the basic way in which Hamas's position has been translated into action has been to acknowledge fully the contribution of these organizations to the struggle against occupation and to transcend ideological and theoretical differences with them while cooperating with them on the basis of resisting the occupation. Transcending those differences has meant overcoming a period of bitter competition and occasional clashes between the Palestinian Islamists and leftist or nationalist variants of the patriotic movement. This new position gained significance when the Islamists eagerly and in large numbers took up direct resistance.

The resistance organizations, for their part, viewed the participation of the Islamists in the resistance effort with some misgiving. Among them also were two trends: one was specific to Fateh, which experienced intense competition for Palestinian grass-roots support; the second attitude, among the resistance organizations opposed to the peace process, was one of ambivalence, amounting to a reserved welcome for Hamas. These two trends united in asking Hamas to participate in the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada, which had been selected by the PLO to lead the intifada; after 1991, they asked Hamas to join the PLO and work from within that organization. The two trends differed in how they welcomed Hamas's effort in resisting the occupation. Fateh considered the activities of Hamas

44. The Hamas Charter; see Appendix, document no. 2.

a hindrance to peace negotiations and, consequently, contrary to the general national interest. This was particularly so as the peace process gained momentum, and rounds of negotiations in Washington (and secretly in Oslo) led to the agreement concerning Gaza and Jericho. In contrast, the organizations opposed to the peace process viewed Hamas's activities as well-guided patriotic resistance efforts directed against the Israeli occupation, and therefore in the service of the national cause.

Ideological enthusiasm for the entry of the Islamists into the arena of direct resistance thus varied from one resistance organization to the other, ranging across a spectrum from warm welcome to a cool political response to acceptance of the fact with reservations. Recalling the prior absence of Islamists from the resistance arena, George Habash, secretary general of the PFLP, spoke with notable enthusiasm about Hamas:

From the ideological position of total confrontation, I welcome Hamas joining the swell of total resistance to the Zionist enemy. Whoever is familiar with that (Islamic) movement—its slogans, its priorities, and the ambiguities that beset the occupied territories because of the positions it has adopted—and compares that with its position today, after the intifada, cannot but notice a huge difference and has to welcome warmly its joining the nationalist movement. There can be no doubt but that the participation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the battle is a victory for the nationalist struggle and a boost to the popular uprising.⁴⁵

However, the secretary general of the DFLP, Nayef Hawatmeh, was more reserved, remarking that Hamas's conduct in its early years was at odds with the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada. Hawatmeh believes that Hamas should have joined the Unified National Leadership, and thus it would have been possible to accept Hamas with its agenda as a way of adding variety to that body.⁴⁶

The other response to Hamas among resistance organizations, as represented by Fateh, is that of chronic reluctance. It draws an indirect connection between the rise of Hamas and Israel's plans. While acknowledging a certain amount of inevitable coordination with Hamas, Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), the third most important PLO leader during the intifada, argued that Hamas tried to be an alternative to the Unified National Lead-

45. Quoted in *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 1990, p. 12.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

ership and that the Islamists and Israelis both placed their hopes on that alternative. Although Khalaf did not postulate a link between Hamas and Israel, he did believe that Israel tried to use Hamas to undermine the Palestinian national movement.⁴⁷

Because Hamas was established when the intifada began and was linked organically to the uprising, it was necessary and politically inevitable that it should form a common front with certain Palestinian resistance organizations. This was particularly so as the pace of the peace process picked up in tandem with the intifada and as a Palestinian peace program was put forward and a Palestinian state declared at the 1988 PNC session in Algiers. Subsequent political developments, the Madrid Conference in particular and then the Oslo Agreement, gave rise to a conviction concerning the need for coordination with the other resistance organizations. Moreover, after years of familiarity with these organizations, Hamas came to realize many things, which led to the evolution of its philosophy and to a new perspective on how to deal with them. The most important realization was that the historic stage through which the leftist and nationalist resistance organizations opposed to the peace process were passing made it unwise to depend unconditionally on the alliance, particularly with regard to the question of having a practical impact within Palestine. In view of their performance compared with Hamas in opposing the Oslo Agreement, it became clear to Hamas that opposition to stop or undermine the agreement was ineffectual because many of the opposition forces had been transformed into organizations with complex motives.⁴⁸ Sheikh Yassin said as much in describing the opposition, stirring up strong criticism from Palestinian resistance organizations allied with Hamas in the ten *fasa'il* grouping. In his letter from prison at the end of 1993, Yassin presented his opinion concerning a united opposition front. He expressed his suspicions that this motley opposition was capable of putting its own interests above all else, of turning on Hamas at some point, and of effecting a reconciliation with Arafat. What really drew the ire of the opposition resistance organizations was the sheikh's suggestion that Hamas should be cunning, openly pragmatic, and utility maximizing in its dealings with them.⁴⁹

47. Ibid.

48. Abu Marzouq, interview, *Al Sabeel* (Jordan), 30 November 1993.

49. Sheikh Yassin, Letters from Kfar Yona prison to the leaders and members of the Hamas movement, 3 October 1993; published in *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

The Practical Dimension

In order to simplify the study of Hamas's political conduct toward the Palestinian resistance organizations, this study focuses on relations at three crucial levels: (a) with Fateh both inside and outside the Occupied Territories (Fateh is the single largest resistance organization and occupies a position on the other end of the political spectrum from Hamas); (b) with Palestinian resistance organizations opposed to the peace process (this perspective should clarify Hamas's dealings with opposition forces because these organizations are at the opposite end of the ideological spectrum from Hamas, despite the strong common denominator of their political positions); and (c) with Islamic Jihad, which has strong similarities in its ideologies and political positions.

Relations with Fateh

The general characteristic of relations between Fateh and Hamas ever since the latter was formed—and even before that—has been virtually continuous competition and tension. This situation applies even in relatively peaceful settings, such as universities and professional associations, where the competition is openly manifested only during elections for offices. It also applies in the domain of politics and resistance, where it was particularly visible during the intifada and resistance to the occupation.

No one expected relations between Hamas and Fateh to take a different course, given the sources of conflict between them. Naturally, there is the added dimension of a power struggle between two parties that are more or less equal in strength, irrespective of the circumstances or the type of activity in which they are engaged. In this respect, since the outbreak of the intifada at the end of 1987, they have been two virtually equal forces in terms of mass following and organizational strength. They both compete for Palestinian grass-roots support, using everything in their power and pitting slogans against slogans, in order to win the competition. Fateh raised the slogan of harnessing the intifada to secure an independent Palestinian state in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, the strategy endorsed by the PNC in 1988. In contrast, Hamas defied the harsh reality of occupation by raising the slogan of not surrendering a single inch of the territory of historic Palestine, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan, and calling for the total condemnation of the legitimization of Israel's presence in the territories occupied in 1948.

This competition has historic roots that go back to the 1950s, when Fateh split from the Muslim Brotherhood, creating a bitter feeling among the leadership as well as the rank and file of the organization. Fateh was kept under close scrutiny. Even as it grew, the Muslim Brotherhood expressed reservations about Fateh, denouncing its secularism and irreligiosity, as well as the atheism characteristic of the leftist Palestinian resistance organizations in general. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Palestinian Islamists in general—despite their weakness and small numbers—were condemned by Fateh and other resistance organizations for not becoming directly involved in the resistance to the occupation (see chapter 1). These charges and countercharges strained relations on an almost permanent basis. The intifada barely succeeded in defusing that tension, although it did put an end to charges by Fateh and the nationalist groups that the Islamists were shirking their responsibility for military resistance to the occupation.

After the creation of Hamas and the surprisingly swift increase in its strength, it entered into competition with Fateh for support at the Palestinian grass-roots level. The charges against Hamas changed from fence sitting to trying to create an alternative to the PLO and trying to unravel the achievements of the PLO and its mainstay, Fateh. At one period Hamas was accused of being the handiwork of Israel and of serving the interests of the occupation. At a minimum, Hamas had to contend with nonrecognition. However, these accusations and lack of recognition by Fateh did not prevent Hamas from attempting a rapprochement with Fateh. On several occasions, it invoked Fateh's patriotic history in a bid to encourage it not to accept a settlement with Israel, such as in the message it sent to Fateh's fifth congress in Tunisia in September 1989.

The refusal of Fateh to recognize Hamas was one of the main reasons for the strained relations between them and why their relations deteriorated into conflict and fighting. Recognition here does not entail simply a question of legitimacy. As mentioned earlier, one consequence of nonrecognition in the Occupied Territories and in Israeli prisons and detention centers was to deprive the newly arrived prisoner of the opportunity to join the same group he had belonged to outside prison. Palestinian tradition in Israeli prisons required a newly sentenced inmate to join a prison group identified with one of the major organizations, such as Fateh, the PFLP, or the DFLP. These and other organizations belonging to the PLO were the only ones recognized in prisons. Even four years after the outbreak of the intifada, Hamas prisoners had not been granted the right to form their own organization in prisons, and Hamas was not on the recognized list shown

to new prisoners. Because of this, prisoners belonging to Hamas or Islamic Jihad used to choose to join the cell blocs for inmates affiliated with Fateh—it was the closest group ideologically to their own. In these cell blocs, they had to join cultural and political programs for Fateh members and had to adhere to instructions from Fateh prison leaders because they had joined voluntarily. Islamist prisoners did not obey all these instructions because they considered some of them to be inconsistent with Islamic beliefs. When the “leaders” imposed the same penalties on them as they did on others who violated the rules, this led to a bitter struggle between inmates loyal to Fateh and those loyal to Hamas. The conflict spread to outside the prisons, prompting a series of clashes between the two sides, particularly during the second half of 1991 and again in 1992. The clashes connected to the situation in the prisons cast a shadow on relations between Fateh and Hamas for a long time. The problem did not begin to abate until a code of honor was signed between the two sides in 1992, following some bloody clashes.⁵⁰ Among the most important provisions of that document was a recognition of Hamas’s right to establish its own prison organizations and to be represented in the Higher Struggle Committee in each prison and place of detention.⁵¹

After each wave of clashes between Hamas and Fateh in the Occupied Territories, talks were held to end the fights. These talks often took place in the Occupied Territories, but also were held abroad. The talks, particularly those held abroad—where the conferees did not have to operate under the same restrictions as in the Occupied Territories—expanded to cover topics beyond the clashes, notably the question of the participation of Hamas in the Unified National Leadership of the Intifada and the peace process.⁵² Discussions about paths to a peaceful settlement were futile, due to the wide disparity in viewpoints. Fateh was engrossed in the peace process, while Hamas rejected the whole idea. However, the talks about the participation of Hamas in the Unified National Leadership were more

50. For an official statement about the honor code, see “Hamas taziffu bushra al-irtifaq li sha'bina wa ummatina” [Hamas brings good news of the agreement of our people and our community], dated 14 July 1992.

51. The Higher Struggle Committee is found in every detention center and comprises a representative from every organization. Its task is to coordinate relations and to supervise some services inside the detention center in addition to resolving problems that may arise among the detainees.

52. For details on the Hamas-Fateh talks, see Khaled Hroub, “Sijill bi-tarikh al-liqa'at bain harakat hamas wa qiyadar fateh” [An index of dates and meetings between the Hamas movement and the Fateh leadership], *Al-Hayat*, 16 October 1993.

promising, with Hamas itself submitting a proposal to Fateh and the other resistance organizations containing a formula for joint leadership that would include all resistance organizations participating in the intifada. The Hamas proposal also included some difficult conditions with respect to a joint political position on a peace settlement, and these doomed the proposal. In particular, Hamas demanded that the proposed joint leadership of the uprising not only reject all existing plans for a settlement, but that it also work to defeat such plans.⁵³ Generally, these meetings produced little more than joint releases that were directed at the followers of Fateh and Hamas in the Occupied Territories and called on them to refrain from internecine combat and to direct their efforts against the Israeli occupation.

In practice, none of the dialogue sessions arrived at a formula that could reconcile political positions or coordinate efforts. Despite the significant topics for discussion that were placed on the agendas of the meetings—the position on the peace process, national unity, and proposals for setting up joint task forces even for military operations—in the final analysis they succeeded only in reducing mutual tensions. The most significant discussions—which also failed to yield any practical results—were those held in Khartoum in January 1993 under the patronage of Sheikh Hassan al-Turabi, the secretary general of the Arab Islamic Popular Conference. These talks were important for two reasons: the level of representation and the topics discussed. The level of representation was very high: Arafat and Salim al-Za'nun, then vice president of the PNC, headed the Fateh delegation, while the Hamas delegation was headed by Musa Abu Marzouq, chief of the Political Bureau, and Ibrahim Ghosheh, Hamas's official spokesman. The discussions included the sensitive subject of whether Hamas recognized the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.⁵⁴

On reviewing the history of strained relations and clashes between Fateh and Hamas, a few factors stand out and shed light on other aspects of the relationship. Hamas adhered to Islamic religious restraints that defined the parameters of how far it could go in clashes with other parties, Fateh in particular. This point was dealt with in chapter 1. To reca-

53. For the Arabic text of this proposal, see the Arabic version of this book, Appendix, document no. 6, pp. 326–27.

54. For partial minutes of the Khartoum meeting, see the section “Hamas and the PLO/Fateh” above.

pitulate here, that commitment decreased the intensity of the conflict and prevented it from getting out of hand. More specifically, it can be said that the conduct of Hamas toward Fateh never reached the same level of violence as did Fateh's conduct toward Hamas.

A second observation pertains to the negative impact of the endless stream of accusations about Hamas made by Arafat. These accusations, which included such charges as that Hamas had been created by Yitzhak Rabin, that it owed allegiance to Iran, and that it had deviated from the unity of Palestinian ranks just like the Zulu tribes who opposed Nelson Mandela in South Africa, were an obstacle to a rapprochement. Some assertions—such as the one by Arafat at the 7 October 1992 meeting with PNC members residing in Amman that he would not go easy on Hamas as Mandela had done with the Zulus but rather, unlike Mandela, would shoot at “the Palestinian Zulus”—caused scheduled talks to be canceled.⁵⁵ Arafat himself devised the strategy for dealing with Hamas, and discussions with Hamas at which he was not personally present were ineffectual.

The third observation is that the conflictual relationship between Hamas and Fateh pleased Israel, which indirectly fanned the flames of that dispute. A good indication of this was the way in which those quarrels and clashes were given prominent coverage and blown out of proportion in the Israeli media; Israeli correspondents also attempted to get prominent Fateh and Hamas leaders to condemn each other in the media.⁵⁶ Israel also went out of its way to torpedo any potential rapprochement by preventing Hamas leaders or prominent figures close to the movement from travelling abroad for meetings with Fateh and PLO leaders.⁵⁷ Israel has remained wary of even minor improvements in relations between the two sides. The publication of an article in *Filastin al-Thawra*, the organ of the PLO, demanding the release of Sheikh Yassin,

55. Arafat's remarks were quoted by Saleh Al-Barghouti, a member of the PNC, in his article, “Innama al-‘Aajez man la yastabidd” [The feeble one is he who does not rule (autocratically)], published in *Al-Liwa* (Jordan), 14 October 1992; the quotes attributed to Arafat created a storm and spoiled the atmosphere for the dialogue scheduled to be held in Khartoum.

56. One example is the interview Israeli television conducted with Mahmoud al-Zahhar following the September 1992 clashes. This interview stirred strong negative reactions not only within the ranks of Fateh but also within Hamas itself because al-Zahhar fell into the trap of using the Israeli media to attack Fateh.

57. For example, in August 1992 Israel prevented ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Rantisi and al-Zahhar from travelling to Jordan to meet the “outside” leadership of Fateh; see *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem), 20 August 1992.

prompted Israeli fears that this could be the beginning of a real rapprochement.⁵⁸

A fourth, but by no means last, observation is that a number of the joint communiques in fact did succeed, at least partially, in halting the escalation of tensions and containing brewing crises. In fact, one of those communiques, released jointly by the military wing of Hamas, the al-Qassam Brigades, and the military wing of Fateh, the Fateh Eagles, about a joint military operation, was an exceptional example of bilateral cooperation,⁵⁹ and it aroused some concerns among the Israeli military. However, this example was really the exception that proved the rule. A fair assessment therefore must be that whereas the inability of both sides to arrive at a formula for national cooperation can be deemed a failure, their ability to avoid a wide scale civil war can be judged a success. This is particularly significant in view of the dynamics of polarization between any two equal forces competing in the same arena, a situation that traditionally has bedeviled national liberation movements.

After the PA began to operate in the Gaza Strip and Jericho in mid-1994, the tensions between Hamas and Fateh abated. They were replaced by new tensions between Hamas and the newly formed authority, although the PA tried on several occasions to keep the conflict between Hamas and Fateh in the foreground, so that it could claim the status of arbiter for itself. Meanwhile, there was a new competition and a “shift” in the identities of some of the parties engaged in conflict.⁶⁰ Even as tensions escalated between Hamas and the PA, Fateh itself was experiencing internal conflict between the Fateh leaders inside the Occupied Territories—those who had led the intifada and therefore felt they deserved the lion’s share of power in the PA—and the Fateh leaders from “the outside”—those formerly based in Tunisia who saw themselves as deserving credit for the diplomatic victory that had led to the PA’s creation. This diversion of Fateh energies into internal matters is partly responsible for the lessening of

58. See Al-Nahar (Jerusalem), 16 January 1990, citing Ha’aretz (Israel) of 15 January 1990.

59. “Al-‘Amaliyya al-mushtaraka al-oola” [The first joint operation], joint communique of al-Qassam Brigades and Fateh Eagles, 17 May 1993.

60. Noteworthy in this respect is the PA’s insistence on implicating Fateh as an organization, especially the Fateh Eagles, in the bloody clash at Palestine Mosque on 18 November 1994; Al-Tayyeb ‘Abdul-Rahim insisted that the problem was between Fateh and Hamas, not between Hamas and the PA, but Hamas rejected this line. These positions delayed a solution to the problem and impeded its investigation; also see Mahmoud al-Zahhar, *Al-Destour*, 13 December 1994.

conflict with Hamas. Simultaneously, the conflict between Hamas and the PA was escalating, as explained above.

*Hamas's Relations with Leftist and Nationalist Resistance Organizations:
Alliance Based on the Least Common Denominator*

Coordination between Hamas and the leftist and nationalist organizations began with the declaration of the formation of the Ten Resistance Organizations (TRO), just before the convening of the Madrid Conference in October 1991. The birth of this alliance was announced by the leaders of eleven organizations,⁶¹ who met concurrently with the World Conference in Support of the Islamic Revolution in Palestine, which was convened in Tehran, Iran, on 22–24 October 1991. Opposition to the Madrid Conference was the common denominator among these organizations and the subject of the first communique released by the TRO. The TRO did not form a joint organizational or command structure, a situation that continued until the formation of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces in January 1994, which will be discussed below. The absence of any organizational structure undermined the effectiveness of the TRO; coordination among the members remained minimal and was limited to issuing joint communiqués. From the beginning, the participation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in this alliance of opposition forces had a noticeable impact on the TRO's political discourse. The language in a significant number of alliance releases had a distinct Islamic tone and expressed the ideas of Hamas. This is particularly apparent in the emphasis placed on the borders of historic Palestine (from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River), the rejection of any peace settlement whatever, and the references to the Islamic dimension of the problem.

The loose structure of the TRO, which allowed for only minimal coordination among the *fasa'il*, made it ineffectual in coping with the situa-

61. The "ten" organizations that initially joined together at Tehran included the following: Hamas, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—General Command, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Islamic Jihad, the Movement for Palestinian National Liberation—Fateh/Al-Intifada, the Movement for Palestinian National Liberation—Fateh/Revolutionary Council, Vanguard of the War of Popular Liberation, Al-Sa'iqa, the Popular Struggle Front, and the Revolutionary Palestinian Communist Party. The first joint communique, issued on 24 October 1991, called for a general strike on 30 October, the day the Madrid Conference was to convene; however, the formal announcement on the formation of the TRO did not come until nearly one year later, on 29 September 1992. By that date, the Palestinian Revolutionary Front had replaced the Movement for Palestinian National Liberation—Fateh/Revolutionary Council.

tion as the peace talks moved from Madrid to Washington. The peace talks were propelled by the momentum of international and regional support, as well as by the disarray of Arab power in the wake of the Gulf War. The resistance organizations felt the need to turn themselves into a united front or alliance. However, rather than going into the political history of such formulas, this study reviews the proposals presented by Hamas to the TRO for advancing its cause and improving its organization. These proposals reflect Hamas's position toward the leftist and nationalist Palestinian resistance organizations.

The first idea for the TRO was a Hamas proposal for a Higher Palestinian Coordination Committee, submitted in April 1992, that is to say, six months after the convening of the Madrid Conference and the first meeting of the TRO.⁶² The introduction stated that the proposal was for the establishment of a TRO coordination committee which would formulate a united political position in Palestine directed against the proposals for a peaceful settlement. This proposal did not receive serious consideration, perhaps because of the short duration of the relationship between Hamas and the other organizations and because of some doubts concerning Hamas's motive, especially on the part of those organizations that were concerned that Hamas might be setting itself up as an alternative to the PLO.⁶³

The other ideas were submitted by Hamas to the TRO in the wake of the signing of the Oslo Agreement, which caught the Palestinians as a whole (and specifically the organizations opposed to a settlement) off guard. Particularly because the negotiations being conducted in Washington (following the Madrid Conference and continuing until the Oslo Agreement) appeared to be going nowhere, the Palestinian opposition had been encouraged to relax its attitude. After the Oslo Agreement, Hamas proposed the creation of an Alliance of Palestinian Forces as a new formula for organizing the TRO; the other organizations submitted similar proposals. With respect to the suggested political position of the alliance, the Hamas proposal was in line with those of the other organizations. What differentiated Hamas's proposal was its new perspective on the

62. For the Arabic text of this proposal, see the Arabic version of this book, Appendix, document no, 7, pp. 328–30.

63. As mentioned previously, some resistance organization leaders reacted negatively to this proposal because they believed it was being offered as an alternative to the PLO.

PLO as an institution: It proposed “rebuilding the institutions of the Palestinian people, first and foremost the PLO, on a fair and democratic basis.”⁶⁴ A noteworthy change in Hamas’s point of view was expressed in this proposal, which moved beyond setting up the movement as an alternative to the PLO: It envisaged taking over the PLO and reforming it from within. That is to say, there was a shift from option one to option two, which are fundamentally different positions.

The Hamas proposal contained contentious recommendations for the structure of the leadership of the alliance, and these led to its rejection. Hamas proposed creating a central committee that would consist of 40 delegates representing the TRO plus some independents. Hamas would have 40 percent of the delegates, while the other organizations combined would be represented by 40 percent; independents would have the remaining 20 percent. Most of the leftist and nationalist *fasa’il* rejected this proposal, not on political grounds but rather for organizational reasons. They thought it would repeat their experience with Fateh, which used to dominate Palestinian organizations by using a quota system that allocated a quota to each organization proportionate to the size of its membership. Hamas amended its original proposal in view of this rejection, abandoning the idea of proportional representation in the central committee and adopting the demands of the *fasa’il*. It put forward a formula whereby each organization would have two delegates;⁶⁵ this proposal, presented in December 1993, was accepted and became the basis for the Alliance of Palestinian Forces.

Proposals for the political positions that the alliance should adopt in the post-Oslo period included the following: rejecting the agreement; boycotting the elections for the PA council (or participation in the council by appointment); boycotting all organizations derived from the Oslo Agreement or charged with its implementation; affirming the inalienable, historic rights of the Palestinian people to liberate its land, return to its homeland, and practice full national self-determination; and adhering to armed struggle as the principal means of liberation. The *fasa’il* approved the general text of the proposal unanimously and approved the final amendments. Thus, as of the founding session in Damascus on 5 January 1994,

64. For the Arabic text, see the Arabic version of this book, pp. 328–30.

65. For the Arabic text of the modified proposal, see *ibid.*, pp. 334–36.

the Alliance of Palestinian Forces replaced the TRO. In its first declaration, issued the following day, the alliance condemned the Oslo Agreement and the letter from Arafat to Rabin recognizing Israel as acts of “national treason” that had to be abrogated by all means, and it declared them to be nonbinding on the Palestinian people. The leadership of the PLO, but not the organization itself, was condemned: “The current leadership of the PLO does not represent the Palestinian people, nor does it express its views or aspirations.”⁶⁶

In practical terms, due to the major dispute over the leadership structure of the alliance, the original formula for representation that had been in force under the TRO survived unchanged. All organizations had an equal number of delegates to the central committee of the alliance, irrespective of their actual size. Consequently, the change from the TRO to the Alliance of Palestinian Forces was little more than a name change, particularly because no common political agenda was agreed upon, just a set of “political tasks” for the alliance. Later, in December 1996, Hamas submitted a new proposal to the *fasa'il* for the creation of a group to be called the National Independence Front. It tried to avoid the pitfalls that had led to the failure of previous proposals and focused this time on including a large number of independent Palestinian personalities. However, this proposal did not succeed either.

As far as the joint effort was concerned—whether under the TRO or the Alliance of Palestinian Forces formula—the most important issue was coordinating political positions toward Oslo and the PA, especially the boycott of elections and of institutions resulting from the agreement. With respect to efforts to gain grass-roots Palestinian support, no major achievements were scored, although there were numerous scattered but significant successes, most notably the organizing of a general strike during the Madrid Conference on 28–30 October 1991 to protest and condemn that meeting. The success of the strike was remarkable and worrying to the PLO leadership. The victory of the joint electoral list supporting the rejectionist *fasa'il* in the Bir Zeit University elections also can be counted a success. That victory—at a traditional PLO stronghold—was considered an important referendum on the peace process and showed what the *fasa'il* could achieve by coordinating their activities.

66. “Declaration of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces” [in Arabic], Damascus, 6 January 1994.

Aside from a limited number of successes, the coordinated efforts of the alliance/*fasa'il* amounted to little more than the issuing of joint communiqués concerning significant developments pertaining to the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Agreement or issuing releases expressing solidarity with each other. The latter included demands, in solidarity with Hamas, that Sheikh Yassin be released, or, at the collective level, focusing attention on the cause of Palestinian detainees.

In the absence of military coordination among these organizations inside the Occupied Territories, there was only one communiqué from the 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades, issued after the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier in October 1994. This demanded the release of more than 150 prisoners affiliated with the *fasa'il* and who were serving long jail terms in return for the release of the soldier. In addition to demanding the release of prisoners—50 belonging to Hamas, 25 to Islamic Jihad, 50 to Fateh, 20 to the PFLP, 10 to the DFLP, 20 to Hizballah, and 15 to the PFLP-GC—Hamas demanded the release of Sheikh Yassin and all Palestinian female detainees.⁶⁷ Israel did not release any of them.

Neither as the TRO nor as the Alliance of Popular Forces did the *fasa'il* succeed in overcoming a number of problems that retarded their progress. The first of these was their inability to work together to win elections in the Occupied Territories. Despite agreements they had reached abroad, suspicions and lack of trust characterized their relations inside the Occupied Territories. This was reflected in the results of student union, professional association, and trade union elections. Apart from one case in Bir Zeit, these organizations put up detailed lists of candidates who competed with each other as well as with Fateh's strong candidates. As a result, opposition votes were divided, and the Fateh list invariably won.

This lack of trust among the resistance organizations characterized relations in general, not just during elections. They accused each other of not keeping promises and of withholding support, particularly on those occasions when Hamas clashed with Fateh. Hamas demanded that the opposition *fasa'il* denounce Fateh publicly, because the clashes were an attempt by Fateh to crush the power of Hamas. Some *fasa'il*, however, did not comply but rather condemned internecine fighting in general.

Outside the Occupied Territories, the level of cooperation was better, but a number of fundamental issues continued to be contentious between Hamas and the *fasa'il*. Notably, Hamas objected to the introduction of any

67. "Military communiqué of the Martyr 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades" [in Arabic], 11 October 1994.

amendments to the program of the Alliance that involved acceptance of international legitimacy—such as implicit recognition of UN resolutions 242 and 338—as a basis for solving the Palestine problem. It also opposed acceptance of an interim solution to the Palestine problem. Hamas viewed such amendments as entailing recognition of Israel, which it found unacceptable.⁶⁸ Other differences concerned the holding of popular conventions in Arab countries where Palestinian communities resided. The conventions were held to choose representatives for those communities, and they culminated in national congresses attended by the previously chosen representatives, who then elected leaders from among themselves for the Palestinian people; these leaders subsequently claimed legitimacy on the basis of having been elected. Hamas disliked this method because it believed the only winners would be prominent figures in the *fasa'il* who were active in areas such as Syria and Lebanon, while Hamas, which lacked an organized presence in these states, would be marginalized. Therefore, Hamas insisted that the activities of these popular conventions be limited to mobilizing opposition to the Oslo and Cairo agreements, and that they not choose leaders to represent the Palestinians. It also demanded that the mechanism of direct elections be used to choose any legitimate Palestinian leadership.⁶⁹

Hamas's experience in working with leftist and nationalist Palestinian resistance organizations is summarized in the lengthy excerpt below that identifies the "pillars" on which Hamas based its proposals for alliance formation following the Oslo Agreement. Hamas advocated the establishment of a broad Islamic/national alliance with a united political program aimed at abrogating the Oslo Agreement but did not openly declare war on the PLO over the question of legitimacy. From the perspective of Hamas, these proposals represented a compromise between those *fasa'il* in the rejection front that wanted an alternative to the PLO in the form of a different national liberation organization and those such as the PFLP and the DFLP that wanted alternative leaders for the PLO while keeping the organization as a national institution. According to Nazzaj, a member of Hamas's Political Bureau these "pillars" are as follows:

The First Pillar: The front or alliance should be able gradually and naturally to evolve into a real alternative leadership. It should not attempt to leap over the intervening stages. In this way, it will gain support from prominent figures, whether for its declared or undeclared positions.

68. Ibrahim Ghosheh, interview, *Al-Destour* (Jordan), 3 January 1994.

69. *Ibid.*, 22 February 1994.

The Second Pillar: One does not acquire legitimacy by declaring that one has it, as much as it comes about through a process of natural evolution. It is possible, in the event of the failure of the Gaza-Jericho First Agreement and of plans for a political settlement in general—which is what we are seeking—that the alliance formula will turn into a formula for the collective leadership of the Palestinian people, which is truly representative of that people and its aspirations. However, going about it the other way around would be impractical and pernicious. Should an organization that sets itself up as an alternative degenerate into a mere opposition front, its members then would lose their credibility and their flexibility.

The Third Pillar: The declaration on the formation of an alternative organization at this time depends on local, regional, and global circumstances, most of which are not propitious. In addition, such a declaration would result in a grueling fight with Yasir Arafat himself. In that case, Hamas would bear the lion's share of the cost of such a battle, which would sap our efforts and divert them from the battle with the enemy.

The Fourth Pillar: We in Hamas, because of our powerful presence inside the Occupied Territories, must bear the consequences of any collective decision by the ten *fasa'il* [TRO], whereas the effect of such a decision on the other *fasa'il* would be limited because of the limited nature of their presence and influence in the Occupied Territories. Therefore, we are bound to examine closely the repercussions any decision will have on our movement, as we would like it to augment our influence, not diminish it.⁷⁰

Relations with Islamic Jihad

The relationship between Hamas and Islamic Jihad warrants a separate section because of the close identity of the ideologies and political agendas of the two organizations, as well as their common Islamic basis. Throughout the 1990s, there were no real political or ideological differences between them.⁷¹ This proximity of views raises the question, which has been asked repeatedly since both movements arose and developed during the intifada: Why do they not merge, or at least coordinate their activities more closely? Furthermore, why has the relationship between them remained limited to

70. See further Khaled Hroub, "Hamas wa itifaq ghazza-ariha awwalan: al-mawaqif wal-mumarasa" [Hamas and the Gaza-Jericho First Agreement: The stance and the practice], *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya*, No. 16 (Fall 1993): 35.

71. See, for example, the interview with Islamic Jihad's former secretary general, Fathi al-Shikaki, in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 17 March 1995.

the ordinary relations prevailing among the various resistance organizations, and why are there no bilateral programs to set them apart?

From a purely theoretical perspective, the Hamas Charter contains an article devoted solely to Islamic movements; most probably this was drafted with Islamic Jihad in mind. The Charter describes the relations of Hamas with Islamic movements in general as follows: "The Islamic Resistance Movement regards the other Islamic movements with respect and appreciation. Even if differences arise in one perspective or viewpoint, there is agreement between them on several other perspectives and viewpoints. If their intentions are pure, and they are true to God, Hamas regards these movements as an exercise of independent judgment in theological matters [*biannaha tandariju fi babil ijihad*], provided that their conduct remains within the confines of Islam. Each person who uses independent judgment shall have his share of truth [*likulli mujtahid nasib*]. The Islamic Resistance Movement considers these movements as a reserve fund on which it can draw. It asks God to give His guidance to everyone, and Hamas shall lose no opportunity to call on others to rally to the banner of unity, which it shall seek to forge on the basis of the Quran and the *sunnah*."⁷²

Despite this theoretical tolerance, in practice aloofness characterized the political relationship between the two movements. This is difficult to understand without reviewing the historical roots of the relationship. The nucleus of the Islamic Jihad movement emerged out of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip among members who refused to accept the Brotherhood's post-1967 quiescent policy of not resisting the Israeli occupation, a topic examined in chapter 1. When this faction, having lost faith in the Brotherhood, split in the early 1980s to form Islamic Jihad and declared its own agenda, an inimical relationship between it and the Brotherhood developed. The Brotherhood perceived Jihad as a splinter group from the parent organization, while Jihad viewed the Brotherhood as a large group that was hesitant to take up armed struggle against the Israeli occupation.

Following a series of daring and successful operations against Israeli targets in the mid-1980s, Islamic Jihad's popularity continued to grow until the formation of Hamas at the outset of the intifada. Most of the Muslim Brotherhood was absorbed into the new movement, and the new/old organization embarked on resistance activity. As the organizational base of the movement grew, it managed in a few months to capture

72. The Hamas Charter; see Appendix, document no. 2

the Islamic spirit of the intifada, abetted by the fact that Islamic Jihad was the target of a wave of arrests that undermined its infrastructure and its effectiveness during the initial months of the intifada. Meanwhile, an inimical atmosphere and political aloofness continued to characterize relations between the two organizations. Islamic Jihad considered Hamas a late-comer who was harvesting the fruit of the military operations that it had sown several years before the intifada began. For its part, Hamas felt that it was appropriate to recapture the Islamic grass-roots support that the Brotherhood had cultivated for more than three decades. This inimical attitude was manifested in each movement's evaluation of its role in launching and carrying on the intifada, and the two movements produced two different readings of the progress of the intifada itself. The early literature of both Hamas and Islamic Jihad ignored the contribution of the other both prior to and at the start of the uprising.⁷³

The political aloofness soon deteriorated into clashes and fistfights, as evident in the dispute over a mosque in the Gaza Strip in April 1992. In the wake of that incident the two movements were compelled to issue a joint release to quell public anxiety. Although the clash ended, it left an uneasy feeling among both the Islamist and secular Palestinian publics. It appeared as though the experience of Palestinian secular resistance organizations was being repeated by the Islamic ones, including the infighting, the only difference being in the names of the parties involved.

Eight months after that incident, Israel exiled 413 Palestinians—all of them supporters of either Hamas or Islamic Jihad—to south Lebanon. About 40 deportees belonged to Islamic Jihad, and they set up a separate camp for themselves. The political antagonism deteriorated on occasion

73. For example, neither Ghassan Hamdan, *Al-intifada al-mubaraka: waqa' wa ahdaith* [The blessed intifada: events and repercussions] (Kuwait: Al-Falah Publishing House, 1988) nor Jihad Mohammad Jihad, *Al-intifada al-mubaraka wa mustaqbaluha* [The blessed intifada and its future] (Kuwait: Al-Falah Publishing House, 1988) mention Islamic Jihad and the effects of its operations on launching the intifada; when references to Islamic Jihad activities or martyrs are unavoidable, adjectives such as "Muslim youth" or "Islamic movement" are used. Likewise, literature supportive of Islamic Jihad, such as *Al-intifada al-thrawra fi 'aamain: sifat wa itijahat* [The intifada revolution in two years: characteristics and directions] (Tampa, Florida: The Islam and Palestine Series, 1989), does not mention any role played by the Muslim Brotherhood before the intifada; on the contrary, it asserts that the "leadership" of the Brotherhood adopted a negative stance toward the demonstrations that preceded the intifada and that the appearance of Hamas as an effective force in Gaza and the West Bank was at the end of August 1988 (the date Hamas issued its charter), that is, almost nine months after the start of the intifada.

into hostile verbal exchanges between the deportees belonging to Hamas and Islamic Jihad and was reflected in the media.

As the years passed, Hamas grew more powerful and extended its influence over the Islamic public. As the old charge against the Muslim Brotherhood (Hamas's parent organization) of failing to do its part in resisting the occupation lost its relevancy, Hamas felt that the *raison d'être* for Islamic Jihad had become tenuous. The positive counterexample that Islamic Jihad had provided in the 1980s by taking up armed struggle no longer was relevant. Fundamental differences had been erased, despite a number of subsequent attempts to manufacture some arbitrary differences and create new disputes. Sheikh Abdullah al-Shami, a prominent figure in Islamic Jihad and spokesman for the deportees in south Lebanon during their exile, said in reply to a question about the difference between Hamas and Islamic Jihad: "Contrary to Hamas, our priority is not indoctrinating the masses but direct action . . . [another point of difference] concerns the question of whether the Islamists should take part in parliamentary and other elections."⁷⁴ Nevertheless, such comments did not represent the official position of Islamic Jihad.

For its part, Hamas viewed Islamic Jihad with a sense of arrogance, looking down on it as though it were a little brother. Consequently, Hamas began to feel that the "splinter group" should rejoin the parent organization because the reason for the split had disappeared. This attitude was at the root of bilateral discussions between the two movements, discussions that examined the moral and ethical ambiguities posed by the presence of two Islamic movements sharing the same ideology and policies, working for the same objective, and using the same methods. This issue was urgent, considering that the question of Islamic unity was being debated at Islamic movement seminars throughout the Arab world, and there was a crescendo of calls for unity.

Since 1993, the two organizations have talked seriously about unity and coordination and have put forward different proposals. Hamas has called for full unity and the total absorption of Islamic Jihad in Hamas, whereas Islamic Jihad has proposed gradually increasing coordination, which would lead to the creation of something along the lines of a common front. Subsequently, Islamic Jihad leaders have issued statements suggesting that it is possible to realize just about any kind of union between the two movements. However, the two proposals and all other recom-

74. Quoted in *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 6 January 1993.

mentations have remained on paper only, and actual bilateral relations have continued to be characterized by political coolness.

Assessment

A number of general observations regarding relations between Hamas and the *fasa'il* are worth mentioning. Although the trend among Islamists had been to avoid alliances across ideological divisions—and they have suffered from an inability to separate their ideological stands from their political ones—as far as Hamas is concerned the movement has been able to a great extent to overcome numerous ideological obstacles that have served as constraints on the activities of Islamists in general and on their alliances with secular and non-Islamist parties sharing a common political position. Perhaps the fast pulse of events at the international level and in the Middle East affecting the Palestinian problem has made possible a speedier transition from the overcoming of ideological obstacles to the overcoming of practical ones.

It also can be said that the power and influence of Hamas grew very quickly, particularly during its heyday, and this development placed it in indirect competition with Fateh and even the PLO over the issue of which group had a legitimate right to represent the Palestinian people and a claim to the leadership of the Palestinians. These circumstances forced Hamas to elaborate new principles and practices in its dealings with the political and social structure of Palestinian society. 'Isa al-Nashshar, who was a member of the administrative bureau of the Muslim Brotherhood on the eve of the formation of Hamas (it was the administrative bureau that decided at the beginning of December 1987 to create the movement), has said:

[I]n this period when the movement was expanding, acquiring grass-roots support, and was embracing the causes and concerns of the Palestinian people, it was obligated to admit all groups belonging to the Palestinian people and to acknowledge all the forces that were operating and had influence in that arena . . . This shall not weaken the movement, nor deviate it from its course; it only will make it stronger, more credible and realistic, and will instill greater confidence in the Palestinian people with all their leanings. It will dismantle barriers isolating it from others and will foster understanding and a coming together with others, which will serve [the general] interest. Just as Hamas hopes to satisfy its own interests in this coming together and coordination with others, it also realizes that the others are using the same self-interested logic. There is no harm in this for Hamas, particularly considering that it is the

biggest and strongest party, and the closest one to the realities and leanings of the Palestinian people.⁷⁵

As mentioned above, Hamas, driven by the desire to impose its leadership on the alliance of opposition Palestinian resistance organizations, proposed various formulas for coordination or the formation of a common front among them. It made an important concession when it abandoned the principle of dividing seats in the central committee of the Alliance of Palestinian Forces in a ratio proportionate to the size of each organization and accepted instead that each organization should have two seats regardless of size. Such concessions, however, could not breathe life into this “lowest common denominator” alliance or enable it to develop into an opposition force capable of challenging the legitimacy of the PLO, the PA, or the personal leadership of Arafat. The alliance relationship inside the Occupied Territories did not even rise to the level of the least common denominator it achieved abroad. Hamas’s dealings with the *fasa’il* inside the Occupied Territories were inconsistent with its dealings abroad with those same *fasa’il* because Hamas felt that its strength and the public support it enjoyed allowed it to dispense with any alliance with the Left. This disparity in the level of cooperation with the *fasa’il* inside and outside the Occupied Territories did not escape severe criticism from the *fasa’il*. The latter perceived the behavior of Hamas as exploitation of alliance forces in areas where it was weak but disregard for the alliance in the areas where it had strength. Criticism can be made here that Hamas’s reservations concerning cooperation with the *fasa’il* inside the Occupied Territories reflected the legacy of the recent past when there had been conflicts with the Left, or that Hamas had not fully transcended its Islamist view of the secular forces.

A number of comments are appropriate with respect to the acknowledged efforts of Hamas to draw closer to leftist and secular Palestinian groups. First, Hamas leaders adopted the unchallenged or unanalyzed assumption that their movement is the natural leader of an opposition Palestinian alliance that seriously could challenge the legitimacy of the PLO

75. Quoted in an unpublished manuscript of collected interviews with Hamas leaders who were exiled to south Lebanon in December 1992; the interviews were conducted during 1993 by Islamic University of Gaza, political science professor ‘Atif ‘Adwan, and the manuscript is entitled “Al-Fikr al-siyasi lil haraka al-Islamiyya bi filastin” [Political thought of the Islamic movement in Palestine]. I am grateful to Dr. ‘Adwan for allowing me to study the manuscript and to use this quote from it.

and present a viable alternative. This was a naive assumption, especially considering the impact this development would have at the regional and international levels; it would have been difficult at those levels to accept an alternative Palestinian leadership totally dominated by the Islamists if the PLO were to fail. It is possible to envisage an alternative leadership in which the Islamists participate to some extent, but one that is dominated totally by the Islamists is unlikely to be acceptable either in the region or internationally in the wake of Madrid and Oslo. It is not clear from the literature of Hamas or the discourse of its leaders whether it had an accurate appreciation of the regional and international repercussions of insisting that the *fasa'il* should submit to a coalition formula under the leadership of Hamas. This insistence either created or fed mistrust of Hamas among more than one party in the alliance of Palestinian organizations and therefore hindered any collective progress. If there was an accurate appreciation of this situation, it was not reflected in practice in relation to what exactly was required of the alliance with the *fasa'il*.

Second, the leaders of some resistance organizations felt that Hamas was reluctant to take the initiative in leading the alliance. Fathi al-Shikaki, the former secretary general of Islamic Jihad, put forward the following analysis of Hamas's position:

After only a brief period of involvement in the popular uprising (intifada), Hamas demonstrated clear flexibility on the issue of forming alliances with the opposition *fasa'il* within the Palestinian movement, breaking the traditional Islamic taboo in this regard. The basic problem that emerged, however, was that Hamas was reluctant to lead a broad Palestinian coalition. It treated its bilateral and multilateral relations as [a way of establishing] a quorum politically, rather than a way of [organizing] collective political action; this is the essence of how Hamas manages its alliances. Despite the credibility Hamas enjoys when it denies a host of rumors started by foe and friend, it has passed up the chance—for its own reasons as well as reasons beyond its control—to establish a broader and more effective alliance under its leadership.⁷⁶

Basically, the responsibility for putting forward a reasonable and acceptable formula for an alliance of Palestinian resistance organizations—one with good prospects for the future—was placed, first and foremost, on Hamas because of its power and influence inside the Occupied Territories, and

76. Fathi al-Shikaki, interview with the author, 29 May 1995.

only secondarily at the door of the remaining *fasa'il*, a fact of which the opposition *fasa'il* are well aware and acknowledge.⁷⁷

Another point that counts against Hamas in its relations with Palestinian resistance organizations is that it did not make use of the international connections of some Leftist organizations in particular. Although those relations were rather limited, and had shrunk down to almost nothing following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc, yet some things did carry over from the past, particularly at the level of student organizations and nongovernmental organizations, which might have proven useful.

Many observations also can be made regarding the relations of the Palestinian resistance organizations with Hamas. The first observation is a general one and derives from the long experience of these organizations in working with Fateh. That experience was characterized by their sense of being dominated by the larger organization; it also had the characteristics of a core-periphery relationship, for better or worse. The *fasa'il*, wary of repeating this experience, had no desire to recreate PLO-type structures. This reluctance expressed itself in a rejection of any formula that assigned representation in the leadership on the basis of the relative size of each organization, i.e., the formula that governed Fateh's relationship with the other *fasa'il* in the PNC and the command structures of the PLO, for that would have amounted to surrendering the leadership of the rejectionist *fasa'il* to Hamas. At the same time, the refusal of these *fasa'il* to acknowledge the wide disparity between their strength and that of Fateh initially and then later of Hamas was hardly realistic and has been harmful to joint Palestinian action because it encouraged unilateral action.

In addition, the rapid growth of Hamas's influence gave rise to a fairly large degree of "political arrogance" among the *fasa'il*. It was not easy for them to accept, in a sportsmanlike spirit, the Hamas leadership, which they perceived as a Johnny-come-lately in the Palestinian struggle arena. Furthermore, Hamas's Islamic identity and ideology at a minimum contradicted, and even was incompatible with, the secular leftist or nationalist character of a large number of these *fasa'il*; this further complicated the problem and made acceptance of Hamas's leadership less likely. The refusal of the *fasa'il* to accept any formula that would have given the leadership

77. See for example the interview with 'Abdul Rahim Malloweh in *Al-Sabeel* (Jordan), 7 June 1994, in which he says: "The primary responsibility (for getting out of the fix facing the TRO) falls on the shoulders of Hamas and the Popular Democratic Front."

to Hamas caused Hamas to feel it was being treated unfairly and its efforts were unappreciated, particularly in the wake of the upsurge in its operations between 1994 and 1996. Hamas, along with Islamic Jihad, appeared to be the only organizations carrying out any real resistance activities in the Occupied Territories. The leaders of Hamas pointed out that their movement sacrificed a great deal in order to make the alliance succeed, but the others did not appreciate these concessions.

The *fasa'il* became preoccupied with the form that an alliance would take and with the structure of the central command at the expense of the objectives the alliance would serve. Form triumphed over substance, as it had triumphed over the formulation of a joint political program of action, which could have served as an alternative to the Madrid-Oslo program. Periodically, opportunities did present themselves for an alternative, such as when negotiations in Washington reached an apparent impasse or when several Arab states expressed reservations about the substance of the Gaza-Jericho First Agreement. However, it is not possible to predict whether an alternative political program, with a different recipe for the leadership of the rejectionist *fasa'il*, could have been effective in undermining the Madrid-Oslo peace process as a solution to the Palestinian problem in view of the strong momentum behind Oslo, specifically the American and international support. Nevertheless, it can be said that the rivalry between the rejectionist *fasa'il* and the failure to formulate an alternative policy or an alternative leadership contributed to the lack of confidence in the alliance and its ability to stand seriously in the way of the Oslo process and to undermine it.

HAMAS AND THE CHRISTIAN PALESTINIANS

Addressing Hamas's relations with Palestinian Christians might seem out of place in a section on Hamas and political parties. Within the Palestinian context, Christians never have constituted a political group as such. The justification for discussing Hamas's relations with them under a separate heading here is that Hamas's religio-political *weltanschauung* demands close scrutiny of relations with the religious *Other*, as well as the foundations for that relationship and the patterns of conduct emanating therefrom. In addition, a purely political perspective does not govern Hamas's *weltanschauung*.

In general, it can be said that Hamas's theoretical conception and its practical conduct concerning relations with sects and religions falls within the tradition of religious tolerance and coexistence that is characteristic of

the history of the region as a whole, and the history of Palestine in particular. Hamas is proud of that history and mentions it repeatedly in the articles of its Charter that deal with Christians and Jews. Hamas's leaders and prominent figures and the movement's communiqués constantly refer to that history whenever the topic of relations with other religions comes up.

At the ideological level and under the heading, "Defining Hamas's position toward the followers of other religions," the Charter speaks of the "humanitarian" nature of Hamas, which requires respect for the human rights of others and observance of "the magnanimity of Islam toward the followers of other religions," unless they declare themselves to be the enemies of Islam.⁷⁸ The Charter seeks inspiration from the history of religious coexistence in Palestine and the region as a whole, stating that Islam had the best record in the practice of tolerance; according to Hamas, the adherents of the three monotheistic religions—Islam, Christianity, and Judaism—can coexist in peace and security under Islam; security and trust only can prevail under the rule of Islam. Recent as well as ancient history provides the best proof of that. It is the responsibility of the adherents of the other religions to stop the competition with Islam over which one of them is to have supremacy in the region because when the others have prevailed, killing, torture, and displacement have been the norm; the past and present are replete with examples substantiating this point.⁷⁹

These recurring references to the historic position of Islam and to its tolerance and coexistence with the religious Other represent one of the pillars of Hamas's discourse on this subject, particularly in relation to the Christians of the Occupied Territories. Years after the Charter was made public, Hamas's releases, particularly those extending good wishes to Christians on their holidays, continued to mention that historic attitude and to renew Hamas's commitment to it, citing the concrete example of the Covenant of Omar (the pledge granted by the Caliph Omar ibn al-Khattab to the Christians of Jerusalem to protect their lives, property, and churches). Hamas refers to this covenant with pride, saying that Omar "declared [the covenant] in Jerusalem as a historic humanitarian teacher, presaging the periods of real peace in the land of Palestine. Under the aegis of that peace, Christians and Jews lived in peace and security under the protection of the great Islamic civilization—noted for its tolerance and unbounded humanitarian horizon, which has given mankind the

78. The Hamas Charter; see Appendix, document no. 2.

79. *Ibid.*

example of coexistence, tolerance, and freedom of religion, the exact opposite of the massacres we are witnessing in Bosnia in the darkness of (supposedly enlightened) Europe.”⁸⁰

Aside from looking to the position of Omar toward the Christians for inspiration, Hamas’s other point of departure in formulating its perspective on the religious Other, particularly the Jewish Other, is the history of the usurpation of Palestine by the Zionists. This is a position on aggression, not religion, as explained above in the discussion of Hamas’s political vision: The hostility to Jews in Palestine is based not on the fact that they are adherents of a different faith but rather that they are aggressors.⁸¹ Hamas’s position on those Jews who immigrated to Palestine, driven by Zionist ideology, is hostile. Hamas considers those immigrants from abroad generally to be “occupying invaders,” or “enemies engaged in combat,” and treats them accordingly.⁸²

Hamas’s theoretical and practical concern with the Jewish component of the religious Other goes no further than the position explained above. Consequently, Hamas has not established relations with any Jewish group, either on the Left or among religious Jews such as Naturei Karta, which has a doctrinal position rejecting the establishment of a Jewish state at this point in time. Hamas focuses its concern on working out the details of what should be its perspective on and behavior toward Christians—as partners in the same national predicament.

Hamas refined and made more explicit its view of the Christian Palestinians. This position was formulated as a combination of policies that the movement adopted beginning with its first year. The following in-house document represents one of the earliest positions formulated by Hamas to regulate its position and conduct toward other religious or political groups. Dated August 1988, it is entitled “The Movement’s Policies toward the Christians of Palestine,” and it outlines a general framework for relations with the Christians:

1. The Christians of Palestine are an inseparable part of the Palestinian people and the Arab nation and its national identity.

80. Hamas leaflet, “Fi dhikra sayyedina al-masih, ‘alaihi al-salam, nujaddid al-‘ahd ‘ala tahrir al-masjid al-aqsa” [On the birthday of Christ, peace be upon him, we renew our pledge to liberate Al-Aqsa mosque], 25 December 1993.

81. Hamas leadership, extended interview in *Filastin al-Muslima* (London), April 1990, pp. 24-27.

82. *Ibid.*

2. The Christians should enjoy the same civil rights, and have the same obligations, as the rest of the Palestinian people.
3. They should be reminded of the religious and patriotic significance of their ties to their holy sites and their land.
4. Their religious feasts and holidays should be referred to in releases by the leadership of the intifada, and we should try to co-celebrate those feasts when possible.
5. They should be asked not to emigrate under the monstrous pressure of [Israeli] terrorism, and its aggressive and beastly conduct toward our people.
6. We should stress how important it is for them to participate in the political life and struggle of the Palestinian people during the occupation and after liberation.
7. We should establish solid relations with their religious and political leaders, enlist their support for nationalist positions, and consult their leaders on the general affairs of the country.
8. We should continue to make reference to them in the movement's releases and on their special occasions.⁸³

These policies, however, were not applied in a creative way, nor did they become everyday practices. The relationship remained a passive rather than an active one. A few comments are in order here: Palestinian society remained free of sectarian tensions, although some observers interpreted Hamas's very presence as having given rise to sectarian apprehensions and alleged that Hamas as a general rule had an anti-Christian attitude, making things uncomfortable for Christians and encouraging them to emigrate.⁸⁴ My own position is that more significance should be attached to the fact that since being founded at the end of 1987, Hamas has based its relations with the Christians on mutual respect and has adhered to the general line of policy to which the movement committed itself. There have been no incidents that could be classified as cases of sectarian violence, although on several occasions there were examples of what can be termed political violence among opposed *fasa'il*. That violence invariably was caused by political, not sectarian, positions, and most of the violence was between Fateh and Hamas, which are the organizations most similar in

83. This text first was published in Khaled Hroub, "Al-masihyyoun fil ard al-muhtalla, waqi' ta'ayush mujtama'i raghm al-ihlilal" [Christians in the occupied territories: The reality of social coexistence despite the occupation], *Al-Hayat*, 3 July 1993.

84. This is the argument of Said Aburish in his book *The Forgotten Faithful: The Christians of the Holy Land* (London: Quartet Books, 1993).

doctrinal matters. Furthermore, it is not difficult to monitor in detail Hamas's observance of the above policies over the years. Here one can refer to Hamas's relationship with the Christian elite, at various occasions and places and involving different individuals. In this regard, there is a positive record that involves positions adopted and concerns expressed that are consistent with the image which Hamas projects of itself: It is a Palestinian nationalist Islamic movement with a program for all Palestinians from a collective perspective.

To supply some corroborative detail, one of the principal strikes that Hamas had called (weeks in advance, as usual) happened to coincide with Christmas 1990. When the movement realized this, it quickly canceled the strike. Instead, it requested merchants to keep their shops open on the 24 and 25 December to commemorate the birth of Jesus. In addition, Hamas instructed its cadres involved in the intifada to call on Christians to wish them a "Merry Christmas" so that "gatherings of Muslims would visit the homes of Christians, extending their best wishes for the holiday, and blessing the unity and solidarity of our people."⁸⁵

One can find many similar texts in numerous leaflets, such as Periodic statements no. 65 of 11 October 1990 and no. 81 of 1 December 1991, as well as in the 13 April 1990 statement condemning a Zionist assault on the property of a Greek Orthodox church in the holy city of Jerusalem and the subsequent attack on the monks who demonstrated in protest against the first attack. In this release, Hamas expressed its solidarity with and support for the Christian community, especially considering that the attack occurred during the Greek Orthodox Easter observances. Using similar language, Hamas denounced the May 1995 Israeli attacks on St. Anthony's Church in Jaffa.⁸⁶

In general, it can be said that the relationship between Hamas and the Christian communities in Palestine falls within the context of joint struggle against the occupation and has been normal and not strained. At the same time, however, it is not a distinctive relationship or a well-developed one. Hamas has been very alert and has distanced itself from and condemned anything that could harm that relationship. For instance, it acted quickly to condemn the killing of Albert Glock, an American professor at Bir Zeit University, in January 1992. It praised Glock, saying

85. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 67 of 3 December 1990.

86. Hamas statement, "Hawla al-'itida' al-sahyouni 'ala kaneesat al-qiddis anton fi yafa" [On the Zionist aggression against Saint Anthony's Church in Jaffa], 23 May 1995.

that his research was aimed at showing the value of the heritage of the Palestinian people.

Christian responses and expressions of solidarity with Hamas on more than one occasion indicated that mutual respect characterized the relationship. Such a response came from Bishop Lutfi al-Lahham, pastor of the Orthodox bishopric in Jerusalem, during a sit-in in front of the Knesset in December 1992 to protest the deportation of the 413 Palestinians accused of membership in Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The bishop said: "We all are [fighting] in the same trench. If they are deportees, then we, too, are deportees. If they are terrorists, then we, too, are terrorists. If they are fundamentalists (*usuliyoun*)—that term they use to demean the religion and faith of Islam—then we are all fundamentalists."⁸⁷

Outside the Occupied Territories, there was nothing noteworthy about Hamas's dealings with Christians, whether they were Arab or Palestinian party leaders or independents, because Hamas defined its relationships mainly in political terms. However, Hamas did not pass up any opportunity to praise political positions on the Palestinian problem that merited praise. For example, Hamas met with Pope Shenoudeh of the Egyptian Coptic Church to express its appreciation for his stand on Jerusalem and his rejection of normalization with Israel.⁸⁸

One notable phenomenon concerning Christians in Palestine, and which coincided with the emergence of Hamas, has been their increased immigration rate to Australia, Europe, the United States, and other places. The situation has been particularly sensitive because most of the immigrants have been from Jerusalem, where the demographic struggle over the status of the city is most intense. Hamas has expressed its concern regarding this trend and has called on Christians to stay and not yield to the temptation to immigrate. In its statements, Hamas reiterated that Palestinians were immigrating because of the constant pressure on them from the Israeli occupation.

Nevertheless, the relationship remains confined to declarations of solidarity and mutual respect. There has been no progress toward the more

87. Quote is taken from the video tape, "Inna baqoon" [We are staying], which was made by the Islamic Movement in Israel to support the Palestinians whom Israel deported to south Lebanon in December 1992; see also Abdul Salam Ibrahim, "Al-Muslim wal Masihi ma'an fi khandaq al-wihda al-wataniyya" [The Muslim and the Christian are together in the trench of national unity], *Filastin al-Muslima*, May 1993, p. 23.

88. Hamas, "Risala maftouha ila al-baba Shenouda al-thalith" [Open letter to Pope Shenouda III], 8 January 1995.

important issue of joining in common action. Specifically in the case of Hamas, it did not go further toward developing its relationship with the Christians in order to enlist those who agree with it politically to join the movement, either in its traditional framework or any other that may be improvised for the purpose. Some of the leaders and prominent figures in Hamas maintain that there is no fundamental reason preventing any Palestinian, regardless of his religion, from joining Hamas.⁸⁹ The literature of Hamas contains clear definitions with a bearing on this. For example, the “Introductory Memorandum” released at the end of 1993 states that “Hamas is a wide scale popular organization that champions the causes of the Palestinian people, free of discrimination on the basis of religion or race.”⁹⁰ The more significant trend in Hamas’s policies after Oslo—particularly relating to the question of the establishment of a political party in the Occupied Territories—holds that the party is to include Muslims and Christians among its members, and perhaps even in its top leadership or Political Bureau.⁹¹ In practice, however, the situation has proved to be different, and there were no Christians among the list of founders of the Hamas party, the Islamic National Salvation Party, which was founded in Gaza at the end of 1995 and announced to the world in March 1996. This indicates the inability of Hamas to get beyond a certain point in Christian-Muslim relations in practice. Hamas has not reached the stage where it can absorb Christians in its organizational framework, a fact that Hamas leaders acknowledge but hope to alter in the future.

HAMAS AND THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL

The Islamic trend has been gaining strength among the Palestinians in the territory of Palestine that was occupied in 1948. These Palestinians number about 850,000 and are citizens of Israel. The growth in influence of the Islamic movement led to its sponsorship of candidates for municipal elections in a number of Arab towns and villages in the 1980s and 1990s. For example, in the municipal elections of 1989 and 1993, the Islamic movement won seats on such important town councils as Acre, Kafr Barra, Kafr Qassem, Nazareth, and Umm al-Fahm. In some towns it held a majority of council seats and even won the presidency of the councils.

89. Mahmoud al-Zahhar, as quoted in ‘Adwan manuscript, *supra*.

90. Hamas, “Introductory Memorandum;” see Appendix, document no. 3.

91. Abu Marzouq, interview with author, 21 April 1995.

The Islamic movement has played a prominent role in awakening and deepening Palestinian nationalism among the Arabs in Israel. Palestinian national consciousness emerged from a long and serious crisis involving the loss of identity and the estrangement of Palestinians from their roots, due to the impact of efforts to give an Israeli identity to the Arab minority in Israel.⁹²

The spreading Islamic tide followed four decades of virtual communist and leftist domination of the political life of Palestinians in Israel. In contesting municipal and Knesset elections or the control of local and regional committees representing the Palestinians, the Rakah (Communist) Party had been the most important political vehicle for the realization of the political and legal demands of the Arab minority. Only through Rakah or other Israeli leftist parties had the Arabs managed to win a few seats in the Knesset.

It is important to compare and contrast the ideas and the activities of the Islamic movement in Israel with the ideas and political activities of Hamas because of their ideological and nationalist similarities and their geographic proximity, as well as the temporal overlap in the birth and rise of the two movements during the second half of the 1980s. A basic difference characterizing the ideology and practices of the two movements is their position on armed struggle. The Islamic movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip made a transition from proselytizing and educational activities in the days of the Muslim Brotherhood to armed struggle after Hamas came on the scene, gaining wide support, new adherents, and significant influence. In contrast, the Islamic movement in Israel widened its support and influence by effecting a transition from a brief period of armed struggle in the early 1980s to contesting political campaigns, proselytizing, and offering educational services. An important turning point for this movement occurred in 1985, when Sheikh Abdullah Nimr Darwish was released from prison. He had been arrested, along with a group of his brethren, in 1981, and charged with establishing military cells belonging to *Usrat al-Jihad* [Jihad family], whose objective was armed struggle against Israel. After his release, Sheikh Darwish adopted peaceful means of spreading his message, based on a realistic vision that the objective of Islamists in Israel should be: to consolidate an Arab-Islamic identity; to defend the rights of

92. See further Mahmoud Mi'ari, "Hawiyyat al-Filastiniyyin fi Isra'il: Hel hiya filastiniyya-Isra'iliyya?" [The identity of Palestinians in Israel: Is it Palestinian-Israeli?], *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya*, No. 8 (Spring 1992): 40–50.

the minority by engaging in political struggles; to contest municipal elections; and even to run for the Knesset. This position now constitutes the frame of reference governing the activities of the Islamic movement in Israel and has taken the movement far from any form of armed struggle.⁹³

Despite repeated allegations in the Israeli media that the Islamic movement in Israel has close ties to Hamas, both movements deny this vehemently. Any researcher who follows the course Hamas has taken in the last few years in its relations with the Islamists in Israel or monitors official (Israeli) reactions and security measures will conclude that it is far-fetched to postulate an organizational link between the two. The Islamists in Israel were the first to realize that establishing relations with Hamas would be playing with fire; would place their social, cultural, and civil institutions in jeopardy; and would nullify their growing achievements at the municipal and political levels.

For its part, Hamas has been satisfied with the support it receives from the Islamic movement in Israel in terms of charitable activities, media coverage, and political support. Assistance is given to the orphans of the intifada and families left without a source of support. Hamas's struggle gets support in the Islamic movement's media, where it is portrayed as a defender of usurped Palestinian rights. Political pressure, no matter how limited, is applied to defend the political rights of Palestinians in general. At times support is given for specific demands, such as for the release of detainees, the return of exiles, or the release of Sheikh Yassin when he was in prison. Among the most outstanding contributions of the Islamic movement in Israel was its activity on behalf of the 413 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members who were deported to southern Lebanon in December 1992. A sit-in tent was pitched in front of the Knesset and government building in Jerusalem; politicians, journalists, and opponents of the deportation visited this tent, which stayed up until the exiles were allowed to return.

The Israeli authorities kept a close watch for any developments in the relationship between Hamas and the Islamic movement in Israel that would allow them to take legal action. Particular scrutiny was maintained on the activities of charitable committees, especially when the struggle

93. For more details about the development of the Islamic movement in the territory occupied in 1948, see Ahmad bin Yusef, *Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya dakhel al-khatt al-akhdar—filastiniyu 1948* [The Islamic movement inside the green line—the 1948 Palestinians] (Chicago: International Center for Research and Study, N.d.); and Mahmoud Mi'ari, "Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi isra'il" [The Islamic movement in Israel], *Shu'un filastiniyya*, Nos. 215–16 (February–March, n.d.): 3–15. For an Israeli view of the Islamic phenomenon, see Raphael Israeli, *Muslim Fundamentalism in Israel* (London: Brassey's, 1993).

between Israel and Hamas reached a high point in the 1994–96 period. Security forces stormed the headquarters of the charitable committees on several occasions, confiscated their property, and microscopically examined their documents to find evidence for a connection between the Islamic movement and Hamas.⁹⁴ Israel accused these committees of supporting the families of Hamas martyrs, especially those who had carried out suicide bombings. Israel also subjected the newspapers and other publications of the Islamists in Israel to severe scrutiny and censorship, and it has stopped the publication of the Arabic newspaper, *The Voice of Truth and Freedom*, on several occasions on the grounds that it was carrying inflammatory material and supporting Hamas.

In the political sphere, Israel did not need to intervene to stop any effective support by the Islamic movement for Hamas because the movement had placed restraints on its activities through a major decision not to participate in the Knesset elections, a decision that seriously curtailed its political influence. This issue came up repeatedly, and it became the subject of controversy in mid-1995 when Sheikh Darwish insisted on the need for participation while Sheikh Ra'ed Salah, the mayor of Umm al-Fahm and the head of the movement, took the opposite position. The outcome was that the movement adopted a unanimous decision not to participate in the 1996 elections.⁹⁵ However, this decision was amended under the pressure of events that followed this decision, namely Hamas's operations in retaliation for the assassination of Yahya 'Ayyash. The Islamic movement came under additional pressures in Israel, and there were renewed charges that it was supporting Hamas. This convinced the branch of the movement under the leadership of Darwish to review its decision and to come out in support of putting up candidates and voting in the elections; the reasoning was that having members in the Knesset would provide political legitimacy and protection. The Islamic movement amended its decision by leaving it up to the members whether they wanted to take part and did not bind them to a decision or a central policy. The movement consequently participated in a limited way in the elections: Islamic candidates were placed on the United Arab List; two won and became members of the Knesset. It

94. See further "Tahjim al-'amal al-khairi fil 48, hel yakun al-bidaya li muwajahaten bain Isra'il wal haraka al-Islamiyya" [Downsizing charitable work among the 1948 Palestinians: Is it the beginning of a confrontation between Israel and the Islamic movement?], *Filastin al-Muslima*, September 1995; and *Al-Hayat*, 18 March 1996.

95. In the Islamic movement conference held in May 1995 to discuss this issue, 69 percent of the 135 participants refused to run as candidates for the Knesset, but they agreed that members could vote for whomever they chose; see further *Al-Quds*, 31 May 1995.

is an image that best is captured within a postmodernist political framework, where it brought to reality a contradictory combination: Palestinian Islamic representation in the Israeli Knesset. Such a development was unimaginable for years and hardly corresponded to crude political expectations. In any case, the movement had gone beyond the stage of political adolescence but not without paying a high cost. As a result of the bitter dispute between supporters and opponents of the idea of participating in the elections, the movement split into two factions, one led by Darwish and the other by Salah.

Hamas clearly applied very heavy moral pressure on the Islamic movement to prevent it from taking part in the Knesset elections.⁹⁶ The decision not to participate in the Knesset elections indirectly supported Hamas's decision not to participate in the elections for the self-governing council. Hamas was immensely satisfied with the first decision because to do otherwise would have weakened the political rationale for its position. Hamas felt it was totally unreasonable for Islamists to participate in the Israeli Knesset elections, while it boycotted the self-government elections. However, Hamas may have been mistaken on this point, considering the immense pressure to which it was subjected and the Israeli, regional, and international campaigns against it in the wake of the series of suicide bombings in February and March 1996. It became clear that Hamas had lost any political cover it had, either from the Administrative Council in the self-rule area or from any state in the region—on the contrary, it was condemned from virtually all sides. One way to alleviate the pressure on Hamas was to have Islamist deputies enter the Knesset in accordance with the law, thereby constituting a thorny dilemma for Israel: It could not keep them out because they are Israeli citizens, but neither was it willing to tolerate the positions they represented or the defenses they put forward, both of which played an important role.

96. See *Al-Hayat*, 18 March 1996 and 18 May 1996; and *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya*, No. 27 (Summer 1996).

Hamas's Political Relations



RELATIONS WITH THE ARAB STATES

Hamas's political thinking and discourse about the Arab regimes can be divided into two periods. In the first period, from the time the movement was founded in December 1987 to the end of 1990, Hamas had no official representation or spokesmen outside the Occupied Territories. The second period began near the outset of the Gulf War when Hamas named Ibrahim Ghosheh as its official representative to the Popular Islamic Delegation, which consisted of leaders and representatives of Islamic movements. This delegation visited Iran, Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia in January 1991 in an attempt to mediate the conflict stemming from Iraq's occupation of Kuwait. Since then, Hamas leaders and prominent figures have emerged in the Arab countries surrounding Israel, and representatives have been named in those countries. Although these time periods are not exact in terms of establishing clear demarcation lines in the substance of Hamas's political discourse, the division does explain a change in the freedom with which Hamas expressed itself. In the first period, Hamas's expression was spontaneous and free of diplomatic restraint or serious concern for its organizational interests in one country or another. Official releases and declarations of position were colored by life in the Occupied Territories, where Hamas was founded and matured, and were neither sensitive nor responsive to pressures from Arab regimes.¹

1. There is no difficulty in finding outspoken statements by Hamas between 1987 and 1990 that unabashedly indict (and openly antagonize) a number of Arab regimes for

The free and spontaneous period did not last. In the second period, - Hamas's language became more diplomatic and nuanced; statements by the movement's leaders and spokesmen outside the Occupied Territories typically have been moderate. Many considerations were weighed carefully in formulating Hamas's position before making public pronouncements. These factors had an impact on Hamas's political thought and discourse, not only because of the presence of the movement's leaders and representatives in the neighboring Arab countries but also because the movement was becoming politically more mature. It had come to realize the importance of not antagonizing parties in the region and of building strategic alliances in its quest of moral and political support for its political vision of the struggle.²

In the first period, some Hamas releases leveled accusations of treason at fellow Arabs, singling out states and regimes by name. The inference to be drawn is that these releases were meant for domestic consumption; as an outlet for the grievances of those under occupation, they reflected popular resentment against developments in the Arab world that did not serve the Palestinian cause. In the second period, the unabashed accusations and the naming of names when dealing with the official positions of Arab regimes virtually disappeared. Such expressions were replaced by generalities and ambiguous statements that did not appear aimed at anyone in particular yet allowed Hamas to reject and denounce positions it opposed. By directing its remarks at actions and positions but not mentioning the perpetrators of denounced actions or the names of office holders, Hamas struck a compromise between the need to denounce and the equally important need to keep its bridges open.³

As stated, no sharp division can be drawn between these two periods in Hamas's political discourse pertaining to Arab affairs; there is a clear overlap between them. Nor was there a noticeable line of separation between Hamas's statements directed at the public in the two periods. Hamas's discourse has continued to reflect the view that the role of the people in the

their positions on a political settlement or their treatment of Palestinians; see, for example, Hamas, *Periodic statement no. 2 of December 1987*, which openly condemns certain Arab countries by name.

2. Musa Abu Marzouq, interview with author, Amman, 21 April 1995.

3. See, for example, the Hamas leaflet on the eve of the Madrid Conference entitled "A Historic Release: No to the Conference; No to Selling out Palestine and the Holy City of Jerusalem," 23 October 1991; the release did not so much indict the Arab regimes participating in the conference as it condemned the conference itself, although the focus was on the position of the PLO, which was denounced explicitly.

Arab world has strategic significance. The movement has maintained its interest in mobilizing the public by repeated appeals to the grass roots and in rallying Islamic movements to the cause of the intifada and in support of the jihad of the Palestinian people.

Even during the first period, Hamas's discourse was remarkably restrained in the use of radical appellations, adjectives, and accusations in comparison to the discourse of the Palestinian Left, which denounced Arab regimes on numerous occasions, and in Fateh's publications in the Occupied Territories, especially the latter's statements on Jordan. This relative moderation in expression—which on several occasions led to accusations that Hamas was collaborating with Arab regimes—can be attributed to Hamas having learned from the PLO's experience. That is, Hamas observed the Palestinian resistance organizations being forced to swallow their radical words in order to be allowed to establish a presence in neighboring Arab countries. In addition, Hamas claimed that it is committed to Islamic ethics (like the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood before it), which place limits on the level of verbal abuse that is permissible.

Parameters of Hamas's Relations

Once Hamas named an official spokesman, it became possible to establish direct contact and to communicate with the movement. Hamas could meet with Arab, Islamic, and Western officials. Moreover, the very process of dealing with Arab officials revealed to Hamas practical as well as ideological complications and constraints, none of which it had been aware in the first stage when its political discourse had been untroubled by considerations of diplomacy or the need to take Arab interests into account. Even when these constraints became apparent, Hamas did not feel obliged to assign high priority to them. As its popular appeal, political clout, and guerrilla operations expanded, Hamas realized that the interest of Arabs and others in the movement was increasing. As Hamas's influence and weight in Palestinian affairs grew, the need for Arabs and others in the region to establish relations with the movement became more pressing. Consequently, the historical, ideological, and political obstacles that had impeded the establishment of working relations became conspicuous and had to be overcome.

The first obstacle that Hamas had to surmount in forging its ties with Arab regimes was the political and historical legacy of relations—most often hostile—between the Muslim Brotherhood and those regimes. Because Hamas is considered similar to the Brotherhood for ideological

and genealogical reasons (which are acknowledged in the movement's Charter),⁴ two difficulties stood in the way of Hamas overcoming this categorization and establishing working relations with Arab governments free of the legacy of old positions. The first difficulty was on the part of the movement itself; Hamas had trouble transcending the heritage of hostile relations between the branches of its mother organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Arab regimes. The second difficulty was the uncertainty in the minds of Arab regimes with regard to the precise nature of the relationship between Hamas and the Brotherhood and the extent to which Hamas's position would be based on that of the Brotherhood.

Hamas's difficulty in liberating itself from the legacy of the Brotherhood's relationship with Arab regimes was more of a psychological than a practical impediment. Hamas tried to reduce the hostility from the beginning, particularly in its relations with the Syrian regime, with which the Brotherhood had engaged in bloody clashes during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nevertheless, that legacy continued to cast a shadow on the development of more healthy relations with the states neighboring Palestine, and it continued to exacerbate the fears of the regimes themselves concerning Hamas's ties to the Brotherhood. The Arab regimes were concerned that openly allowing Hamas freedom of action on their territory indirectly could help local Islamic movements whose agendas often clashed with the regimes' own goals and interests. Weighing various possibilities, most of the Arab governments found it difficult to allow Hamas unfettered freedom of action, despite the movement's open pledge that it would not interfere in their internal affairs.

The second obstacle Hamas had to surmount in its relations with the Arab world was the widespread and unshakable Arab recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Even though Hamas did not declare openly to the Palestinian people that it was an alternative to the PLO, its discourse placed it in an intense competition with the PLO for the right of representation. In addition, as discussed in the previous chapter, Hamas also refrained from unambiguously recognizing the PLO's status as the representative of the Palestinian people. Thus, the firm Arab recognition of the PLO as the exclusive holder of the legitimate right to represent the Palestinians proved to be a hindrance to the establishment of relations with Arab regimes. In this respect, some

4. This connection is stated clearly in the Hamas Charter, which was issued on 18 August 1988. The first reference to it prior to the release of the Charter appeared in Hamas, *Periodic statement no. 6 of 11 February 1988*, just two months after the movement was founded.

regimes may have believed that they could manage relations with a number of relatively minor Palestinian organizations far more easily than they could manage ties with Hamas, which had significant clout and was a rival to the PLO itself. Furthermore, Arab regimes were unlikely to be accused of trying to create an alternative to the PLO or trying to strip it of its legitimacy if they dealt with the *fasa'il*, whatever their reasons for doing so. However, by cultivating relations with a potential rival to the PLO like Hamas, their actions could be interpreted as supporting the creation of that alternative. This certainly would irritate many international players and could trigger unwanted pressures on those regimes.

This was no mean obstacle, as Hamas discovered, because the years in which the Palestinian Islamists had been absent from the arena of political and military action had enabled the PLO to take command of the Palestinian national struggle. The PLO had taken root in the Arab and Islamic worlds and consolidated its position internationally. Musa Abu Marzouq believes Arab nonrecognition of the legitimacy of the PLO to be the *sine qua non* for setting up an alternative to the organization.⁵ But Hamas encountered the hard political reality that no Arab state, no matter how close its relations with the movement, was about to endorse Hamas setting itself up as an alternative to the PLO or aid it in that effort. Even the government of Sudan, which is the closest Arab state to Hamas in political and ideological terms, has suggested repeatedly that Hamas join the PLO in order to change it from within.

The third obstacle to Hamas developing relations with Arab regimes has been the general Arab consensus to accept a peace settlement, which Hamas has refused to do. Only a few months after the intifada began and the movement was founded at the end of 1987, settlement proposals proliferated. After the Gulf War, the Madrid Conference was held in 1991; then came the Oslo Agreement between the PLO and Israel in 1993 and the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty in 1994. In addition, the informal ties between Israel and more than one Arab country since have multiplied and become more extensive; tangible progress has been made toward a peace settlement on the ground, and Arab commitment to such an outcome has grown. Even during the years of the intifada, Palestinian recognition of Israel had taken the form of PNC resolutions, Arab and international pressures to bring about a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute had intensified, and the Arab and regional mood gradually had shifted away

5. Musa Abu Marzouq, interview with author, 9 May 1998.

from the military option for which Hamas was mobilizing support. Thus, as Hamas tried to breathe new life into the military course of action and to make it the foundation of its relations with official Arab bodies, it found itself swimming against the tide. One of the movement's leaders summed up Hamas's efforts: "It was calling for war while everyone was marching toward peace."⁶

Hamas also was hampered in developing relations with the Arab states by the U.S. and Western campaign against "Islamic fundamentalism," whose activities were classified as terrorism and were targeted. On the one hand, this anti-Islamist campaign escalated just as Hamas's influence and power were expanding. On the other hand, it was the increasing power of Hamas that helped to trigger the American campaign. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of the Eastern bloc, new theories were put forward that substituted the "Islamic threat" for the vanquished "Communist threat."⁷ Although the official position of Western nations is that this danger does not represent a direct threat to the West to the same magnitude as that of the Soviet Union, those nations are treating it at least as an international threat that needs to be taken seriously. This has led to the expansion of the definition of "terrorism" so that it includes the activities of Islamist groups that engage in guerrilla operations and resistance activities. Hamas thus was placed on the U.S. and Western lists of "terrorist organizations." That classification was sufficient to deter many states and institutions from developing a relationship with Hamas. Even meeting with Hamas at an official level became a cause for embarrassment: Questions were raised, followed by direct or indirect pressure. Furthermore, failure to condemn Hamas's armed attacks inside the Occupied Territories or Israel proper put Arab governments in an embarrassing position with the West, particularly the United States.

Hamas also contributed to the list of obstacles impeding development of its relations with Arab states. Shortcomings in Hamas's political confidence building measures and its public relations effort, particularly in the Arab world, are painfully obvious. Visits by Hamas's official delegations to Arab states, whether to meet with officials or the public, were rare. The paucity of visits also highlights the limited capabilities of Hamas's

6. Interview with an unidentified Hamas military commander, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 28 October 1994.

7. See further John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Fawaz A. Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

administrative and political staff outside the Occupied Territories. These tasks are carried out by a small group of prominent Hamas figures, who are involved repeatedly in most of these official visits or encounters with the public. Quite often the public relations shortcomings of Hamas have been due to the movement's refusal to create an organizational infrastructure outside Palestine. Instead, it relied on select political and information cadres whose role was to provide support services for the essential activities of the movement that take place inside the Occupied Territories. As a result, there was no normal organizational base from which new cadres routinely could be chosen to serve the political, informational, and public relations functions for which there was growing demand. Consequently, the demand in these areas was not met, the administrative pressures increased, and the limited cadres available could not cope adequately.

In fact, Hamas's policy of not establishing its own organizations in the Arab countries was a constant subject of contention. The basic reasoning behind this policy was that Hamas should not repeat the mistake of the Palestinian *fasa'il* by organizing and mobilizing Palestinians in their places of residence, a practice that had precipitated clashes between those *fasa'il* and the regimes of the countries hosting Palestinian refugees. The lessons learned from the clashes in Jordan in 1970 and in Lebanon during the second half of the 1970s were clear. In addition, Hamas argues that the real arena of struggle is inside Palestine and that the movement should concentrate on ensuring the success of the resistance there, rather than squandering time and effort on setting up bureaucratic structures outside. This does not mean, however, that concentrations of Palestinians outside the Occupied Territories should be ignored, that Hamas should avoid establishing relations with them, or that efforts to mobilize them should slacken. Nevertheless, Hamas's view (discussed below) is that Islamic movements in those countries should conduct such mobilization.

The counterargument is that in the absence of an organizational infrastructure, Hamas will continue to face a number of difficulties. These include the huge disparity between the diverse tasks that need to be performed outside the Occupied Territories and the limited human resources available for that purpose; and the slow growth of resources due to the fear of bureaucratization, complex administrative structures, and high costs. Furthermore, the argument goes, there is a pressing need for Hamas to step in and fill the vacuum created in the political and information area when the PLO vacated a number of positions it used to hold following its agreements with Israel. Also, there is a pressing need to increase contacts with the millions of Palestinians outside who have been virtually forgot-

ten at the official level, not to mention the hundreds of millions of Arabs and Muslims.

Hamas and the Arab Regimes

One distinctive characteristic of the thought and conduct of Hamas in relation to its Arab environment is the political realism and pragmatism that has marked its dealings with Arab regimes. From its inception, Hamas has not theorized about or sought to create a new Arab state system or produced thoughtful studies or radical theories concerning the disunity besetting the Arabs. The movement refrained from any practical engagement in this direction, being content with slogans expressing generalities. For some people, the nonexistence of a theoretical perspective on such issues is a point in Hamas's favor and testifies to its political pragmatism. For others, this facile acceptance of the status quo in the Arab world and the absence of any dedication to change are negative aspects, particularly because Hamas considers itself a pan-Islamic movement supporting change. Critics contend that Hamas knows that neither the Palestinian people nor a divided Arab people can support the burden of liberation alone, points that the movement's literature makes abundantly clear.

Hamas has left the burden of theorizing about and working for reform of the Arabs' "system" to grass-roots political movements in the Arab states. It has kept a distance from any endeavor that can be interpreted as interference in the affairs of any country, apparently haunted by the nightmare of the results of PLO involvement. This approach is also the foundation for its relations with popular organizations, a topic that is examined later.

Hamas's pessimistic reading of the state of affairs in the Arab and Islamic worlds forms the bases of its overall political strategy. According to an internal memo, the outstanding features of the situation are the following. First, polarization and divisions in the wake of the Gulf War beset the Arab and Islamic worlds, and these factors have had a negative effect on the policies of Arab states. Second, the majority of Arab and Islamic states are participating in or supporting the peace process. Governments that oppose this trend are unable to generate momentum in the opposite direction because of the scale of international support for it and the pressures that are being brought to bear on Arab states. Third, a large number of Arab and Islamic states are being bled by internal conflicts (i.e., Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, and Sudan) or are squandering their energies on regional and international disputes. Consequently, the governments and peoples of those states are preoccupied with their own

problems and have little opportunity to worry about the Zionist threat and liberating Palestine. Fourth, many Arab countries have scant resources and are heavily in debt.⁸

In acknowledging the existing Arab situation and in dealing with the realities of individual Arab states, Hamas formulates its policies on the basis of the four points above. It is a cautious, rather than a radical, policy aimed at ameliorating the existing negative circumstances without precipitating a conflict. Hamas tries to promote the positive elements in that situation and to contain the negative ones in its dealings with the Arab and Islamic worlds.⁹

Hamas's Arab Relations Policy

According to Hamas leaders, the general principle on which the movement bases its Arab relations, in addition to highlighting the positive and playing down the negative, is not to alienate anyone and not to get drawn into a conflict with any Arab party.¹⁰ The former head of Hamas's Political Bureau, Abu Marzouq, adds that Hamas has learned several lessons from the PLO's experience in forging relations with Arab partners. "Contrary to Fateh's policy of dragging Arab regimes into the battle for the liberation of Palestine, we believe that one must be fully aware of what one is doing when one gets involved in battle. The absence of adequate awareness leads to defeat, which has been the outcome of our wars with Israel."¹¹

An indication that Hamas has heeded the lessons of the PLO's past in this regard is the movement's avoidance of radical slogans concerning Arab regimes. Slogans such as "the liberation train passes through" this or that Arab capital had filled the air during the heyday of Palestinian revolutionary zeal, the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hamas believes that fighting Arab regimes in this manner only exacerbates their weaknesses while making Israel even stronger, which would be a gratuitous service to Israel. "Hamas's guideline is to strengthen Arab states, not weaken them, and this is also the basis for its actions."¹²

8. These four reasons are taken from an undated internal Hamas document, "Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyya fil-'alaqat al-siyasiyya" [Hamas's interim policies in political relations], which was shown to the author in Amman on 16 April 1995.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Marzouq interview, 21 April 1995.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

According to its internal documents, Hamas's dealings with Arab and Islamic parties are based on the following six political principles.¹³ First, Hamas seeks to establish positive relations with all Arab and Islamic parties (states, organizations, forces, political parties, or individuals), irrespective of their ideological and political orientations or their sectarian and racial origins. Second, Hamas does not interfere in the internal affairs of Arab or Islamic states; it also rejects the involvement of those states in its own policies, positions, and internal affairs. Third, Hamas is not at war with any Arab or Islamic party; therefore, its policy is not to attack any Arab or Islamic party. Fourth, Hamas considers Palestine to be the proper arena for struggle with the enemy. The movement is careful not to transfer the struggle outside the territory of occupied Palestine. However, Hamas does not condemn any act of jihad outside Palestine directed at the Zionist occupation. Fifth, Hamas makes it clear to all sides that the purpose of its establishing relations with any party is to gain support for the movement's resistance to Israeli occupation. Such relations are not directed against any regime or organization. Sixth, Hamas will not join any alliance directed against any other group, and it will not allow its relations with any Arab or Islamic party to be at the expense of another.

Based on these principles, the movement tried to establish a network of official relations with Arab countries. It established a presence in the countries surrounding Israel as well as in the Gulf area and opened talks with officials in those countries. It sent representatives to Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen, and they met with Arab rulers and officials. The most intensive period of meetings followed the release from prison of Sheikh Yassin, who then embarked on a major tour of Arab countries from February to June 1998. The tour took him to Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen, where he met with the leaders of these countries. That tour represented the most significant inroad by Hamas into the Arab establishment since the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference in March 1996, and it was the most important public relations exercise in its history. The United States criticized the tour on the grounds that the high-level official reception given to Sheikh Yassin sent an indirect message of support for what Washington perceives to be Hamas's terrorist activities.¹⁴ Nevertheless, the obsta-

13. "Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyyah."

14. The Foreign Minister of Kuwait, Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber as-Sabah, said there was U.S. pressure on Kuwait not to meet with Sheikh Yassin, *Al-Hayat*, 28 May 1998; concerning U.S. chagrin with the Arabs for hosting Sheikh Yassin, see Henry Siegman, "Peacemaking Needs Help from Arab Governments, too," *International Herald Tribune*, 8 June 1998.

cles discussed above placed limits on how far those relations could develop. Furthermore, the PLO put indirect pressure on a number of Arab states to restrict any future ties with Hamas.

Apart from Libya, the countries of the Maghreb (Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia) remained closed to Hamas and were not on the list of countries visited, which might work to the disadvantage of Hamas. Clearly, the relations between the regimes of Algeria and Tunisia and the Islamists in those countries made it very difficult to establish anything resembling acceptable relations.

Hamas's View of Arab Positions and Issues

The above-mentioned policies began to take shape after the Gulf War (1990–91), but the spirit of those policies actually had been guiding Hamas's political practices even earlier. Hamas's political discourse in the postwar period also evolved in the direction of further moderation. This becomes apparent by examining Hamas's views on a number of Arab positions and outstanding issues. The following discussion shall examine in particular Hamas's views of Arab positions that pertain to the conflict with Israel; these have been analyzed at length in the movement's literature.

Arab Positions on the Intifada and Resistance to Occupation

In its political discourse, Hamas continued to assign special importance to various aspects of Arab positions on the intifada (1987–93) and resistance to the occupation. It highlighted the need for solidarity, support, and the provision of moral and material aid to “the jihad of the Palestinian people inside [the occupied land]” and warned against using the intifada in the service of peace agreements, as a bridge to self-rule, or for the convening of an international conference that would “liquidate the Muslim Palestinian cause.”¹⁵ It repeated the pattern observed in the first period [from the outbreak of the intifada to the Gulf War], when Hamas's discourse gradually toned down from initial zealotry to moderation and less condemnation. Hamas's view of Arab positions on the intifada and the resistance of occupation also underwent moderation.

Hamas realized shortly after the outbreak of the intifada that the uprising was not going to amount to anything more than a vehicle which a

15. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 8 of 23 February 1988.

Palestinian negotiator could use to arrive at a peace settlement. No matter how much the uprising spread or how important it became, it had to end, and it was inevitable that it would be exploited. Consequently, Hamas faced the question: What comes after the intifada? This was a question for which it did not have an answer. In fact, the question had only one answer in the light of the inauspicious Arab and Islamic situation: It would be exploited for political gain, which Hamas has condemned repeatedly. Hamas got a hint of what was to come only one month after the uprising began, when it condemned the attempt by “certain Arab leaders” to create “surrender solutions” by the convening of international conferences.¹⁶ It was apparent even then that Arab interest in the uprising was limited to how it could contribute to a peace settlement and to the realization of the maximal attainable extent of Palestinian rights. Certain neighboring countries became concerned that the intifada might spread or be imitated. In this context, incidents in southern Jordan in April 1989 served as the primary spur for the transition to democracy at the end of the same year. Such events raised the question of how much they might have been influenced by the uprising in the Occupied Territories.

Hamas had little confidence in the collective Arab offers of material support or expressions of moral support for the intifada emanating from the Arab League or the Arab foreign ministers’ meetings. The movement dismissed this support as serving the predetermined aim of fostering the peace process. More significantly, all material aid was distributed through PLO channels, which ignored Hamas.

The position of Arab regimes on the intifada and resistance to the occupation, which was tied to the goal of a peace settlement, was consolidated following the convening of the Madrid Conference in October 1991. This position became quite apparent following the December 1992 expulsion of 413 Hamas leaders, supporters, and prominent figures to south Lebanon, where they set up camp under harsh winter conditions. The deportation led to the Arab delegations suspending their meetings with the Israeli delegation at the Washington peace talks. It appeared momentarily as if Hamas had succeeded, albeit indirectly, in derailing the peace process. The Hamas deportees gained widespread sympathy in the Arab and Islamic worlds and even internationally. The issue of the deportees continued to occupy the parties to the peace talks for about four months. After that, most of the statements by the Arab side shifted to an emphasis on making

16. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 4 of late December 1987.

the peace talks succeed, and this aim was declared to be more important than the deportees.

The modest Arab protests against the deportation and the subsequent shift in the Arab position in the absence of any concessions on the issue made Hamas more realistic and aware of just how weak the Arabs were. That incident was responsible for yet another period of quiescence in Hamas's discourse, and it lowered the movement's expectation of a tough Arab stand. Consequently, Hamas's call for an Arab summit following the massacre of 36 worshipers and the wounding of many others at the Abraham Mosque in Hebron by Israeli settler Baruch Goldstein in February 1994 was little more than a cry in the wilderness.¹⁷ Hamas displayed a more pragmatic attitude a week later, when it welcomed the decision by the Arab participants in the Washington talks to suspend the negotiations in protest against the massacre. Hamas described that decision as "a serious step that is an adequate response to the Zionist massacre."¹⁸

The official Arab position toward Hamas became more complex as Hamas mounted a series of armed operations that were painful to Israel and had a significant impact. Hamas began with the kidnapping and killing of Sergeant-Major Nissim Toledano in December 1992. This incident was followed by a number of armed attacks, most notably the series of bus bombings in retaliation for the Hebron massacre in 1994, then another series of bus bombings in February and March 1996 in retaliation for the January assassination by Israeli security agents in Gaza of the engineer, Yahya 'Ayyash, then leader of Hamas's military arm, the 'Izziddin al-Qassam Brigades. These operations were widely condemned by the United States and other Western countries, and they also were severely condemned by the Palestinian Authority, as well as by a number of Arab states, whether directly or indirectly. Hamas found itself in the position of having to defend, explain, and justify these operations and to connect them to Zionist massacres of Palestinians, such as the Hebron massacre or Israeli operations to liquidate armed groups belonging to the al-Qassam Brigades. The Hamas opinion of Arab attitudes became increasingly bitter. After criticizing Arab regimes on their tepid support for the intifada,

17. Hamas called for Arab and Islamic summits in its leaflet, "Press Conference Statement by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) Concerning the Criminal Massacre at the Noble Sanctuary of Abraham," released in Amman on 26 February 1994.

18. Hamas leaflet, "Commentary on the decision by Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon to suspend their participation in the talks to protest the massacre at the Noble Sanctuary of Abraham," 1 March 1994.

Hamas had to redirect its rhetoric to justify its operations to many of those same regimes.

Arab-Israeli Settlement

The Hamas movement developed in an atmosphere dominated by proposals for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli struggle, despite the intifada and the spirit it embodied. Because of the extreme contradiction between settlement proposals and Hamas's ideological and political position, the movement found itself having to denounce them constantly. It should not be surprising that the persistent series of denunciations began with the condemnation of the 1979 Camp David accords. Hamas's first communique issued during the intifada inveighed against "those who are panting after a feeble peace . . . after vacuous international conferences . . . after treasonous bilateral accords in the manner of Camp David."¹⁹ This sharp castigation of agreements and the Arab parties thereto set the tone for a batch of early press releases by the movement.²⁰

Hamas's abandonment of the strident tone that colored its discourse at the beginning of the intifada and its adoption of more moderate language and careful choice of words is manifest in its commentary on the signing of the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty in October 1994. The Hamas description of this treaty as "a new fissure in the wall of Arab solidarity" reflected an effort to use diplomatic language to convey censure. In order to blunt the sharpness of its criticism and thus avoid infuriating the Jordanian regime, the movement denounced all other agreements between Arab parties and Israel, such as the Camp David agreements and the Oslo and Cairo accords.²¹ Differences in the two modes of expression are clear, although the position being expressed is the same. In the second period, emphasis is on the deed, the signature, and the treaty, rather than on the doer of the deed, the signatory of the treaty. This is a basic feature of Hamas's press releases after the Gulf War.

In between the two extremes, the strident position on Camp David and the moderate one on the Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty, one finds a spectrum of positions, reflecting gradations in the movement's mode of expression from heated emotionalism to cool calculation. For example,

19. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 1 of 14 December 1987.

20. See Hamas, Periodic statement no. 2 of mid-December 1987.

21. Hamas leaflet, "The Jordanian-Zionist Treaty: A New Fissure in the Wall of Arab Solidarity," 27 October 1994.

Hamas held a press conference on 24 April 1993 in the wake of the decision by the foreign ministers of the Arab countries surrounding Israel to return to the negotiating table and resume the ninth round of talks in Washington. These talks had been frozen for four months in response to Israel's December 1992 deportation of over four hundred Palestinian Islamists to south Lebanon. The Hamas press release adopted a moderate tone in criticizing the foreign ministers' action. Only one sentence directly addresses the ending of the suspension: "It is astonishing and worthy of disapproval that the decision to resume negotiations was made despite the insistence by Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin that no initiative would be undertaken and no real concessions made concerning the substantial issues at the talks."²²

I have focused on Hamas's attitude toward the Arab states that are most supportive of or involved in the peace effort, namely Egypt and Jordan. As stated, despite political opposition to the positions of those states, Hamas tried not to precipitate a confrontation with them. As for Arab states that are less supportive of the peace process, Hamas's dealings with them fell under the rubric of "the Arab position" and "the Arab responsibility" or some such general category. Hamas used to respond with criticism of a general nature to any official Arab manifestations of the desire to establish commercial or political relations with Israel, or to any talk about ending the boycott of Israel, but it used indirect references, without naming names.²³ Syria, however, was singled out for rare praise, in particular during the deportee crisis from December 1992 to December 1993.²⁴

Arab Attitudes toward the Palestinians

Hamas's political discourse addresses the question of various Arab attitudes toward the Palestinians under various circumstances. Hamas has tried to

22. Hamas leaflet, "Press Conference Release by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)," 24 April 1993.

23. See, for example, the Hamas leaflet, "Release Concerning the Termination of the Economic Boycott and the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations with the Enemy," dated 2 October 1994; for later proclamations on this subject, see Hamas, Periodic statement no. 131 of 12 January 1996, which denounced "the regimes that are deeply involved in normalization with the Zionist side."

24. See, for example, the letter from 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, a prominent Hamas figure and the spokesman for the deportees, to Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad, which says "History shall record your position toward our cause with glowing pride . . . Palestine is part of our Greater Syria, and Damascus is our pre-eminent leader." The text was published in the daily *Tishrin* (Damascus), 16 February 1993.

keep informed of the problems of Palestinians in their diaspora, particularly in locations within the Arab world. Hamas's discourse refers to the massacres that Palestinians have experienced in the countries surrounding Palestine, such as during Black September (1970) in Jordan and in the Tal al-Za'tar (1976) and the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps (1982) in Lebanon.²⁵ One also finds scattered indictments of Arab maltreatment or disparagement of Palestinian communities residing in Arab states. For example, Hamas has mounted a strong defense of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon and sharply denounced efforts to expel Palestinians from that country,²⁶ where Palestinians "have suffered more calamities, slaughter, and torture than anywhere else."²⁷

The more pressing crisis that Hamas faced, however, was the hardships suffered by the Palestinian community in Kuwait after the Gulf War. Palestinians who remained in Kuwait were subjected to many forms of harassment as a result of negative attitudes toward Palestinians, who were perceived as siding with Iraq in line with the position adopted by the PLO in 1990. This atmosphere, as well as the events that led to the war, precipitated a genuine crisis for Hamas because it had established rather distinctive relations at the Islamic, political, and parliamentary levels in Kuwait (this point is discussed in more detail below).

Over a period of five months following the end of the war, Hamas's position escalated gradually. It began with expressions of hope and called on "our brethren in Kuwait to halt their campaigns against our struggling Palestinian people."²⁸ Next, Hamas called on "the government and people of our sister state Kuwait to put an end to their improper practices against our Palestinian people residing in Kuwait."²⁹ This progressed to a more strident request "to stop the injustice and halt the massacres to which our Palestinian people and other nationals are being subjected in Kuwait."³⁰ And it culminated in strong condemnation and calls for "the Arab League to intervene to stop the inhuman violations being perpetrated against the Palestinians of Kuwait."³¹

25. See, for example, the references to these massacres in Hamas, Periodic statement no. 27 of 3 August 1988 and idem, Periodic statement no. 115 of 3 September 1994.

26. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 27 of 3 August 1988.

27. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 32 of 25 November 1988.

28. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 71 of 26 March 1991.

29. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 75 of 1 June 1991.

30. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 76 of 1 July 1991.

31. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 77 of 3 August 1991.

Hamas's position went beyond mere press releases. It made direct contact with the Kuwaiti government in order to stop violations. Those contacts remained unacknowledged officially because of the sensitivity of the situation. Hamas sources believe, however, that those contacts had an impact in regularizing relations between the two sides and ameliorating the suffering of the Palestinian community remaining in Kuwait.³²

During the crisis leading to the Gulf War, Palestinians living in Egypt and the Gulf states experienced various levels of harassment. Hamas felt obliged to condemn that harassment, particularly in cases that resulted in deportation. One press release in the midst of the crisis announced that Hamas "condemns the expulsion and deportation of Palestinian students and residents from Egypt and some states in the Gulf and deems such action to be a stab in the back of the Palestinian cause and the blessed intifada."³³

Another crisis affecting Palestinians abroad, albeit at a less severe level than the crisis in Kuwait, was the plight of Palestinians working in Libya. This crisis involved two episodes. The first incident was the detention of 25 Palestinian families on the Libyan border with Egypt for several days in December 1994; this led to the death of two children. At the time, Hamas intervened actively, making direct contact with the Libyan leader, Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi, to get authorization for the families to enter Libya. The effort was successful and was publicized by Hamas.³⁴ The second and larger-scale incident resulted from President Qaddafi's September 1995 order to deport Palestinians residing in Libya to the area controlled by the PA. This action was meant to embarrass the PA by demonstrating that it did not have the power to admit the Palestinians or to protect them. Hamas felt obliged to denounce the Libyan action unambiguously,³⁵ but only after announcing that it had contacted Libyan leaders to try to get the order annulled.³⁶

It can be said that the Palestinians outside Palestine have yet to face the most serious crisis, and one to which Hamas will need to react. That

32. Muhammad Nazzal, Hamas representative in Jordan, interview with author, 23 April 1995.

33. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 64 of 26 September 1990.

34. See the two leaflets by Hamas on this issue, dated 21 December 1994 and 12 January 1995.

35. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 128 of 5 October 1995.

36. Hamas, Press Statement of 9 September 1995, gives details of contacts between Ibrahim Ghosheh, the official spokesman for Hamas, and President Mu'ammar al-Qaddafi, on this issue.

crisis is latent in Jordan, where the largest Palestinian community outside Palestine lives, and is connected intricately to the provisions of the Israeli-Palestinian deals that will be negotiated concerning the future of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, and the role that Jordan will play in those agreements. The situation of Palestinians in Jordan is extremely sensitive politically. On the one hand they are, in theory, full Jordanian citizens and enjoy the same rights of their fellow citizens of Jordanian origin. On the other hand, they constitute the largest segment of Palestinian refugees and “displaced.” Because so little discussion can be traced in Hamas’s literature about this potential crisis, it is difficult to predict how the movement would respond to possible options. Nevertheless, it is possible to get a glimpse of the crisis that could engulf Hamas if the Palestinians in Jordan were offered a choice between retaining Jordanian nationality or giving it up in favor of some status that links them to the Palestinian state that will emerge, whatever its shape. In such a situation, Hamas will have to express its opinion quite frankly. Whichever option Hamas chooses and asks Palestinians to adopt, there will be political repercussions both for its relations with the Palestinian entity and with Jordan, and these will have consequences for Hamas’s presence in Jordan. Most likely, however, Hamas will opt for a pure “Palestinian option,” calling Palestinians in Jordan to choose to return back to Palestine.

Inter-Arab Conflict: The Gulf War

The Gulf War, which was the most severe inter-Arab crisis since the Arabs won their independence, broke out only three years after Hamas had been formed. This crisis prompted Hamas to appoint for the first time an official representative outside the territory of Palestine to join the delegation representing Islamic movements and groups that was formed to help resolve the crisis through nonmilitary means. The Gulf crisis and the Gulf War were severe tests for the abilities of a growing and politically inexperienced movement that was entirely engaged in the intifada inside Palestine. It needed to survive a very complex Arab development while holding on to the gains it had made at the grass-roots level in the Gulf states, particularly Kuwait, which was the center of the crisis. The test for Hamas was to succeed in finding a compromise solution consistent with the movement’s convictions while maintaining the good will of the Gulf people and not clashing with the emotional and unconditional support for the Iraqi position surging among the masses, especially in Palestine and Jordan.

To a certain extent, Hamas succeeded in coming up with a compromise to deal with the thorny situation.³⁷

Initially, Hamas attempted to stay within the general rhetoric of condemning the intervention of Western forces in the region, while avoiding any clash with the popular mood that could result from any direct criticism of Iraq. In its 13 August 1990 statement, Hamas called on Iraq, Kuwait, and all Arab countries “to resolve their internal affairs between themselves and deprive enemies of the chance to exploit the situation.”³⁸ Hamas leaders, however, could not withstand the pressure exerted on the movement by its Islamist allies and its friends in the Gulf states who had close ties to governments. Hence, its position evolved so that in its 17 August press release Hamas distanced itself further from the Iraqi position. According to this statement, Hamas “had been taken by surprise, as had the other Muslims, by Iraq’s military intervention in Kuwait. . . . Although Hamas had sided with Iraq in the face of American threats, that does not mean that it [accepts] the existing state of affairs, nor does it constitute a bias toward one side or the other.” The release demanded that Kuwait once again should become “a free and esteemed country rich in potential and resources that make a significant contribution to the development of the Arab world . . . and to the solution of the problem in an Arab and Islamic framework.” Hamas considered its stand, as formulated in this release, to be a balanced position respecting basic principles and rights. It added that the solution “has to be based first of all on the withdrawal of foreign forces from the region and Iraqi forces from Kuwait; that an Arab or an Islamic force should be stationed in the hotly disputed border areas; that the people of Kuwait should have the right of determining the future of their country; and that disputes should be settled in an Arab or Islamic framework which will ensure that Iraq’s demands concerning the drawing of borders or the repayment of debts arising from the war with Iran and other [debts] will receive due consideration.”³⁹ With the passage of time this position became clearer, and more criticism was directed at the Iraqi invasion. Asserting that “occupation” should be condemned—whether it was Israeli occupation of Palestine or Iraqi occupation of Kuwait—‘Abdul

37. For a detailed analysis of the Hamas position during the Gulf War, see Jean-François Legrain, “A Defining Moment: Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalism,” pp. 70–88 in *Islamic Fundamentalists and the Gulf Crisis*, ed. by James Piscatori (Chicago: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991).

38. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 62 of 13 August 1990.

39. Hamas leaflet dated 17 August 1990.

'Aziz-al-Rantisi, a Hamas leader in Gaza, declared: "First of all we demand that the Iraqi troops should withdraw from Kuwait."⁴⁰

In order to appreciate the courage it took to adopt such a position, one has to consider the context. Hamas took a risk by calling openly on Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait. Such a position was unpopular at the time for any grass-roots movement or organization in Palestine or Jordan, where the majority of Palestinians live. Hamas argued that its position was totally consistent with its conviction that political choices should not be forced on anyone, although some analysts maintain that it was a reflection of the political pragmatism that Hamas had embraced early on in comparison with the PLO, which clearly was biased toward Iraq.⁴¹

Throughout the crisis and the war that followed, Hamas continued to address the Kuwaiti and Iraqi peoples, shunning any endorsement of official positions. It had to negotiate a public relations minefield. It spoke of "ending the tribulations and afflictions of the Muslim Kuwaiti people," and said that the Palestinian people never would forget "the benevolent and generous position of our brothers, the people of Kuwait, toward the people of Palestine throughout their tribulations and the calamity that befell them."⁴² Yet Hamas also saluted "the steadfast people of Iraq who are standing up bravely to tyrannical American aggression" and called on "all Arab and Islamic peoples to stand beside the Iraqi people and to support them to the full extent of their capabilities."⁴³

In brief, Hamas tried to hedge its bets in the crisis. It attempted to keep open its lines to the Gulf countries, which is particularly important because of the financial support the movement receives from the public there. Hamas also had to act within the parameters set by the Palestinian public that was supportive of Iraq and resentful of the Western-led coalition. This also was the view of Musa Zeid al-Keylani, a Jordanian analyst of Islamist movements: "Thus Hamas demonstrated that it had a better understanding and could read events and predict outcomes better than its domestic national rival, and Hamas was able, through its neat response to the Gulf crisis, to secure financial and political benefits as well."⁴⁴ This

40. Quoted in *al-Quds al-'Arabi* (London), 13 September 1990.

41. See further Legrain, "A Defining Moment: Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalism;" also see Ahmad Rashad, *Hamas: Palestinian Politics with an Islamic Hue* (Annandale, Virginia: United Association for Studies and Research, 1993), p. 29.

42. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 63 of 29 August 1990.

43. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 70 of 4 February 1991.

44. Musa Zeid al-Keylani, *Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fil urduin wa filastin* [The Islamic Movement in Jordan and Palestine] (Amman: Al-Risala Institute, 1995), pp. 186–87.

strategy did allow Hamas room for maneuver and made it possible for the movement to maintain contacts with official circles in both Iraq and Kuwait. Consequently, after the war was over, Hamas could offer to mediate, particularly in the matter of Kuwaiti prisoners and the problems that confronted the Palestinian community in Kuwait.⁴⁵ Although the offer to mediate over the issue of prisoners was not taken seriously, the intervention to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians in Kuwait did have some effect. The reception given to Sheikh Yassin in Kuwait on 12 May 1998 while on his tour following his release from prison boosted Hamas's position in Kuwait, compared with the resentment and great hostility harbored for the PLO and Yasir Arafat. Sheikh Yassin again offered to mediate to secure the release of Kuwaiti prisoners in Iraq. His offer was accepted by Kuwait but rejected by Iraq.⁴⁶

Apart from the Iraq-Kuwait conflict, Hamas has not been affected directly by any other bilateral Arab disputes, apart from the general affect of such disputes in weakening the Arabs as a whole and thereby indirectly weakening Hamas's political and military position. Hamas has tried to maintain the position of a distant observer of some of these disputes, without getting entangled in any of them. Thus, it has issued calls for dialogue and for the settlement of disputes within a fraternal climate. For example, Hamas appealed to the Yemeni people after the outbreak of the war of secession in May 1994 to resolve their differences using "Yemenite wisdom, far from outside interference." It also has called on Egypt and Sudan repeatedly to resolve the Halayeb crisis through amicable, bilateral negotiations.⁴⁷

Hamas also tried to steer clear of alliance politics and to maintain a relative degree of neutrality. It did not want to become the protégé of one or another alliance or to become a partisan of one or another regime. Even while a number of its leaders and prominent figures were residing in Jordan, it maintained good relations with Syria through its official representatives and the prominent Hamas figures living in that country. The same applied to Iran and Saudi Arabia; Iran was Hamas's strategic ally, while Saudi Arabia was a source of popular support and a state where Hamas had an official relation with the regime.⁴⁸

45. Nazzal interview, 23 April 1995.

46. *Al-Hayat*, 11 and 14 May 1998.

47. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 125 of 6 July 1995.

48. Nazzal interview, 23 April 1995.

Domestic Arab Affairs

In its political statements and public releases, Hamas has tried to avoid domestic Arab affairs. In only a few instances has it felt obliged to adopt positions pertaining to the domestic politics of an Arab state. Most cases involved clashes between governments and their political opposition. The position of Hamas in such situations has been to encourage dialogue and the avoidance of clashes and similar generalities. Hamas has found itself in embarrassing positions because most of the political opposition in Arab states consisted of Islamic movements whose style of opposition varied from peaceful means to the use of arms. Whereas Hamas felt an ideological affinity with the political orientation of those movements, it was unable to express support or solidarity with those movements unless they triumphed in peaceful democratic elections. One therefore can find a long series of statements of congratulation in Hamas's periodic statements that give the position of the movement toward the victory of Islamists in one country or another. For example, Hamas congratulated the Islamists on the seats they won in the November 1989 parliamentary elections in Jordan.⁴⁹ In fact, the situation in Jordan has attracted Hamas's interest more than that in any other place, because of the direct impact of events in Jordan on the domestic Palestinian situation. Furthermore, political orientations and election results to a large extent reflect Palestinian public opinion because of the high ratio of Palestinians there. Hamas therefore particularly is concerned with stability in Jordan and wants opportunities to remain open for advances by the Islamists in various areas. This is evident in the reiteration by Hamas of its concern not to undermine the democratic experiment in Jordan.⁵⁰

Hamas has made an effort to maintain a presence in Jordan without arousing the hostility of the regime. Therefore, it has refrained from interference in Jordan's domestic affairs and has avoided exploiting its presence in Jordan for anything beyond informational and political activities. For its part, Jordan has felt its regional political interests are being served by allowing a group of Hamas leaders to remain on its territory, rather than to move to Syria. This is particularly so because the outcome of the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has yet to be determined. The shape of that outcome will naturally have an impact on

49. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 50 of 27 November 1989.

50. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 58 of 14 June 1990.

Jordan; therefore Amman wants to have some influence on it, either directly or through a *de facto* alliance with Hamas.⁵¹

Nevertheless, Hamas's relations with the Jordanian regime have undergone tense moments on more than one occasion as a result of Hamas's armed activities, notably its suicide bombings inside Israel and the resulting intensification of pressure on Jordan to close down Hamas's offices and to arrest the movement's representatives. There have been four notable periods of strain in relations with the regime. The first was in April 1994, when Jordan announced it was withdrawing the passports of Nazzal and Ibrahim Ghosheh, both Jordanian citizens, after Nazzal declared in Amman that Hamas was embarking on armed attacks inside the heartland of Palestine. The second episode was in April 1995, in the wake of further operations by Hamas, to which Israel responded by stepping up pressure on Jordan, which reacted by expelling two Hamas leaders, Abu Marzouq, the head of Hamas's Political Bureau, and 'Imad al-'Alami, a Political Bureau member.

The third and most tense episode was in March, 1996 in the wake of the series of suicide bombings by Hamas in Jerusalem, 'Asqalan, and Tel Aviv. Jordanian authorities arrested a number of those working for Hamas's representatives and tightened restrictions on their activities. The fourth episode was precipitated on 7 September 1997 by the arrest of Ghosheh, the official spokesman for Hamas, who was kept in detention along with a number of Hamas members. The response of Hamas to these episodes was limited to expressing regret for their occurrence; the movement attempted on each occasion to defuse the tension by promising to adhere to its principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of Jordan.⁵² One Jordanian analyst views Hamas's conduct in Arab countries, including Jordan, as having gained the movement credibility with the regimes of the host countries.⁵³

Elsewhere, Hamas focused on the development and advancement of Islamic trends. When the Algerian Islamists won a crushing victory at the polls in 1990, Hamas sent a message to the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) congratulating it on the victory and describing it as a source of moral

51. See further Yehuda Lukas, *Israel, Jordan, and the Peace Process* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 184.

52. See, for example, Hamas, Periodic statement no. 124 of 7 June 1995, which expressed "regret" for the deportation of Abu Marzouq and al-'Alami; also see Hamas press release dated 21 September 1997 concerning the arrest of Ghosheh.

53. Musa Zeid al-Keylani, *op. cit.*, pp. 205-06.

support for the Palestinian intifada.⁵⁴ When the situation in Algeria deteriorated and the results of the parliamentary elections were nullified, Hamas called on the Algerian government to be patient and listen to the voice of wisdom. Hamas directed the same appeal to the Tunisian government, which opposed the Islamic Renaissance Movement (*Harakat al-Nahdah al-Islamiyya*), asking the government to rely on a dialogue with the Islamists.⁵⁵ One Hamas bulletin expressed solidarity with Tunisian Islamist prisoners and called on the government to rescind sentences passed on the Islamists, notably Rashid al-Ghannoushi, the leader of the Tunisian Islamic movement.⁵⁶

When Islamists came to power in Sudan in 1989, Hamas welcomed this with great enthusiasm. Since then, Hamas has developed its relations with the Sudanese regime so that it has become Hamas's strongest ally in the Arab world. Hamas's political discourse and its information releases always respond to internal changes in Sudan. When the government announced it was applying *shariah*, Hamas telegraphed its congratulations, calling it a step toward "the restoration of the dignity and impregnability of the *ummah* and the liberation of lands of the Muslims from colonialists and Zionists."⁵⁷ The victories of the Sudanese army in the south against the rebels headed by John Garang were welcomed by Hamas, which congratulated President Omar Hassan al-Bashir on occasions such as the July 1992 liberation of the strategic city of Torit, which had served as the headquarters of the rebels.⁵⁸ Hamas believed that any attack on Sudan, such as those by Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Sudanese rebels, was an assault on the security of the Arab nation as a whole.⁵⁹ Hamas condemned in the strongest terms the U.S. missile attack on a pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum at the end of August 1998. Washington claimed that the plant was manufacturing chemical weapons, but Hamas described the action as state terrorism.

Pan-Arab Issues

In its dealings with the Arab world, Hamas has asserted the pan-Arab nature of the conflict with Israel and focused its energies on preventing

54. Letter from Hamas to Sheikh 'Abbasi Madani, dated 18 June 1990.

55. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 83 of 4 February 1992.

56. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 90 of 5 September 1992.

57. Hamas leaflet, "Congratulations on the Application of the Islamic Shariah in Sudan," dated 13 February 1991.

58. Letter from Hamas to Sudan President Omar al-Bashir, 16 July 1992.

59. Hamas leaflet, "An Attack on Sudan is a Serious Threat to Arab National Security," dated 18 January 1997.

the conflict from metamorphosing into a conflict between Israel and the Palestinians alone. This theme has dominated Hamas's appeals, letters, and communications. In one letter sent to Arab heads of state, Hamas argued that the conflict between the Palestinians and the Jews should not be confined to "one piece of land or one state," emphasizing that it was "a war for destiny and existence (of the Arabs)."⁶⁰

Hamas believes that the Zionist threat threatens the entire region and the Arab people as a whole, citing Israeli interventions in the Bab al-Mandab Straits, Ethiopia, and southern Sudan, and argues that such interventions form part of a plan for a "Greater Israel."⁶¹ In order to combat that "threat," Hamas proposed to the Baghdad Arab summit in May 1990 a program of action based on three pillars:

1. The achievement of economic independence through Arab economic complementarity and a unified oil policy.
2. Gaining military independence by developing a modern armament industry.
3. Attaining political independence by using the media and cultural agencies to frame issues in their proper context, as a battle of the *ummah*, and a battle for destiny and existence, fought against a tyrannical enemy allied with the historic enemies of this nation.⁶²

Hamas openly asked the summit to create an "Arab Army for the Liberation of Palestine," that presumably would be stationed in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The movement also asked that an appropriate budget be allocated for that purpose, that the military capabilities of the states surrounding Israel should be placed at the disposal of that army, and that its servicemen be recruited from citizens of all Arab states willing to fight.⁶³

It is clear, however, that Hamas's appeals and its proposals for joint Arab action to deal with Arab national issues met with no serious response, even prior to the Gulf War. Nor did Hamas mount an effective effort to convince or to try to influence concerned Arab parties about its ambitions and programs, which are closer to a naive wish list than proposals that could be realized on the basis of the existing Arab state of affairs. Nevertheless, Hamas's attempt to deal with Arab summits and to send messages

60. Hamas letter, dated 25 May 1990, to Arab leaders prior to the convening of the May 1990 Baghdad summit; printed in *Al-Hayat*, 19 May 1990.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

to them constituted an evolution in its thinking, compared with the categorical censure of all Arab summits and conferences during the first two years of the movement's life.

Hamas tended to see all major events in the Middle East from the perspective of the battle with Israel. In Hamas's view, the Gulf War was a hemorrhage of Arab capabilities that should have been channeled into the battle with Israel. It saw the Egyptian-Sudanese border dispute over Halayeb also as benefiting Israel. Even the occupation of the Yemeni island of Hanish in the Red Sea by Eritrea in January 1996 was not free of Israeli involvement and served Israeli objectives.⁶⁴ Hamas did take note of the Egyptian concern during 1994–96 with Israel's territorial recalcitrance and its desire to be the regional leader. Egypt's position encouraged Hamas, as did its hosting of the negotiations between the PA and Hamas in Cairo, which constituted tacit recognition of a role for the movement. Hamas was outspoken in its appreciation for Egypt's position at the Sharm al-Sheikh anti-terrorism summit in March 1996, which clashed with the Israeli and U.S. objective to dedicate the summit exclusively to questions relating to the security of Israel. One Hamas official commented: "Egypt's influence and interests in the region clash with the expansion of Israel's interests and its influence, either directly or via its partners in the region."⁶⁵

Hamas tended to express its positions on pan-Arab issues or the problems facing individual Arab states through press releases or statements by its prominent members. The Gulf War was the most prominent occasion of this sort, but so were the effects of the war, particularly the effects of the indefinite containment of Iraq. Hamas called for an end to the economic boycott and declared its solidarity with the people of Iraq, positions that were reiterated in consecutive bulletins, particularly during 1991 and 1992. The movement also called for an end to inter-Arab conflicts for the sake of the Arab *ummah* as a whole, to which narrow state interests should take second place.⁶⁶ With respect to the U.S. treatment of Libya and the charge that Tripoli was responsible for the explosion of a Pan American airplane over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, Hamas denounced the American threats, which it termed American terrorism against Libya, and censured the boycott of Libya.⁶⁷ Hamas repeatedly censured the peri-

64. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 131 of 12 January 1996.

65. Statements by a Hamas strategist as quoted by Jamal Khashogji in *al-Hayat* (London), 12 March 1996.

66. Letter from Hamas to the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers, dated 26 July 1997.

67. Hamas leaflet, "No to the Unjust Penalties Imposed on the Muslim People of Libya," dated 15 April 1992.

odic acts of aggression by Israel against south Lebanon, which it considered to be an Arab national cause. Each time that Israel attacked towns and villages in south Lebanon under the pretext of striking at the Lebanese resistance forces, notably bases for Hizballah, Hamas immediately called for the support of the Lebanese resistance in the south and declared its solidarity with Lebanon. When natural disaster befell, such as the earthquake in Egypt, Hamas offered condolences,⁶⁸ and when famine threatened as a result of the drought and civil war in Somalia, Hamas appealed for help for the people of that country.⁶⁹

At the Popular Level

Hamas eventually realized that the aloof treatment accorded it by Arab regimes was counterbalanced by warm feelings toward it on the part of political mass movements, particularly Islamic ones. Hamas's interest in the Arab and Islamic public developed as the movement acquired more experience and became more proficient in its assessment of real conditions. Initially, the Hamas Charter, promulgated in August 1988, nine months after the movement was established, did not explicitly differentiate between an official and a popular level in the Arab and Islamic arenas. However, it did contain an article concerning Arab and Islamic states and governments, followed by another article under the heading of "National and Religious Groups, Institutions, Intellectuals, and the Arab-Islamic World."⁷⁰ The text in this regard is general. It tries to rally the nationalist and religious groups, and it sees the Islamic peoples as a source of support for Hamas, constituting a human, material, and informational strategic depth for the movement.⁷¹

At a subsequent stage, Hamas's perspective on the public sphere became more discriminating, and the movement's demands of the public became more definite. The Arab and Islamic *ummah* came to be regarded as strategic depth for Hamas and the Palestinian cause. Hamas put more reliance on popular forces and came to regard these forces as "the real resource for our movement in its long struggle with the Jewish enemy."⁷²

68. See for example the Hamas leaflet, "Our Most Heartfelt Condolences and Consolations to the Struggling Egyptian People," dated 13 October 1992; and the leaflet, "Our Most Sincere Condolences to the Egyptian People for the Victims of the Train Accident," dated 21 December 1995.

69. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 90 of 5 September 1992.

70. The Hamas Charter, article 29; see Appendix, document no. 2.

71. *Ibid.*

72. "Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyya."

Consequently, Hamas forged a set of general policies for its relations with the public, parallel to those devised for official Arab circles examined above. It should be noted that these policies (like those concerning regimes) apply to the Arab and Islamic worlds, which shall be examined in the next section. The most important of these policies, according to Hamas's documents, are the following:

1. [Hamas] is eager to consolidate its relations with various public groups, irrespective of their ideological or political affiliations, considering that the Palestinian cause and the Zionist threat concern the entire *ummah*, although priority should be given to Islamic movements and grass-roots institutions with an Islamic leaning.
2. Hamas shall avoid involvement in disputes and rivalries among Islamic movements or institutions working in the same sector or in the same geographic area; and it shall not align itself with one faction against any other.
3. Hamas shall avoid racial, regional, or sectarian divisions that exist in the Arab and Islamic *ummah*, and it shall refrain from participation in the details of ideological or theological (*fiqhiyah*) disputes.
4. Hamas shall adopt positions and information policies that foster other just causes of Islamic peoples and movements and organizations. It shall ally itself with justice and against injustice and always champion human values and human rights. In circumstances under which it is not free to act, Hamas may remain silent, but under no circumstances will it support a position that is unjust.
5. In its relationships, contacts, and the positions it adopts, Hamas respects the customs of peoples, their special characteristics, and their traditions but will not itself participate in those practices that are forbidden by the *shariah*.
6. Hamas's [policy] in its relations with grass-roots organizations and personalities is to concentrate on [cultivating relations with] key figures in each stratum and group, such as important scientists, intellectuals, journalists, and public relations officials, because that is more productive and yields faster results for the movement.⁷³

The above text can be interpreted in different ways. One can analyze it either in a realistic or an idealistic manner and reach different conclusions. It may be worthwhile to find a common denominator among

73. Ibid.

different possible interpretations. The first point that can be made is that one can detect in the text a measure of palpable political realism, gained after three years of experience. That experience moderated Hamas's discourse from the absolutism of the Charter to the pragmatism of dealing with the details of the complex reality in the Arab-Islamic world. Here the enigma of the official and the popular constitutes an idiosyncratic structural conundrum, quite apart from how it affects, or is affected by, the Palestinian problem.

A second point that can be made concerns Hamas's attempt to deal with this complex relationship between the official and the popular levels by cultivating, in theory, two different sets of policies. The first set is public-oriented, aimed at nurturing mobilization, and calls for material support and participation in jihad; the second is regime-oriented, characterized by appeasement and moderation, and emphasizes noninterference in domestic affairs. In fact, these two sets were irreconcilable, because the actions that Hamas advocated for adoption by popular Arab grass-roots organizations definitely conflict with regime policies. In reality, therefore, Hamas did not pursue strongly its public level policies in the Arab countries. The movement always has given priority to maintenance of the links—however weak—that it had established with governments over activist links with grass-roots organizations. In short, Hamas's activities were restricted to the political and informational functions of its representatives and official spokesmen. These activities amount to little more than communicating Hamas's views only on those issues that are germane to the Palestinian cause. Even at their most expansive, these activities do not go beyond the participation of Hamas's leaders as speakers or lecturers in conferences, mass rallies, and festivals. More accurately, except for a limited number of cases in Jordan and Lebanon, Hamas hardly ever has organized any mass activities under its banner in any Arab country on any occasion, and thus it is difficult to evaluate how the above policies are working in practice.

The third point that can be made concerns the application of those policies and Hamas's connections with the masses. In both Arab and Islamic states, Hamas has relied from the beginning on the complementarity and solidarity of local Islamic movements. For instance, rather than Hamas organizing its own meetings of support and solidarity, the country-based groups themselves organize such meetings. This tactic has provided Hamas with a buffer between its policies and those of the governing regimes, and it has succeeded in minimizing the points of friction between Hamas and Arab regimes, particularly if one takes into

account Hamas's commitment not to organize branches outside Palestine. At the same time, the cost to the movement is that Hamas has been deprived of the benefit of establishing direct contacts with the public and developing them into a stable relationship. In an effort to sidestep the bureaucratic problems of securing official permission from security forces, many of these activities expressing solidarity with Hamas were organized under the banner of general slogans such as support for the jihad of the Palestinian people or support for the intifada. Consequently, neither the name of Hamas nor its symbols were displayed prominently at those activities. In summary, one can conclude that Hamas's lackluster efforts in terms of establishing relations with the public effectively minimized or even eliminated conflicts with Arab regimes. Yet, that success has been achieved at the expense of Hamas's direct contacts with the Arab public, which have become rare.

One of the few ways in which Hamas retains grass-roots contacts in the Arab world is to participate in conferences that have an Arab or Islamic popular dimension. For example, it participated in the Arab Islamic Popular Congress that used to meet in Khartoum, at the invitation of its secretary general, Hassan al-Turabi. The first congress was organized during the Gulf crisis, and it since has become a meeting place for delegates from grass-roots Arab nationalist and Islamic movements. Hamas has a seat on the general secretariat of the congress. Hamas also took part in the pan-Arab-Islamic Convention that met in Beirut in October 1994; it was organized jointly by the Arab Nationalist Conference (an annual convention of the pan-Arab nationalists) and prominent Islamic figures from throughout the Arab homeland, including Rashid al-Ghannoushi (Tunisia), al-Turabi (Sudan), and Mustafa Mashhur (Egypt). The Arab-Islamic convention was considered the first real meeting, at the ideological level, between the Arab nationalist and Islamist movements, and its aim was to resolve differences and to begin a new chapter in their relations. Hamas was given a seat on the general secretariat and attended subsequent meetings of the convention.

To cite some less important grass-roots activities, Hamas takes part in popular festivals and party conventions in support of the Palestinian cause or the resistance in south Lebanon. Most such festivals are held in Jordan or Lebanon, but some are held in Syria. Hamas's files on its relations with Arab political parties and movements are full of messages of support from them. Most such messages relate to specific events, such as press releases and memoranda from Jordanian and Lebanese parties on the

occasion of operations by the al-Qassam Brigades or the assassination of its commanders.⁷⁴

HAMAS AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

Hamás considers the "Islamic dimension" to be "a pivotal strategic dimension for [the movement] and for the Palestinian cause"⁷⁵ and the acquisition of power by the Islamic world—for example, the Pakistani nuclear bomb—as an asset for the Arab Islamic *ummah*.⁷⁶ On the basis of these convictions, Hamás has been keen on establishing relations with Islamic states and peoples.

The Official Level

Hamás has made an effort to establish direct relations with the governments and peoples in the Islamic world. Hamás's political discourse has been sensitive and responsive to the principal causes in the Islamic world, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir. However, the movement has encountered problems with respect to the establishment of official relations with regimes, and even the people, in the Islamic world just like the ones it experienced in the Arab world. These problems include the past history of the Muslim Brotherhood's relations with its Arab-Islamic environment; the regional and international consensus on the peace process and the abandonment of the military approach; the Western, notably American, campaign against "Islamic terrorism" and the fears this has aroused among Islamic and Arab governments; the widespread and deeply ingrained recognition of the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, a recognition that finds concrete expression in the offices and embassies the PLO maintains in those states; and finally, the administrative and organizational shortcomings of Hamás itself, beginning with the limited cadres in charge of establishing and maintaining

74. Hamás received many letters of support from Jordanian, Lebanese, and other parties following the killing of such prominent leaders as Tareq Dukhan and Yahya 'Ayyash and after the deportation of 413 Islamist leaders to south Lebanon; see, for example, "Statement by Parties Opposed to Submission and Normalization [of relations with Israel] Concerning the Armed Confrontation Between the *Mujahidin* of the al-Qassam [Brigades] and the Israeli Occupation Forces," dated 15 October 1994 and signed by eight Jordanian parties.

75. See "The Islamic Sphere" section in the Hamás Charter.

76. See further, Hamás, "Siyasat Hamás al-marhaliyya."

political and public relations. One can add another obstacle: the limited interest in and familiarity with the Palestinian cause in the Islamic world and the paucity of available information on the topic. This is especially so in distant countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and a number of Islamic states in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in the Islamic communities of the West.

With respect to Hamas's general policies in dealing with the official and popular levels in the Islamic world, these are the same as the policies explained in the last section. In general, these policies are based on nonintervention in the domestic affairs of Islamic states and maintaining a careful balance between supporting issues that Hamas believes are just and not antagonizing the regimes concerned. As for dealing with Islamic countries collectively, Hamas does not enjoy any special or quasi-diplomatic status (e.g., have observer status) in the organizations and institutions established by the Islamic countries. Hamas's relations with those institutions are limited to issuing appeals and addressing statements to those fora on various occasions, particularly when high-level meetings are convened. Hamas has become accustomed to putting forward its perspective on Palestinian issues in those appeals, in the hope of attracting attention from the Islamic states.⁷⁷

Relations with Iran

Hamas's ties with Iran are the most significant among the movement's relations in the Islamic world. Iran is an extraordinary state in the region for several reasons. It is a "revolutionary Islamic state"; it has had a remarkable history of concern with the Palestinian cause ever since the revolution of 1979 brought the Islamic Republic into being; and it supports and places special emphasis on Islamic movements in Palestine. Correspondingly, there is intense interest with Iran on the part of its neighbors and other states in the region, whose relations with the Islamic Republic are strained and characterized by mutual distrust. At the international level, Iran's hostility to the West and the relentless American-led campaign against it under the justification that it supports "terrorism" and opposes peaceful settlements in the Middle East, along with the other reasons listed above, assigns special importance to Hamas's relations with Iran. These relations justify devoting a special section in this chapter to Iran.

77. See, for example, "A Memorandum from the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, to the Organization of the Islamic Conference Meeting in Islamabad on March 23, 1997," dated 22 March 1997.

Since the Islamic Republic of Iran came into being, its relations with the Palestinian national movement in general have passed through several stages. Initially, there was a remarkable honeymoon with the PLO, which began shortly after the triumph of the revolution. PLO Chairman Arafat landed in Tehran 1979 as the first official visitor to the capital under the new regime, and he was given a triumphal welcome befitting conquerors and *mujahidin*. The visit resulted in the opening of a Palestine embassy in place of what used to be the Israeli mission under the shah. The first few months witnessed the flowering of fraternal sentiments, during which Palestine's representatives in Tehran were hosted and feted. However, as tensions between Iraq and Iran developed and war broke out between them in 1980, the short honeymoon with the PLO ended. Relations with Tehran entered a cold freeze as the PLO drifted away from Iran to restore some balance in its relations with Arab states, a process exacerbated by Iran's disappointment in the un-Islamic conduct of members of the Palestinian delegation.⁷⁸ Iran developed an interest in Lebanon in 1982, particularly in Hizballah, and some contacts were established with prominent Palestinian Islamists in Lebanon. Then a thaw in the freeze began with the outbreak of the intifada at the end of 1987, particularly in view of the significant and noteworthy participation of the Islamists in the uprising against Israeli occupation. Thus a third phase in Iran's relations with the Palestinians was inaugurated.

Iran unambiguously rejected the looming political settlement in the region and gave its support to the Palestinian opponents (both Islamic and secular) of the process. This support was crowned by the convening in Tehran of a conference of forces opposed to a settlement with Israel on 22 October 1991, just eight days before the Madrid Conference began. The opposition forces meeting in Tehran denounced the Madrid Conference and its participants. The Palestinian resistance organizations in attendance had met on 19 October in a forum entitled "The International Conference to Support the Palestinian People's Islamic Revolution" at which they declared their determination to halt and abort the settlement. This forum later led to the formation of what became known as the alliance of the ten *fasa'il*.

78. For a well-balanced and in-depth interpretation of the relationship between revolutionary Iran and the Palestinians in this period, see the chapter "The Palestinians between Dream and Reality," pp. 363–405 in Fahmi Huwaidi, *Iran minal dakhil* [Iran from the Inside], 3rd ed. (Cairo: al-Ahram Center for Translation and Publishing, 1988).

In addition, the Iranian parliament passed a bill entitled “Law for the Support of the Islamic Revolution of the Palestinian People.” This legislation established an account that was funded by contributions collected from governmental and nongovernmental organizations and earmarked for support of the Palestinian people through their Islamic forces.⁷⁹ Iran declared the last Friday of the fasting month of Ramadan to be International Jerusalem Day and has observed it annually. In addition, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and his successor, Ali Khamenehi, have issued letters to the effect that making peace with Israel is unlawful [*haram*]; Hamas welcomed and greatly appreciated these moves.

Hamas’s relationship with Iran developed gradually but entered a significant phase with the outbreak of the Gulf crisis at the end of 1990. For the first time, Hamas chose an official spokesman, and the movement organized official visits on its own and took part in joint missions to states in the region including Iran. Hamas sent an official delegation to Iran in October 1991, signaling an important upgrading of relations. This move was followed by the formal opening of a Hamas office in Tehran in February 1992, about four months after the convening of the conference of groups opposed to a peaceful settlement. This office symbolized Iran’s acknowledgement of the central role of Hamas in the Palestinian opposition.

Ever since Hamas opened its office in Tehran, PLO leaders constantly have accused it of owing allegiance to a foreign power. Meanwhile, on an altogether different tack, the U.S. and Western powers have mounted verbal attacks on Iran and Hamas for working together to undermine the peace process. The PLO’s strategy succeeded in exaggerating Iran’s relationship with Hamas out of all proportion and creating doubts in the minds of Arab regimes. In addition, Israel launched a political and media campaign depicting Iran as the sponsor of terrorism in the region and as being behind the resistance activities against Israel, even if only indirectly, through its support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The most intense media campaign against Hamas for maintaining relations with Iran came from the PLO, according to Hamas sources,⁸⁰ who highlight two specific incidents. The first was a charge by Arafat in late 1992 that Hamas was receiving as much as \$30 million annually in support from Iran, an allegation that Hamas denied categorically as being both alarmist and exaggerated. However, the sum mentioned by Arafat was cited

79. A law establishing the fund was enacted on 9 April 1990.

80. Nazzal interview, 23 April 1995.

by the Arab and Western press and quoted extensively when discussing Hamás's relationship with Iran.⁸¹ The second incident concerned a "leak" to the media by a Palestinian source in Tunis of the purported text of a signed agreement between Iran and Hamás in which Iran recognized Hamás as the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. News agencies reported the agreement on 6 May 1993; the Egyptian daily *Al-Abram* published the full text that same day in an article entitled, "Read the full details of the Iranian conspiracy against the Palestinian cause." Hamás denied the report, saying it was not true and had been fabricated in Tunis, the site of the PLO headquarters. It also denounced the PLO for resorting to cheap tricks.⁸²

Hamás considers Iran to be a strategic partner,⁸³ but it stresses that this is not at the expense of its relations with Arab parties. Prominent figures in Hamás point out that the movement tries to maintain a balance in its relations with Iran and with Arab partners and tries to avoid the appearance of dependence on Iran. These points are stressed primarily for the benefit of Arab states in the Gulf, although this reason never is stated explicitly.⁸⁴ According to 'Imad al-'Alami, Hamás's former representative in Tehran and a member of the movement's Political Bureau, Iran and Hamás are strategic allies because of "the coincidence of the Islamic dimension of their strategic viewpoints. . . . the relationship Hamás maintains with Iran is clear and above board and is based on the mobilization of maximal support for the Palestinian cause, considering that it is an Islamic cause."⁸⁵ Al-'Alami denies that Hamás receives direct support from the Iranian government, although "there are certain ways in which the Iranian people support the Palestinian people so as to foster their steadfastness in the Occupied Territories."⁸⁶

In fact, Hamás has tried to navigate the minefield of Arab-Iranian relations very cautiously. It realizes that a bias in favor of Iran will be very costly to its relations with Arab states, especially those in the Arabian Peninsula. The cost would be both political and popular (*sha'bi*) because of the sectarian sensitivity in the Gulf region toward Iran. Still, Hamás has not

81. See, for example, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), 18 October 1992.

82. Hamás leaflet, "A Statement to Set the Record Straight Concerning Fabricated Reports," dated 7 May 1993.

83. See Reuters interview with 'Imad al-'Alami, member of Hamás's Political Bureau and at that time its representative in Tehran, in *Al-Destour* (Amman), 1 March 1993.

84. Nazzal interview, 23 April 1995.

85. Al-'Alami interview in *Al-Destour*, 1 March 1993.

86. *Ibid.*

distanced itself from Iran but has drawn relatively close to it. For Hamas, it would be politically senseless not to value and support the state that is most adamant in its opposition to the political settlement that Hamas itself opposes. Sheikh Yassin underlined Hamas's appreciation for Iran's position and the movement's support for Iran after his release from jail in June 1998. Hamas also has made a point of giving verbal and moral support to Iran on several occasions.⁸⁷

There were indications of a strong desire on Hamas's part to strengthen its relations with Iran, while still operating within the general parameters of the lines of policy to which Hamas is committed. Hamas has tried to make it clear that their relationship "is based on mutual respect, the alignment of positions, and political and strategic perspectives on the settlement, without anyone dictating to anyone else."⁸⁸ As evidence of its independence, prominent Hamas figures point to an incident that took place while the 413 deported Hamas and Islamic Jihad supporters were living in exile in south Lebanon. When Jerusalem Day, the annual occasion on which Iran expresses its solidarity with the Palestinian people, came around, the deportees split into two factions. One group, comprising Islamic Jihad deportees, favored holding extensive observances in response to the Iranian call. The second group, comprising Hamas supporters, thought it would be sufficient to hold symbolic observances and to send a letter to Iran expressing support for its position; in this way the observances by the deportees would not appear to be mimicking those in Tehran. In adopting that position (which won out) and risking embarrassment to Iran while it was under the spotlight of Western attention, Hamas wanted to make clear that it was independent, even of its closest allies.

Expressing Concern for Islamic Issues

Hamas's principal mode of involvement with Islamic issues similar to the Palestinian cause—resistance to occupation and the struggle for independence—in practice was limited to press releases. This level of support naturally compares unfavorably with that the PLO offered during the 1970s to liberation movements similar to itself, particularly military training or the provision of expertise. Although Hamas and the PLO both saw themselves

87. See, for example, the leaflet, "Statement on the Iranian-German Crisis," dated 16 April 1997, in which Hamas denounced German charges of Iranian involvement in political assassinations.

88. Nazzal interview, 23 April 1995.

as part of a global trend for change (an Islamic liberation movement in the case of Hamas and a national liberation movement in the case of the PLO), what each did in practice was influenced by the prevailing circumstances. In the 1960s, 1970s, and up to the early 1980s, regional and international political circumstances were advantageous to the PLO. This was the period during which national liberation movements emerged in many Third World nations in Africa, southeast Asia, and Latin America, a wave that received direct aid from the former Soviet Union and China. For this reason, theories about the world sweep of revolution and its large number of allies were describing a palpable reality.

Allowing for the difference in ideology, Hamas also saw itself as part of a global movement (albeit Islamic) trying to bring about a historic transformation, first in the Islamic world and then in the entire world, just like other Islamic movements from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. However, in reality there clearly was not solidarity among these movements nor a great power that could act as a backer for this “new internationalism” and create circumstances propitious for it to grow and develop. Consequently, Islamic causes such as Palestine, Bosnia, Chechnya, and Kashmir, which are the concern of this “new internationalism,” remained in separate compartments, disconnected except in press releases and the general language of Islamic solidarity. In brief, it can be said that there is no comparison between the achievements of the Third World liberation movements during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in their victories against the forces of colonialism and in gaining independence for dozens of states and the efforts of Islamic movements in the 1980s and 1990s.⁸⁹

One therefore sees in practice that Hamas's policies on Islamic affairs were limited to making statements to the media and providing expressions of solidarity. On the one hand, Hamas did not develop the sort of political or public relations with the Islamic world that would have given it an effective presence in any country. Apart from the case of Iran, it can be said that the movement did not succeed in establishing real political relations with the regimes of the Islamic world, putting aside courtesy calls and messages of solidarity dutifully dispatched on appropriate occasions. On the other hand, Hamas's informational and political discourse did address all the principal issues of concern to Muslims, issues that relate to the topic of liberation or comprehensive social change.

89. Among the more significant studies that claim that Islamic movements in the Muslim world failed to achieve their objectives is Olivier Roy, *Failure of Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1994).

The most striking aspect of Hamas's discourse on Islamic issues is the vigorous attack on Western double standards in dealing with Islamic as opposed to other issues that are consistent with Western interests. From early on, Hamas's monthly bulletins included a paragraph under the heading "At the External Level." This dealt with the movement's positions on Arab, Islamic, and international issues, and it preceded the sections on domestic issues, which dealt with Hamas's attitudes on Palestinian affairs. Hamas assigned special importance to a number of recurring issues covered in "At the External Level;" four such issues are reviewed briefly below.

Balkans

From the time that ethnic wars broke out in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its independence, Hamas has been protesting "the injustice against, and the persecution of, the Muslims" there, "just because they are Muslims."⁹⁰ Its support for the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina is due first of all because they are Muslims, and second because they have a just cause: self-defense and the struggle for independence. In several press releases, Hamas appealed to "the free world and men of conscience everywhere to rally to the just cause of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina: full independence, as the people indicated in a free plebiscite."⁹¹ In Hamas's view, the basic problem facing the Muslims there was Western hypocrisy and support for the aggressor. For example, Hamas examined in detail the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) policy of nonintervention, which it saw as allowing the Serbs the opportunity to establish their hegemony. According to Hamas,

The NATO decision to confiscate the defensive weapons of the Muslims in order to secure the hegemony of European forces acting under the banner of the United Nations, while allowing the Serbs the opportunity to withdraw and keep possession of their heavy weapons, betrays the biased intentions of the West.

Hamas expressed bitterness over this persistent bias, which it perceived as indicative of the enmity between Muslims and the West: Arabs and Muslims are fed up with the extent of crude Western hypocrisy with regard to the Bosnian tragedy. They do not doubt that the Western nations lack any sense of the political and historical responsibility they

90. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 9 of 5 May 1992.

91. Hamas leaflet entitled, "Let us Stand Behind our Brethren in the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina," dated 25 April 1992.

bear when they deal with this human tragedy, nor do they have a sense of the public anger that pervades the Islamic *ummah* and which will be a determining factor in shaping the future order of political relations between Muslim and Western peoples.⁹²

Afghanistan

Hamas gave unreserved support to the Afghan jihad to terminate the Soviet presence in that country. Like other Islamic movements throughout the world, Hamas hastened to congratulate “the Muslim people of Afghanistan on the expulsion of the last Russian soldier from the land of Islam in Afghanistan,” considering it to be “a harbinger of victory in Palestine.”⁹³ Afghanistan continued to figure in Hamas statements until the Afghani jihad movements triumphed over the pro-Russian Najibullah regime and were able to enter Kabul in April 1992. The letters of congratulations sent by Hamas represented the movement’s last significant statement on the issue of Afghanistan.⁹⁴ The issue disappeared from Hamas leaflets as vicious internecine warfare developed among the *mujahidin* groups, which split along ethnic, tribal, and sectarian lines. As the country descended into a brutal civil war among Islamic factions, the once attractive paradigm of Afghanistan lost its appeal to many Islamist activists in the world. However, the interest of Hamas was reawakened in August 1998, when it condemned the U.S. missile attack against the bases in Afghanistan used by Usama Bin Laden, whom Washington accused of masterminding the bombing of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi (Kenya) and Dar as-Salaam (Tanzania) earlier that month.

In the manner of other Islamic movements, Hamas never paused to reflect on the Afghan problem: that it was not simply a question of direct occupation by the Soviet Union; that this was a “hot” arena of struggle in the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union; or that the issue had many nuances. Nor did Hamas consider that the victory of the *mujahidin* never would have been possible without the direct support they received from the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, either through Pakistan or Washington’s Arab allies. Such support was designed

92. Hamas, “Commentary on the NATO Decision in Reference to the Serbian Aggression against the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina,” dated 10 February 1994.

93. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 36 of 25 February 1989.

94. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 86 of 7 May 1992; see also Hamas leaflet, “Felicitations to the *Mujahid* People of Afghanistan on the Occasion of Their Conspicuous Victory,” dated 25 April 1992.

to turn the conflict into a war of attrition against the Soviet Union, similar to the American experience in Vietnam.

Kashmir

In its statements to the media and its leaflets, Hamas has addressed the issue of the Muslims in Kashmir and the general circumstances of Muslims in India. It has supported the right of Muslims in Kashmir to self-determination. Occasionally, Hamas has condemned incidents in which Muslims were victimized, such as in October 1993 when “the Indian army in Kashmir indiscriminately opened fire on Muslims who were demonstrating against the siege of their mosques.”⁹⁵ After Hindu extremists attacked the Babri Mosque in India in December 1992, Hamas issued a strong condemnation of the act, calling on “the government of India to punish the aggressors, and to take action to deter them from pursuing their hostile practices and their covetous claims.”⁹⁶

Chechnya

Seven years after Hamas was founded, the cause of the Chechen people, who wanted independence from the Russian Federation, burst on the world scene. The Russian armed forces waged fierce war against the Chechens. In voicing support for the people of Chechnya, Hamas once again focused on the issues of independence and self-determination, in addition to the Islamic faith of the Chechen people. It also denounced the “Russian aggression” and Moscow’s attempts to “destroy the independence of the republic and annex it by force to the Russian Federation.”⁹⁷ A more sharply worded statement by the official spokesman for the movement spoke of “the Russian invasion of Chechnya as part and parcel of the global offensive against Muslims perpetrated by the Serbs in Bosnia, the Hindus in Kashmir, the Jews in Palestine, and others elsewhere.”⁹⁸

95. Hamas leaflet, “Statement on the Attack by the Indian Forces on the Muslims of Kashmir,” dated 25 October 1993.

96. Hamas leaflet, “Statement on the Iniquitous Attack on the Babri Mosque in India,” dated 9 December 1992.

97. Hamas leaflet, “Concerning the Russian Aggression against the Muslim Republic of Chechnya,” dated 14 December 1994.

98. Statement by the official spokesman for Hamas on solidarity with the Chechen people, dated 28 December 1994; see also the Hamas leaflet, “A Salute to the Endurance of the *Mujahid* Chechen People and Our Heartfelt Condolences,” dated 25 April 1996, on the occasion of the presumed assassination of Chechen president Dzhokhar Dudayev.

Hamás's perspective on the four cases above was that they were nation-
 alist causes, struggles for self-determination and national independence.
 Thus, Hamas supported the concerned Islamic nation as a whole, and its
 media did not trouble itself about a conflict between the popular and offi-
 cial levels. It was a different case, however, when Hamas had to deal with
 Islamic movements in Muslim countries that were not under foreign
 threat, such as in Turkey. In such cases, Hamas sided with the Islamic grass-
 roots movement. For example, Sheikh Yassin denounced the legal ban on
 the Refah Party in Turkey, a country whose secularism he considered hyp-
 ocritical and whose democracy he called a sham because it could not tol-
 erate Refah.⁹⁹ Hamas's dealing with these problems was simply a question
 of media policy, no more than declarations of solidarity from afar. Thus,
 one did not hear of any solidarity visits by Hamas to these areas or of
 Hamas sending combatants or even material aid, which could have trans-
 lated words into deeds. Of course, these were difficult situations riddled
 with political complexities.

With respect to Hamas's position on issues relating to the official order
 in the Islamic world, one ought to mention the repeated calls from Hamas
 to Islamic governments "to let God's law [*shariah*] govern" and to "realize
 the aspirations of their people and to cut the apron strings of dependence
 on the arrogant, colonial West, to liberate themselves from it, and to
 become one with their peoples who yearn for the might of Islam which will
 allow them to achieve dignity."¹⁰⁰ Hamas also observed the tradition of
 offering condolences when natural catastrophes befell Islamic countries,
 such as on the occasion of the floods in Pakistan in 1992 and the earth-
 quake in Iran in 1990.¹⁰¹

At the Popular Level

The general policies that directed Hamas's relations with the public in the
 Islamic world are the same policies that applied to the Arab world, as dis-
 cussed at the beginning of this chapter. These policies stressed the desire of
 Hamas to avoid involvement in the domestic affairs of Islamic countries and

99. *Quds Press Service*, 15 January 1998.

100. Hamas leaflet, "A Call for Unity and Coming Together is the Call for the Hajj,"
 dated 30 June 1990.

101. See, for example, the letters of condolence to the president of Pakistan (dated 18
 September 1992) and to the people of Iran (dated 13 June 1990).

to avoid internal divisions, particularly those between societal groups and their governments. On that basis Hamas established relations with political parties, movements, and social groups in the Islamic world, the vast majority being Islamic movements. Unlike its practice in the Arab world, it was unusual for Hamas to establish ties with non-Islamic parties or movements in the Islamic world. Delegations from Hamas or close to Hamas undertook visits, held meetings, and established relations with Islamic groups in India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, and Turkey, to mention the most important cases. The objective was one of “mobilizing moral and material support for the Palestinian people and consolidating the Islamic dimension of the issue.”¹⁰² This was really not a difficult objective to achieve, especially in the milieu of Islamic movements on which Hamas relied to mobilize and develop popular sentiments in support of the Palestinian cause. The task was made all the easier by the fact that Islamic countries far from the arena of conflict had no objection to permitting such activities as long as they remained confined to public relations efforts and public awareness programs.

In order to consolidate the “Islamic dimension of the cause,” Hamas was particularly eager to establish contacts with the *‘ulama* (experts in canon law), *muftiyeen* (official expounders of Islamic law), and religious authorities in the countries it was able to reach. Hamas’s rationale was that if it could win over those opinion leaders, then they in turn would influence the views of people who heard their sermons, read their *fatwas* (legal opinions), and sought out their moral guidance. This resulted in a number of *fatwas* by Islamic *‘ulama*, issued singly and collectively, forbidding “truce with the Jews” or “normalization with the enemy.”¹⁰³ It is difficult to estimate the influence of these *fatwas* on public attitudes. However, they had no significant impact on official government policy, particularly as some *‘ulama*, in keeping with their governments’ policy, passed their own *fatwas* justifying the truce as a *hudnah* and invoking the

102. Nazzal interview, 23 April 1995.

103. Numerous such *fatwas* issued under the direct or indirect influence of Hamas have been collected and published in various books and pamphlets. The most important sources include *Fatwa al-‘ulama al-muslimin bitabrim al-tanazul ‘an aiya juz’en min Filastin* [The *fatwa* by the Muslim *‘ulama* forbidding the concession of any part of Palestine] (Kuwait: *Jam‘iyat al-islam al-ijtima’i*, 1990); Muhsin ‘Anabtawi, ed., *Limatha narfud ul-salam ma’ al-yahud* [Why we refuse to make peace with the Jews] (Kuwait: *Jam‘iyat al-tarbiyah* of University of Kuwait, no date); *Thawrat al-masajid* [The revolution of the mosques] (Lebanon: The Palestine Information Office for the Palestine Movement, 1990); and *Fatawi ‘ulama’ al-muslimin bitabrim al-tanazul ‘an aiya juz’en min Filastin* [Religious opinions by Muslim scholars forbidding the concession of any part of Palestine] (Cairo: Markaz al-‘lam al-‘Arabi, 1991).

weakness of the Muslims, thus countering the view behind which Hamas had tried to rally the *'ulama*. On more than one occasion Hamas made reference to *'ulama al-su'* (the *'ulama* of malfeasance), meaning those *'ulama* "who issue legal opinions sanctioning a truce with the Jews and who condemn the killing of Jews on the basis that they are innocent."¹⁰⁴ Subsequently, Hamas secured the signatures of hundreds of *'ulama*, religious leaders, and prominent nationalists from various Arab and Islamic countries to a document entitled "Statement of Support and Solidarity."¹⁰⁵ This document is an appeal to Muslims to support Hamas and its jihad against the Zionist occupation and to support the Palestinian people in view of the concessions being made at their expense. The statement was released in April 1995 following the PA's intensified wave of arrests in the wake of operations by Hamas against the Israeli army and Jewish settlers inside and outside the Gaza Strip.

Hamas's statements and public appeals continued to solicit support from Islamic movements in the world. Occasionally the aim was to relieve pressure on Hamas, such as its call for "the world Islamic movement to redouble its information effort abroad on behalf of Hamas in order to break the media blackout—imposed by the agencies of the enemy and the subservient regimes in the region—about the jihad of the Palestinian people inside the Occupied Territories."¹⁰⁶ Other calls were made to reject the Madrid Conference and to do whatever was possible to foil it.¹⁰⁷ On the occasion of the December 1991 Islamic summit in Dakar, Senegal, which supported the peace settlement and the Madrid Conference, Hamas issued a strong statement of condemnation expressing surprise that "an Islamic summit should abrogate jihad under the banner of Islam. . . . What sort of Islamic summit is this that supports the containment and slow death for eighteen million Muslims in Iraq? What sort of Islamic summit is it that supports conferences of capitulation and the surrender of the holiest of the holies of Islam and Muslims?"¹⁰⁸ Hamas appealed to the world Islamic movement to take effective action to censure the Dakar summit's resolutions and to reaffirm the centrality of the Palestinian cause

104. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 87 of 3 June 1992.

105. Published in *Al-Hayat* (London), 5 May 1995, as a two-page advertisement bearing the signatures of hundreds of leading personalities in the Arab and Islamic world; the statement also was reprinted in both English and Arabic in various Arab-Islamic periodicals.

106. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 39 of 5 April 1989.

107. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 80 of 29 October 1991.

108. Hamas leaflet, "The Jihad to Liberate Palestine is Continuing and Will not be Undermined by the Dakar Summit or Any Other," dated 16 December 1991.

to securing the political, social, and cultural liberation of the Arab-Islamic region.¹⁰⁹

In addition, Hamas sent letters to conferences and popular or quasi official meetings, such as those of the Islamic *fiqh* (jurisprudence) groups, proselytizing and aid conferences, and the like. A letter addressed to the heads of Islamic centers, organizations, groups, and movements illustrates the kind of support that Hamas sought from these meetings:

1. Issue an appeal to Amnesty International and all human rights organizations to expose the humanitarian dimension of the suffering of the Palestinian people;
2. Make Muslims aware of the justice of the Palestinian cause;
3. Publicize the (recent) wave of arrests [of Hamas members] and the objectives of such campaigns;
4. Send memoranda to the PLO and a number of its leaders protesting the organization's indifference to the arrest of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and other prominent Hamas figures;
5. Direct the organization's members who deliver Friday sermons to support their brethren [in Palestine];
6. Urge Muslims to give donations to Hamas and the intifada in the form of gifts, contributions, and charity.¹¹⁰

In 1995, Hamas appealed to Islamic groups to bring pressure to bear on the United States in the form of letters and embassy contacts so the latter would ease its hostility to Hamas. Specifically, Hamas wanted the United States to release the head of its Political Bureau, Abu Marzouq, who had been arrested in July 1995 at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York while on a private visit. Hamas distributed the telephone and fax numbers of the White House, the State Department, and the Justice Department to hundreds of Islamic centers and groups throughout the world. The Washington based International Committee of Solidarity with Dr. Musa Abu Marzouq quoted Abu Marzouq's lawyers as saying that he had received over five thousand letters of support in his New York jail during the first three months of detention; and faxed letters of protest had so disturbed American embassies that the embassy in Pakistan had shut down its fax one week after the arrest.¹¹¹

109. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 82 of 2 January 1992.

110. "Letter from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to the Heads of Islamic Centers, Organizations, Groups and Movements," dated 6 June 1989.

111. See the reports of the International Committee in Solidarity with Dr. Musa Abu Marzouq, especially the one dated 9 December 1995.

Through its ardent and emotional rhetoric, Hamas managed to retain a modicum of moral and material support that allowed it to continue and to retain considerable independence from official sources. However, those statements were not sufficient, due to the obstacles mentioned earlier, to move the masses in the Islamic world in such a way as to influence the march of events relating to the Palestinian cause, particularly in the case of the peace process. The failure of Hamas's rhetoric to activate Islamic movements and to secure genuine solidarity to its own satisfaction led Hamas to lament "the shortcomings of those movements with regard to support for the intifada, for the jihad of the Palestinian people, and for Hamas;" and it also criticized "the total preoccupation of Islamic movements with their internal concerns and issues at the expense of the Palestinian cause."¹¹²

HAMAS'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Evolution of Hamas's Ideological Position and General Policies

The Hamas Charter mentions three spheres with which it is concerned: the Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic spheres. Each can play a role in what Hamas perceives as the "liberation effort."¹¹³ There are no positive references in the Charter to the idea of forging specific types of relations with any country or international organization outside the Arab and Islamic worlds. Rather, there are frequent negative references and strong denunciations of foreign states and international organizations for their support of Israel. The Charter presents a naive view of international relations and offers shallow generalizations about "the forces supporting the enemy."¹¹⁴ There is no appreciation of differences among the major powers and the parameters within which one has to operate in dealing with them. Hamas's early bulletins are replete with incessant condemnations of "international conspiracies" against Palestine, in particular, "the British conspiracy via the Balfour Declaration" and "the conspiracy to partition Palestine," as well as "the American conspiracy" to provide unwavering support for Israel and to come to its defense whenever needed.¹¹⁵ The international situation is

112. Ghosheh, official Hamas spokesman, in an interview with the Jordanian daily *Al-Sabeel*, 31 May 1994.

113. The Hamas Charter, article 14; see Appendix, document no. 2.

114. *Ibid.*

115. For examples, see Hamas, Periodic statement no. 9 of 4 March 1988; no. 31 of 7 October 1988; and no. 32 of 25 November 1988.

viewed through Hamas's ideological lenses, from its perspective of the struggle, and from a historically grounded interpretation of the chain of events relating to the Palestinian question during the first three years of the movement's existence. Gradually, a process of disengagement developed between Hamas's ideological perspective concerning the nature of the struggle and the nuanced political standpoint required to comment on events (both local Palestinian and Middle Eastern or world events bearing on the Palestinian question) and the need to formulate and give voice to the movement's position on them.

About three years after the movement was founded, Hamas's perspective on international affairs began to mature and grow more nuanced. It discovered, in the course of dealing with politics, that there was considerable complexity to the relationships between Israel and the major powers. Also, there was much to be learned about the structure of international alliances, the actions of the United Nations and the Security Council, and, at the most general level, about the way international society is organized. There was a network of relations between states, international norms, and international law that constitute the foundations for interaction between states and the inevitable basis for international legitimacy, political rights and conduct, the redress of grievances, and recourse against aggression. This awareness was reflected in the emergence of a new kind of political discourse for Hamas, a discourse that relied on international law, along with its Islamic ideology, to justify and legitimate its struggle.

With time then, Hamas's appreciation of international relations became more sophisticated and its discourse more nuanced. Two factors contributed to this evolution. First was the rise in the power of the movement, which attracted international attention from politicians and the media and which in turn required a response from Hamas in a language that could be understood and acceptable. Second, and quite significantly, was the deportation of over four hundred Palestinians (composed mainly of Hamas's leaders, prominent figures, and supporters) to south Lebanon at the end of 1992. That incident, combined with other international experience Hamas had gained, helped to shape a new understanding of states and international organizations outside the Arab and Islamic spheres. This new perspective was receptive to the idea of Hamas entering into new relationships without self-imposed *a priori* handicaps, and it became manifest in the slogan "Hamas's battle is not with any foreign state or international body, its battle is with Israel alone." At a later stage, Hamas's discourse became more discriminating toward the West. Sheikh Yassin,

for example, called for a cultural dialogue with the West in the interest of humanity. He differentiated between Western governments that support Israel and the people of those states.¹¹⁶

The following twelve points, which are from the movement's internal document on political relations, explain Hamas's perspective on international affairs:

1. Hamas's dealings with foreign states and international organizations, regardless of any pre-existing political and ideological baggage, will be to serve the interests of the Palestinian people, their cause, and their rights.
2. Hamas will not undertake any moral or political commitments that contradict its firm Islamic and nationalistic principles in exchange for the establishment of political relations.
3. Hamas's interest in making contact and establishing relations with foreign states and international organizations is to seek their support and sympathy and does not violate its basic commitments and strategic position.
4. Hamas's relations with any foreign state or international organization will be affected, either negatively or positively, by the positions and policies adopted by that party toward the Palestinian cause.
5. Hamas considers Palestine to be the battleground against the Zionist enemy and is careful not to transfer that conflict to foreign soil.
6. Hamas has no dispute with any foreign state or international organization, and the movement's policy is not to attack the interests or possessions of foreign states.
7. Hamas welcomes any international efforts, the purpose of which is to end the occupation, its tyranny and hegemony over the Palestinian people, and its repressive practices. Hamas also welcomes any international aid that will improve the health and economic conditions of the Palestinian people under occupation.
8. Hamas opposes any resolutions that detract from the rights of the Palestinian people and foster the policies and positions of the Zionist enemy of the Palestinian people. However, it does not in any way seek the enmity of the United Nations.

116. Sheikh Yassin, quoted in *Quds Press Service*, 10 January 1998, and in *Al-Hayat*, 3 June 1998.

9. Hamas is in solidarity with the cause of national liberation throughout the world and supports the legitimate aspirations of peoples seeking deliverance from occupation and colonialism.
10. Hamas is in solidarity with states that are subjected to intimidation because of their just positions, and the movement seeks to fortify the positive positions of those states through expressions of support.
11. Hamas's priority is to develop relations with states having international influence, but that does not mean that it will ignore other, less influential states.
12. Hamas declares its solidarity with Arab and Islamic states that are under pressure or subject to threats from world powers because of legitimate positions they have adopted, but Hamas will not enter into a conflict with those powers.¹¹⁷

Apart from these general policies, the document mentions a number of specific policies governing the discourse that Hamas uses to express its views in media statements and leaflets. These specific policies amount to a reiteration of the general policies outlined above, because the focus is on avoidance of conflict with any foreign state or international organization unless that party adopts positions hostile to the Palestinian people. Hamas stresses that the movement's attitude toward any foreign state or international organization will not be based on cultural or broad ideological differences but rather will be based on the positions and policies adopted by that state or organization toward the Palestinian cause. Hamas's public relations policy is to reaffirm that the movement's resistance to Zionist occupation and its "military action" against the occupation are based on international laws, conventions, and treaties and that resistance to occupation is legitimate and differs from terrorism. The movement's public relations policy claims that Hamas attacks only "legitimate" targets, such as "the occupation forces and their organs of repression and armed members," and that it avoids "targeting noncombatant civilians." In the statement of its policies, Hamas reiterates that it is not engaged in a struggle with Jews as adherents of the Jewish faith. Rather, the struggle is with Jews in their role as occupiers; the cause of the struggle is "the occupation of our land by Jews, and their turning our people into refugees."¹¹⁸

117. Hamas, "Siyasat Hamas al-marhaliyya."

118. Ibid.

In formulating these texts and trying to use them as a guide in its opening up to the world, Hamas made an intellectual leap that brought it closer to harsh reality. It also became obvious that Hamas had introduced a dose of pragmatism into the heart of its political discourse, outlook, and practice, as well as into its public relations statements. This is particularly true with respect to Hamas's efforts on behalf of the welfare of the Palestinian people, a policy that might involve dealing with one or another state or international organization while downplaying the issue of religious or cultural differences. Hamas's recognition of this multifaceted reality forced it on several occasions to observe the principles of democratic pluralism, the rights of minorities, and other such terms it had borrowed from modern, politically correct international relations jargon. This was made all the easier as Hamas realized that this vocabulary does not contradict the Islamic ideological framework it espouses.

The Practice of Hamas

The 1992 deportation of Hamas leaders and supporters to south Lebanon was an important turning point in translating the movement's idealistic positions on international relations into actual practice. That incident afforded Hamas an historic opportunity to break out of its political isolation and to end the media blackout, both of which may have been due either to external pressures or its own shortcomings. That incident was significant for two main reasons. First, it was a cruel act, considering the large number of people (413) who were exiled to a strip of wilderness where they had to camp in mountainous terrain under harsh winter conditions. In addition, a large number of the deportees belonged to the Palestinian intelligentsia—university professors, medical doctors, engineers, university students, and imams. The presence among the deportees of many intellectuals who were soft spoken and presented well-reasoned arguments (this helped to generate a moderate political rhetoric for Hamas) ran counter to Hamas's image as a terrorist organization in the Western media. The combination of these circumstances produced sympathy for the movement's cause both in the Middle East and internationally.

The incident was also significant because of the negative repercussion the Israeli action had on the progress of the peace talks in Washington. The talks were suspended because of the incident, and the center of attention in the Middle East and the focus for the United States shifted temporarily to resolving the problem, securing the return of the deportees, and then resuming the peace talks. Hamas found itself at the center of events and

was the subject of sudden and intense interest on the part of Arab and foreign actors. From the date of the deportation incident, if progress was to be achieved toward a solution of the Palestinian problem, Hamas had to be taken into account, despite its Islamic ideology and its rejection of Israel's presence in the region.¹¹⁹

Capitalizing on the sympathy for the deportees, Hamas made contact with the five permanent members of the Security Council through their embassies in Amman. Being at the center of controversy and armed with Security Council Resolution 799, which called on Israel to take back all the deportees, Hamas found that it finally had an opportunity to be heard. Some prominent Hamas figures maintain that the timing for the movement's establishment of contacts with the West was not due only to the deportation. They maintain that Hamas had been motivated to end its isolation in order to focus attention on what was happening under Israeli occupation—notably the expulsion of a large number of Palestinian intellectuals and scientists—and also to counteract the West's distorted image of Hamas, which was branded as a terrorist group. In addition, Hamas felt that it had become an effective force in the Palestinian arena and that it had to introduce itself to the relevant parties.¹²⁰

In the preliminary meetings with Western nations, Hamas tried to put across its general aims, policies, and methods. From Hamas's perspective, the United States and Britain bore a large degree of responsibility for the Palestinian people's loss of homeland and displacement. Consequently, the West bore a political and moral responsibility to undo the effects of this "crime" in which it had participated. Hamas thought there was a need to explain this crime to the West, to convince the West of its duty to rectify it. According to prominent Hamas figures, this belief was the driving force for Hamas to make contact with the West. Hamas also wanted to try "to influence Western attitudes and institutions so as not to leave them under the influence of Israeli propaganda, and not to leave the field clear for Israel, which had largely shaped Western opinion on the Arab-Israeli conflict by itself."¹²¹

The actual contacts and meetings took place with diplomats of the five countries (in their embassies in Jordan) that comprise the permanent Security Council members, as well as with diplomats from Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, and Spain. During those meetings, Hamas's representatives

119. Musa Zeid al-Keylani, *op cit.*, pp. 184.

120. Muhammad Nazzal interview in *Filastin Al-Muslima*, April 1993, p. 16.

121. *Ibid.*

delivered letters from the movement's top leadership containing a unified text laying out its political position, explaining its military practices, and reiterating that it was engaged in a struggle "to liberate the land and defend the people." This struggle, it said, constituted resistance to occupation, which is acknowledged as legitimate, judging by all international norms and, in particular, by the charter of the United Nations and the Geneva Conventions. These letters challenged the Western classification of Hamas as a "terrorist group" as "an attack not only on the Palestinian people, but on all Arab and Islamic peoples, as well as all [national] liberation movements throughout the world which are fighting for the liberty and dignity of their peoples."¹²² On the basis of this position and in view of the usurpation of the rights of the Palestinian people, Hamas appealed to Western governments in the hope of winning their support.

The period of active contacts with the West that followed the deportation incident gave rise to several charges: that the movement had altered its political line; that it was capitulating to the West; and that it was trying to set itself up as an alternative to the PLO. (At the time the United States shunned any official contacts with the PLO, and the peace talks in Washington were with a group of "Palestinian representatives.") Hamas denied all the accusations. It reiterated its political objectives and issued an explanation entitled, "The Nature of the Political Contacts and Meetings between Hamas and a Number of Nations."

The most significant contacts were with the United States. The first of their kind, these contacts were made through the American embassy in Amman during January and February 1993. Thus, weeks after the deportation incident in late 1992 the United States showed interest in taking a closer look at Hamas, its positions, and its thinking; according to Hamas leaders, it wanted to learn whether the movement would consider altering its position on certain political issues.¹²³ In the course of their talks, the United States tried to steer Hamas away from armed activities and to obtain a commitment from it not to do anything that would interfere with the peace process.¹²⁴ As for Hamas, it tried to present its vision of the Palestinian national cause, to explain its Islamic ideology,

122. Hamas letter dated February 1993 and sent to the ambassadors in Amman, Jordan, representing the five countries that comprise the permanent members of the Security Council.

123. Muhammad Nazzal, interview, *Al-Mujtama* (Kuwait), 23 March 1993, pp. 30–31.

124. For more details on the contacts between the United States and Hamas during that time, see Jawad Al-Hamad, "Taradud al-nathra al-amrikiyya ila harakat hamas: iqamat am al-itham bil-irhab" [The American vacillating view of the Hamas movement: Establish relations or accuse it of terrorism?], *Al-Hayat*, 23 January 1994.

and explain some of its positions that it thought were misunderstood in the West.¹²⁵ The Americans ended the two-month contacts in early March due to pressure from Israel and because they felt no progress had been achieved to justify their continuation.

Hamas denounced the U.S. decision to break off talks, particularly as their termination closely followed a bomb explosion at the World Trade Center in New York in February 1993. In a special release, the movement said that the break was evidence of the extent to which U.S. foreign policy was hostage to the Zionist lobby, and it reminded Washington that the contact with Hamas had been initiated by the United States.¹²⁶ Nevertheless, Hamas regretted that contact with the United States had been broken off—and said so several times—because the talks had allowed it to communicate its position directly, without going through a mediator and without the distortion of media reports. It reiterated this theme to explain the reasons for and the background of its operations in the occupied land and why the world misunderstood them. After pointing out that “Hamas always seeks good relations with all peace-loving states and peoples in the world in the interest of all humanity,” it requested international support for its activities and “legitimate struggle [which] . . . unfettered human conscience dictates to every human being on this earth, because it constitutes support for justice, freedom, and human rights.” It called on the U.S. administration and the governments of the Western nations to “show deeper appreciation for the issues of our region, and a deeper understanding of our movement, its legitimate objectives and its noble principles, and to take into account the objective facts about the Palestinian cause.”¹²⁷

Nevertheless, some Americans were convinced that it was important not to break off contacts with Hamas. They argued that doing so weakened the U.S. ability to get a full picture of the political situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, particularly since the information obtained about Hamas no longer came from direct sources. Later, after the Oslo Agreement, these same officials believed that once the PA had been established in Gaza and Jericho, it would be more important than ever for the United States to have an accurate assessment of Hamas’s strength.¹²⁸

125. Ibid.

126. Hamas leaflet, “Statement by Hamas spokesman responding to the statement made by the State Department spokesman Mr. Richard Boucher about ending any political dialogue with Hamas,” dated 3 March 1993.

127. Hamas statement, entitled “A memorandum from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) regarding recent developments,” dated 8 February 1993.

128. Anonymous American senior official interviewed in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 12 July 1994.

Generally speaking, the U.S. position before April 1993 was hesitant. This is particularly interesting because Hamas refrained from conducting attacks against American or Western interests inside or outside Israel and had limited its operations to Israeli military targets. Despite this, in April 1993 the Department of State put Hamas on its annual list of groups engaged in "terrorist activities." This classification was in fact a decisive step in the international "demonizing" of Hamas and inaugurated an American policy toward Hamas best described by Laura Drake as a "unilateral escalation of hostility."¹²⁹ Hamas members, thus, were viewed as "terrorists" without any credentials of liberation fighters. In May 1993, when the Congressional Research Service issued a report entitled "Hamas: Freedom Fighters or Terrorists?"—implying that the nature of Hamas was a debatable issue, influential pro-Israel groups in Washington objected to the study and it was amended; points demanded by the Jewish groups were included and its title was changed.¹³⁰

After its classification as a terrorist group, the U.S. position toward Hamas grew more hostile, particularly as its operations escalated with the bus bombings of 1994, 1995, and 1996. The December 1994 Department of State report to Congress, which covered the PA's implementation of the Oslo Agreement, cited the Palestine Mosque incident in October 1994—in which 14 Hamas supporters were shot by the Palestinian police—as a turning point in the struggle between the PA and extremist groups such as Hamas that opposed the peace process; it said more needed to be done in this direction.¹³¹ The U.S. position became more uncompromising with each operation by Hamas, and occasionally this was reflected in decisions or measures designed to help Israel deal with Hamas.

Having expressed satisfaction at the measures taken by the PA against Hamas, the U.S. government felt that it had to adopt measures of its own to show solidarity with Israel after the Hamas bombings. In January 1995, President Clinton announced that the bank accounts belonging

129. Laura Drake, *Hegemony and its Discontents: U.S. Policy toward Iraq, Iran, Hamas, the Hizbollah and their Responses*, Occasional Papers Series, No. 12 (Annandale, Virginia: United Association for Studies and Research, September 1997).

130. Ahmad Rashad, *Hamas: Palestinian Politics with an Islamic Hue*, pp. 34–39; on the impact of the pro-Israel lobbies on American attitudes toward Hamas, see Ahmad Yusef and Ahmad Abu al-Jibeen, "Ab'ad al-hamlah al-sahyooniyah fi amrika dhid harakat hamas" [The consequences of the Zionist campaign in America against the Hamas movement], *Al-Mujtama'*, 1 and 8 November 1994.

131. Quoted in *Al-Hayat*, 3 December 1994.

to a number of Arab Americans and Islamic societies in the United States accused of financing Hamas would be frozen. In the following July, U.S. authorities arrested Abu Marzouq, then the head of Hamas's Political Bureau, when he landed in New York on a private visit. Washington released Abu Marzouq in May 1997, after Israel dropped its extradition request out of fear of retaliation by Hamas if the United States handed him over. The incident was embarrassing to both Israel and the United States, because they did not want to appear to be bowing to pressure from Hamas, but the United States did not have a strong case against Abu Marzouq.

The U.S. position on Hamas became most uncompromising when the United States pushed for the convening of an anti-terrorism summit at Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, in the wake of the February and March 1996 suicide bombings by Hamas in Jerusalem, 'Asqalan, and Tel Aviv. The United States supported all the collective punishment measures Israel applied against the Palestinians at the time. Furthermore, the United States vetoed the participation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the National Dialogue Conference organized by the PA in April and August of 1997. According to a U.S. State Department spokesperson, "we do not see any role for [them] to play; they are enemies of peace and should have no place in serious peace talks."¹³² The U.S. Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, called Hamas and Islamic Jihad "the worst enemies of the Palestinian people."¹³³ According to a Hamas sympathizer in the United States, the U.S. negotiator and coordinator of the peace process, Dennis Ross, said "No to Hamas, even if it only targeted the military."¹³⁴

Hamas's position on the United States has remained confined to verbal condemnation. It has not been translated into action nor led to the adoption of a policy of targeting U.S. interests in the region. Even after the arrest of Abu Marzouq, the movement said it wanted to avoid "a bone-crushing battle with the United States."¹³⁵ However, Hamas continued to caution the United States against turning him over to Israel. Such a move, according to a Hamas release, "would represent [crossing] a red line. If the United States does so, then it would become a direct party to the strug-

132. As quoted in a Hamas leaflet in English, "Comment on Statement by the Spokesman of the U.S. Department of State," dated 23 August 1997; Hamas strongly condemned the U.S. position.

133. As quoted in a Hamas leaflet dated September 1997.

134. Quoted in *Al-Itihad* (UAE), 3 June 1998.

135. Ghosheh interview with *al-Hadath* (Jordan), 9 August 1995.

gle between our people and the Zionist occupation, which would have the most undesirable consequences."¹³⁶

Hamas's contacts with Western nations other than the United States have been limited to periodic contacts and meetings with those nations' ambassadors in the Arab world and to brief meetings between prominent Islamist figures and Western visitors in the Gaza Strip; these have not developed into anything noteworthy. The states with which Hamas has established contacts at various levels include Britain, China, Germany, and Spain. Hamas has made a habit of sending letters to these states on various occasions, mostly to explain the movement's position on various issues or to denounce a position adopted by one of them in relation to Hamas.¹³⁷

The UN and International Organizations

In its mature phase (1993 onward), Hamas repeatedly has quoted UN resolutions, referred to conventions of international organizations, and attempted to link its conduct to universal norms. While it is debatable whether the movement has succeeded in these endeavors, it is clear that Hamas's discourse in this area has evolved in the direction of acknowledging and seeking "international legitimacy." It is evident that Hamas's use of the language of international legitimacy was prompted by the international condemnation of its armed attacks. The movement has tried desperately to defend its military strategy as falling within the realm of universal principles such as resistance to foreign occupation and aspirations of national self-determination.

However, Hamas is selective in its recognition of UN resolutions, because it only accepts the ones that do not "infringe the rights of the Palestinian people." Hamas leaders argue that accepting some UN resolutions while simultaneously rejecting others is neither a contradiction nor a rejection of the UN system. They also point out that Israel is the most "rejectionist and violating" state in the world with respect to UN resolutions.¹³⁸ Hamas itself readily accepted UN Security Council Resolution

136. Hamas leaflet, "An Important Statement on the American-Israeli Collusion in the Abu Marzouq Case," dated 9 August 1995.

137. See for example a letter sent from Hamas spokesman Ghosheh "To His Excellency Helmut Kohl, the Chancellor of Germany," dated 6 April 1995; Ghosheh condemned a call made by the German minister of economy for fighting Hamas and Hizbollah as priority targets in the Middle East.

138. Abu Marzouq, interview with author, 21 April 1995.

No. 799, which called for the immediate return of the Palestinian Islamists deported by Israel to south Lebanon in late 1992, but it vehemently rejected other—and far important—resolutions, such as 242 and 338, on the basis that they violate Palestinian rights.

In the area of conducting practical relations with international bodies and nongovernmental organizations, Hamas has not been successful in establishing workable contacts. It confined itself to issuing letters and appeals on certain occasions. For example, in March 1996 it sent lengthy memoranda and letters to the United Nations and to the contracting parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the wake of the convening of the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference, which targeted Hamas in particular.¹³⁹ With the exception of occasional contacts with the International Red Cross, the record of Hamas's ties to international groups is remarkably poor.

HAMAS AND ISRAEL: PERCEPTION AND LANGUAGE OF INTERACTION

Two basic issues need to be considered in analyzing the mutual perceptions of Hamas and Israel and the attendant political practice that has been pursued since the creation of Hamas. The first issue concerns the accepted “wisdom” in the media, political circles, and even in academic circles about Israel's stance toward the Islamist phenomenon—the Muslim Brotherhood before the intifada and later Hamas. There is a common belief that Israel encouraged the Islamists, its goal being to weaken the position and diminish the influence of its main enemy, the PLO. The second issue relates to a few Israeli attempts, at different stages in Hamas's existence, to open a dialogue with it with the aim of inducing it to renounce military action in favor of joining the peace process. Reviewing these issues helps to assess the extent to which either Israel or Hamas will be able, through dialogue, to reach a peaceful settlement to which Hamas is a party.

Israel's Position on the Palestinian Islamist Phenomenon

Israeli assessments and interpretations of the Islamic phenomenon in the Occupied Territories are contradictory. Some interpretations attributed the

139. See for example Hamas's letter, “Memorandum from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to the Contracting Parties of the Fourth Geneva Convention,” dated 26 March 1996.

emergence and growth of the Palestinian Islamic tide to an Israeli "plot"; others posited that Israeli policy merely ignored the phenomenon; still others asserted that the Israeli stance was absolutely and implacably hostile and aimed to repress the phenomenon. The Israeli goal of such benign policy was to undermine the preeminent leadership position of the PLO. In fact, the PLO information apparatus wholeheartedly adopted these interpretations and worked to propagate them. That apparatus, particularly through its dissemination of Arafat's strident declarations, often verged in the direction of adopting the first interpretation, which declares Hamas to be merely a creation of Israel to weaken the PLO. Israel, however, adopted the reading that it was lenient, overlooked the development of the Islamic movement, and did not try to suppress it.

In contrast, the Islamists repeatedly claim that Israel's repressive policies against Islamic institutions and all vestiges of Islamic awakening, such as the Islamic University in Gaza, the mosques, and Islamic organizations in general, are evidence of its fear of Palestinian Islam and its growth. It is not reasonable, they insist, that Israel should overlook, let alone encourage, the ideologically most implacable opponent of its existence. Some observers agree; according to Ali Jarbawi, "the occupying authority was not to give the National Islamic tendency the opportunity to strengthen its foundations and to spread its influence among the masses, because to Israel, this tendency constitutes the greatest danger to its future."¹⁴⁰ In this study I advance a fourth interpretation, namely, that Israel's policy toward the growing strength of Islamic movements throughout the 1970s and 1980s up to the first year of the intifada was characterized by confusion, bewilderment, and an inability to take decisive action. Consequently, Israel confined itself to reaction to and monitoring of developments. My assessment derives from the five factors that are discussed below.

First, Israel's position toward Islamic institutions or toward the social and educational aspects of the Islamic awakening was no different from its established position toward other nonmilitary phenomena that accompanied the Palestinian national movement and factions of the PLO. Hence, the level of tolerance for or suppression of the work of those institutions was the same regardless of their ideological or political bent. Scores of nationalist institutions, such as academic associations, clubs, daily newspapers, weekly magazines, schools, universities, and other organizations,

140. Ali Jarbawi, *The Intifada and Political Leadership in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* [in Arabic] (Beirut: Tali'a House, 1989) p. 106.

bear witness to this policy. All these institutions operated by virtue of permits issued by the Israeli occupying authority; some of the institutions belonged directly or indirectly to the PLO or other Palestinian political factions. It is not fair, therefore, to mention only the permits granted to Islamic institutions in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The chief concern of the occupation authorities during the 1970s and 1980s was military activity. Thus, they concentrated their efforts on the pursuit of such activity and were relatively tolerant toward informational and propagandistic activities, whether carried out by nationalist or Islamist forces.

Second, it was not easy for Israel, especially after the late 1970s, to resort to a harsh repressive policy toward the manifestations of Islamic awakening in the Occupied Territories. There are many reasons for this, the most important being the fear that such a policy might render an indirect service to the Islamic current by giving credence to its claim that the Jews and Israel are fighting Islam. If this assertion acquired credibility, the national struggle would be recast as an ideological one—a war between religions. This in turn might lead to the incitement of religious feelings abroad and thus to the strengthening of the Islamic current. Furthermore, the adoption of an obviously repressive policy toward nonmilitary religious institutions in a region where the Islamic tide was rising would intensify the feeling of enmity for Israel in the region. Internationally, such a policy, interpreted as an abridgment of religious freedom, would harm the reputation of Israel. Such considerations apparently continued to influence the formulation of Israeli policy through the first two years of the intifada. Resistance activities during that time, whether directed by Hamas or by the United National Leadership of the Intifada, were confined to mass demonstrations, and the use of firearms was avoided. The situation only changed in the 1994–96 period, when regional circumstances favored the adoption of a merciless repressive policy under the slogan “fighting Islamic terrorism.”

Third, the implicit Israeli acceptance of responsibility for indirectly helping Hamas by looking the other way when it came into being can be explained by reference to the Israeli political mind-set, which is characterized by a “superiority complex.” This mind-set invented the myth of the “invincible Israeli army,” wove legends around the “supernatural” capabilities of its security services (including Mossad and Shin Bet), and painted a fabulous picture of its ability to influence events both regionally and on the Palestinian plane. In effect, it perceived Israeli control of most (if not all) strings as virtually absolute. Hence, it would be a great blow to Israel’s

“pride” to acknowledge that a Palestinian movement could form and grow in the Occupied Territories, that is, right in the lion’s den. It was more consistent with this mind-set to concede that Israeli policy in one form or another was behind the emergence of Hamas. This claim would serve—even as it admits an error in tactics—Israel’s strategy of firmly establishing that its Arab and Palestinian foes are not capable of carrying out any undertaking that may influence events outside Israel’s masterful control. In brief, the optimum position for the Israeli mind-set is to admit an error and to feign regret over a policy that led to a present situation wherein Hamas has become immune to a complete and final liquidation.¹⁴¹

Fourth, the Islamic phenomenon in the Occupied Territories did not grow in isolation but in the context of an historical social change that swept the entire Arab and Islamic areas. Indeed, the period extending between the second half of the 1970s and the mid-1990s witnessed the dramatic growth of an Islamic awakening and several currents of political Islam. The Islamic current in the Occupied Territories thus was influenced and nurtured by the growth of an Islamic movement in Jordan to the east, the emergence of an Islamic movement, especially Hizballah, in Lebanon to the north, and the advancement of the Islamic movement in Egypt, where moderate groups exerted influence through democratic processes in parliament and the unions while armed groups engaged in a bloody confrontation with the security forces. Beyond the immediate neighborhood, the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran, the evolution of the Islamic movement in Sudan, and the increasing growth of political Islam in Algeria all had important influences on Palestinian Islam in the Occupied Territories. Thus, Palestinian Islam was part of a broader phenomenon, not an isolated occurrence. The fact that it existed under military occupation worked only to deepen and broaden its appeal and to clarify its goals.

Fifth, considering the factors mentioned above, one can conclude that Israel’s stance toward the competition among the various Palestinian forces, such as that between Hamas and the PLO, was one of exploitation and manipulation in the service of Israeli interests. There is nothing creative or unique in this practice of trying to benefit from the internal contradictions of an opponent. Indeed, this is a conventional practice used by one party of a struggle against its various opponents.

141. Many allusions are made by Israeli officials about this point. There are also several analyses that follow the same line. See for example Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel’s Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), pp. 223–25.

-Israel and Dialogue with Hamas

The importance of the topic of an Israel-Hamas dialogue derives from two angles. One is general and concerns the question of how it is even possible for any sort of serious discussion to take place between the two, given Hamas's political and ideological position on Israel. The second is narrower and pertains to the special conditions of Hamas's emergence and evolution inside Palestine and under occupation. By virtue of the relationship between the occupation authorities and the people under occupation, Hamas leaders and others close to it were compelled to meet Israeli security and political officials. In this respect, Hamas's situation was different from that of the PLO, whose known leaders were always outside the Occupied Territories. Of course, PLO operatives inside the Occupied Territories were in the same position as Hamas, although the former had no prime role in the formulation of overall PLO policy and strategy. This situation remained true throughout the 1970s and 1980s, but it changed with the commencement of the Madrid peace process and the establishment of contacts between Israel and the PLO. The initial change actually can be dated back to the end of 1990 when some Hamas leaders began to appear on the political stage outside the occupied land. In the previous three years, when Hamas had no declared political leadership "abroad," Hamas leaders, without being identified as such, had been summoned to meet Israeli officials not as representatives of Hamas but in their capacity as influential, public Islamic figures. They did not speak for Hamas, of course, but they did talk about Hamas, describing its ideas predicting its behavior.

Initially, the Israelis tried to make sense of a new phenomenon with which they did not know how to deal. The task was all the more difficult because Hamas vanguards and its political leaders distanced themselves from military work and denied even belonging to Hamas. Consequently, they spent only short stints in Israeli prisons and detention centers and continued to play informational and political roles among their people. Throughout the early years of Hamas's existence, Israelis attempted to find openings through which they hoped to change the attitude toward Israel of whomever they met. During this initial period of "reconnaissance" and "political softening," a number of Hamas leaders, including Sheikh Yassin, al-Rantisi, and al-Zahhar, were summoned and engaged in discussions.¹⁴² However, after the intifada gradually shifted gears from mass

142. For example, the head of the Israeli civil administration in Gaza summoned al-Zahhar and discussed with him the feasibility of forming a Palestinian delegation to negotiate with

demonstrations and stone throwing to the use of fire arms and Molotov cocktails, the occupation authorities on many occasions issued directives prohibiting the summoning of any Islamic personalities from Hamas or close to it for the purpose of discussions or establishing liaison.¹⁴³ In the second stage of Hamas's career, i.e., after Hamas had declared the presence of its leaders abroad, its position corresponded with PLO policy, which was to reject meeting with official Israeli parties. Thus, Hamas's position became one of "categorical rejection of conducting any dialogue with the Zionist entity."¹⁴⁴

Israel attempted, especially after the Oslo Agreement and Hamas's military operations in 1993 and 1994, to feel out Hamas about the possibility of establishing a dialogue or liaison, the goal being to convince Hamas to renounce violence in exchange for a guaranteed political role in a peace settlement. Several Israeli officials, including then Prime Minister Rabin, declared Israel's readiness for dialogue and negotiations with Hamas to achieve this objective.¹⁴⁵ Even before Oslo, Shimon Peres, who at the time was foreign minister, declared that Israel was "ready to negotiate with extremists from Hamas if they were freely elected in the Occupied Territories."¹⁴⁶ In addition to sounding out Hamas and issuing press statements, Israel offered early release to many jailed leaders of the movement in order for them to travel abroad and discuss its demands for stopping military operations with Hamas representatives.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, some Israeli military commanders discussed the same subject with numerous Hamas supporters in the Gaza Strip.¹⁴⁸

Israel (before the Madrid Conference), suggesting that Hamas be represented in the delegation provided that it recognizes the right of Israel to exist. When al-Zahhar refused, the Israeli threatened him with arrest; see further *Al-Nahar*, 16 December 1989.

143. For example, the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* reported on 15 January 1990 that "the Ministry of Defense ordered the heads of the civil administration in the Occupied Territories not to make contacts with elements of Hamas and to sever immediately all lines of communication with persons who support the movement"; reported by *Al-Nahar* (Jerusalem), 16 January 1990.

144. Hamas leaflet, "Resistance and Struggle will be the Sole Language of Dialogue with the Occupying Enemy," 20 February 1994.

145. *Al-Ahram* (Cairo), 19 April 1994; see also a statement by the Israeli minister of police, Moshe Shahal, published in *Al-Quds Al-Arabi* (2 November 1994): "Israel makes a mistake by not being ready to talk to people. There are many currents [of thought] inside Hamas. The majority denies any possibility of negotiation or recognition of the Jewish state. But there are some whom I would not say are more moderate . . . but are more realistic." Yossi Beilin made a statement along the same lines in November 1994.

146. *Al-Hayat*, 1 January 1992.

147. Muhammad Nazzal, Hamas representative in Jordan, *Al-Hayat*, 22 December 1993.

148. Among these discussions is one conducted in April 1994 by General Doron Alrough, commander of Israeli troops in Gaza, with Sheikh Ahmad Bahar, the head of the Islamic

In the first few months of 1994, Israel's attempts to engage Hamas intensified. One prominent Hamas official described these efforts as follows:

The most important of these attempts included a meeting between the deputy chief of staff of the enemy army, Amnon Shahak, with the brother, 'Imad al-Faluji, who was detained in Gaza's central prison in February 1994; a discussion between two members of the occupation central command and the brother, Dr. Mahmoud al-Rumhi, who was held in Hebron's central prison to await trial for being the political director of Hamas in the Ramallah area; a contact made by an Israeli living in Europe with Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahhar; and a further communication by the same Israeli with a person close to Hamas in one of the European countries whereby Israel offered to negotiate with Hamas through a third party (an Arab country) in such a way that this country would communicate the demands of the movement to the Zionist entity and vice versa. Rabin's declaration in February 1994 represented a readiness for dialogue as a culmination to this series of attempts.¹⁴⁹

According to this same official, Hamas believed that Israel had four goals:

The first is to exert pressure on Arafat by putting him on notice that there is a strong competitor with whom Israel can negotiate. The aim would be to push him into making more concessions. The second is to probe Hamas's position on participation in the self-government authority and on stopping the armed struggle. The third goal is to soften the movement's political and military line. The fourth is to ensure the success of self-government by giving Hamas an effective role in its leadership.¹⁵⁰

Hamas continued to rebuff Israeli attempts to open communication channels with it, persisted in announcing those attempts when they occurred, and used very strong language in firmly rejecting Rabin's offer to negotiate.

Association in al-Shati refugee camp. Sheikh Bahar relates that he was summoned to the office of the Military Governor as would any citizen under occupation. Among the topics was a longish and theoretical dissection of the nature of Islamic government. With respect to [the proposal] for self-government, Bahar expressed his opposition because it consolidates the occupation and does not fulfill people's demands; see his interview with the author published in Khaled Hroub, "Harakat Hamas bain al-sulta al-filastiniyya wa-Isra'il: Min muthallath al-quwa ila al-mitraqa wal-sindan," [Hamas Between the PA and Israel: From the triangle of power to the anvil and hammer], *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya*, no. 18 (Spring 1994): 24–37.

149. Muhammad Nazzal, interview with the author, 23 April 1995.

150. Ibid.

According to Hamas, "the language between us and the occupying enemy forever shall remain a language of resistance and struggle and not one of negotiations, concessions, or capitulations."¹⁵¹

Hamas's basic position had one exception, however, and this related to humanitarian cases and the exposure of civilians to military operations. On several occasions Hamas announced its "readiness to negotiate in humanitarian matters through a third party such as the Red Cross as happened in November 1994 in the case of the captured Zionist soldier, Waxman, who was exchanged for Palestinian detainees."¹⁵² With respect to the issue of targeting civilians, Hamas offered

an initiative in April 1994 to remove civilians from the arena of struggle between Palestinian *mujahideen* and Zionist occupation forces and to spare them the brunt of military operations. This may be done by having [Prime Minister] Rabin issue clear instructions to the occupation army, [Israeli] settlers, and Arab collaborators to stop attacking or targeting Palestinian civilians for killing, arrest, and house demolition. In exchange, Hamas's Qassam Brigades will confine their activities only to military targets and to armed Zionist elements.¹⁵³

At a later stage, specifically after the series of Hamas operations in February and March 1996 and the subsequent violent campaign against it through arrests, the destruction of homes, and the closure of institutions, Israel tried once again to open communication channels with Hamas, using people close to both sides in Europe. At that time, Hamas tried to mitigate the reactions against it (among which was the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference convened on 13 March 1996) by softening its rhetoric and expounding on the legitimacy of its actions. More important, it obliquely hinted at its readiness to open a dialogue with Israel. As usual, this readiness was couched in terms of removing civilians from the arena of violent struggle. It is obvious, however, that Hamas's hints had more than one interpretation. In a relatively detailed statement issued at the time to explain the rationale for its military actions, Hamas asserted its "readiness to deal with any positive (efforts) that aim to discuss the political dimension of the problem and its ramifications on the interest and future of all

151. Hamas leaflet, "Resistance and Struggle will be the Sole Language of Dialogue," 20 February 1994.

152. Hamas leaflet, "Clarification from Hamas spokesman, Ibrahim Ghosheh," 7 November 1994.

153. *Ibid.*

sides, with a view to achieving peace, security, freedom, independence, and sovereignty for our people.”¹⁵⁴

Even as Israel continued its campaign against Hamas, it made an effort to convince Hamas of its seriousness on the subject of dialogue. Israel’s aims remained ambiguous: Did it try to reassure Hamas merely to gain more time to uproot its infrastructure, or did it seek a genuine dialogue leading to an armistice agreement between the two? Meanwhile, in order to mute the attack against it and to neutralize as many of its foes as possible, Hamas continued to signal its readiness to talk about an armistice and to deal with any effort, regional or international, aimed at achieving “a cease-fire in accordance with just conditions.”¹⁵⁵

154. See Hamas, “Memorandum issued by Hamas’s political office about the latest developments,” 12 March 1996.

155. See Hamas, “An Important Memorandum from Hamas to the Kings, Presidents, and Ministers Meeting at Sharm al-Sheikh,” 13 March 1996; full text in Appendix, document no. 5.

Theory and Practice

5

HAMAS AND POLITICAL PLURALISM

Hamas's discourse consistently has attempted to give assurances that the movement acknowledges and is committed to political pluralism and recognition of the "political Other." One can speculate as to whether this acknowledgement has been driven by genuine conviction, by organizational interests, or by devotion to the general interest. (The general interest required a tolerance for diversity in an effort to foster national unity and to heal divisions so as to resist the occupation better, a goal to which all Palestinian forces pay lip service.) Palestinian Islamists, as noted by close observers, made quick progress, not only toward recognizing the existence of their rivals but also in accepting "the necessity of dealing with the other, especially during the intifada, and more specifically after the opening of the peace talks in Madrid, coordinating with [the other] to undertake joint action against those negotiations."¹

Given the paucity of analytic publications or monographs dealing with political pluralism from Hamas's perspective, the only recourse for the researcher is to look for scattered references to this subject in Hamas's press releases, its literature, and the statements of its leaders and prominent figures. A number of these references are to be found in the movement's Charter, under various headings in Section 4, which take up the issue of

1. Iyad al-Barghuti, "Al-Dimoqratiyya wal t'addiyya fi fekr wa selook al-Islamiyin al-filastiniyo." [Democracy and pluralism in the thought and conduct of Palestinian Islamists], *Shu'un al-Sharq al-Awsat*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1994), pp. 105–14.

Hamas's positions toward others, such as "Other Islamic Movements" and "Patriotic Movements in the Palestinian Arena." Hamas declares that it "respects" such movements and "appreciates their circumstances and [the influences in] their environment."² The most important of those movements is the PLO, which is described as "closer than any other group to the Islamic Resistance Movement; it includes the fathers, brothers, relatives, and friends [of our members] . . . We have but one homeland, one affliction, one shared destiny, and one shared enemy."³

Hamas's literature subsequent to the Charter expands on the pluralist view of the "political Other." This is especially the case in the "Introductory Memorandum." Under the heading "The Positions and Policies of the Movement in the Palestinian Sphere," one finds affirmations of the principle of tolerance: "Hamas believes that regardless of the extent of differences in viewpoints and perspectives (*ijtihadat*) in the national effort, it is impermissible under any circumstances to use violence, [particularly] to resort to the use of arms as a means of resolving disputes, or in order to impose one side's views . . . In spite of the disparities between Hamas and the political platforms of the Palestinian resistance groups (*fasa'il*) or other forces, we are nevertheless capable of joint action, particularly in confronting the enemy and escalating popular resistance."⁴

Among the earliest and most significant statements affirming Hamas's respect for the "political Other," despite differences in belief, is the noteworthy and candid statement by Sheikh Yassin. He said that Hamas will accept the views of the Palestinian public on any issue if they are expressed in a democratic election and that the movement is prepared to accept the authority of any democratically elected Palestinian group. The following is an excerpt of the answers he gave to questions on the subject of Palestinian democracy in a 1989 interview published in the Jerusalem daily *al-Nahar*:

Sheikh Yassin: I want a multiparty democratic state, and I want whomever wins those elections to assume power.

Al-Nahar: What would your position be if the Communist Party were to win?

Sheikh Yassin: I would respect the wishes of the Palestinian people even if the Communist Party won.

2. The Hamas Charter, Article 25; see Appendix, document no. 2.

3. *Ibid.*, Article 27.

4. For the full text of the Hamas "Introductory Memorandum," see Appendix, document no. 3.

Al-Nahar: If it becomes clear from the elections that the Palestinian people want a multiparty democratic state, what would your position be?

Sheikh Yassin [in exasperation, according to the newspaper]: By God, we have dignity and we have rights as a people. If the Palestinian people were to express their rejection of an Islamic state, I would respect their will and honor their wishes.

Despite Sheikh Yassin's clear statement of unconditional acceptance for the results of any democratic elections and the willingness to abide by the judgment of the Palestinian people, some observers claim that this is merely a tactical position.⁵ Hamas has tried to refute this interpretation by confirming and consolidating Sheikh Yassin's opinion in word and deed. One of the most important articles in the proposal advanced by Hamas in April 1994 (as an initial effort at solving the Palestinian problem) calls for "the holding of free and general legislative elections inside and outside [Palestine] in order to choose the leaders and real representatives [of the Palestinian people]. Only such an elected and legitimate leadership is entitled to express the wishes and aspirations of our people, and it alone can decide on all the steps that subsequently shall be taken in our struggle with the occupiers."⁶ Statements by prominent figures and leaders of Hamas have confirmed this point repeatedly. For example, Mahmoud al-Zahhar said in response to a question from the press: "Hamas respects the opinion of the Palestinian public even if it runs against its wishes. But others too must respect the opinion of the public if it says 'yes' to Islam."⁷

In light of Hamas's participation in student and trade union elections, one can argue that these declarations by the movement in fact do reflect its genuine inclination. One can cite several points as evidence, in particular the fact that holding either elections or a referendum on the shape of a political settlement would confirm the support for Hamas's program (if the people voted in favor of Hamas) or else convince the movement to adjust its positions in response to public attitudes. That is, if the Palestinians were to decide in a democratic fashion that they wanted to pursue a direction contrary to Hamas's line, then Hamas would be relieved of the need to insist on its major political program. It is also significant that the

5. See for example, Ziad Abu 'Amr, "Al-Islamiyoon al-filastiniyoon: Al-t'addiya wal-dimoqratiyya" [The Palestinian Islamists: Pluralism and democracy], *Majallat al-dirasat al-filastiniyya*, no. 12 (Autumn 1992): 88–100.

6. For the full text, see Appendix, document no. 4, "An Important Statement Issued by the Political Bureau of Hamas."

7. Mahmoud al-Zahhar, interview, *al-Watan* (Gaza), 19 January 1995.

statements by Hamas's leaders and prominent figures have been corroborated by the movement's actions. In a special statement issued by Hamas on 9 August 1992 under the title "Our Position on Self-Rule and the Elections Associated with It," Hamas declared its adoption of national dialogue "as the democratic and civilized way" of dealing with the various [Palestinian] groups. In the same sense, 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi remarked: "Hamas will oppose [self-rule] but it will not employ violence against anyone who adopts the path of self-rule . . . Hamas asks others to respect [the right of] any group to voice its opinion in a democratic fashion without resorting to violence."⁸ Since the signing of the Oslo Accord in September 1993 and the subsequent Cairo Agreement (under which the PA assumed jurisdiction over part of the Gaza Strip and Jericho), Hamas has not resorted to violence against the PA, despite its categorical rejection of those agreements (on the grounds that they represented a monumental sell-out of the inalienable and legitimate rights of the Palestinian people) and its opposition to the nascent PA.

On several occasions, Hamas adhered to its commitment to pluralism at the expense of tactical gains it could have made. One example is the September 1992 elections for the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the city of Jenin. Hundreds of ineligible supporters of Fateh were added to the voting lists a few days before the ballot. The bloc supporting Hamas chose to withdraw quietly rather than let the elections fail over an issue of vote rigging. In another example, four armed members of Fateh's Black Panthers stormed the campus of al-Najah University in Nablus in July 1992 before the elections for the student council and threatened to turn the university upside down if the Fateh bloc did not win. The presence of armed individuals on campus led to a serious crisis with Israeli authorities, a crisis that was resolved only after Fateh and the Israeli authorities struck a deal, according to which the four individuals were deported. At the time, the incident prompted considerable consternation because of Fateh's acceptance of the principle of deporting Palestinians. It is clear that if the armed Fateh members had not intervened, Hamas would have won the elections. Meanwhile, Hamas remained calm, thus helping to create norms for democratic practice in Palestinian politics under occupation; pluralism and peaceful competition became characteristics of Palestinian affairs.⁹ More significantly, the presence of Hamas was a spur for

8. 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi, interview, *Al-Fajr* (Jerusalem), 3 August 1992.

9. See Iyad al-Barghuti's analysis of the elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, "Ast'arath wa taqwim al-tajarab al-intikhabiyya al-sabiqa fil-dhaffa al-gharbiyya" [Review and assess-

organizing elections in various institutions inside the occupied land and “lent huge support to ideological and organizational pluralism.”¹⁰

Hamas has had no reservations about dealing with the Palestinian resistance organizations in all their diversity. The assurances given by prominent figures in the movement in the Occupied Territories on this matter already have been mentioned. Prominent figures outside the Occupied Territories also affirmed their belief in diversity and pluralism. For example, in a 1993 interview, Muhammad Nazzal said: “In the final analysis, however, we respect the viewpoints of others and believe in cooperation with any other party if this serves the Palestinian cause.”¹¹

In practice, Hamas has avoided assassinations and the liquidation of political enemies. It has declared this practice to be prohibited and pledged not to undertake it. In fact, a series of statements by Hamas’s leaders and prominent figures, including Sheikh Yassin, have stressed this categorical rejection of political assassinations.¹² Furthermore, Hamas strongly condemned the assassinations of such prominent Fateh figures as Muhammad Abu Sha‘ban, Maher Kahil, and As‘ad Saftawi, who were killed in the Gaza Strip by unknown individuals in the wake of the September 1993 Oslo Agreement; it also participated in their funerals and the demonstrations denouncing their assassination.¹³ Subsequently, Hamas strongly denounced some newspapers for reporting that the movement was considering assassinating Arafat, reiterating its opposition to assassinations.¹⁴

It can be said, based on its conduct in its relations with the “political Other,” particularly regarding the question of assassinations, that Hamas has maintained a clean record. It has not resorted to assassinations either inside or outside the Occupied Territories, even though assassins killed many Hamas members. The movement adhered to this position even after the Madrid Conference and the developments that followed, which Hamas

ment of previous electoral experience in the West Bank], in *Intikhabat al-bukm al-thati (The self-government elections)*, ed. by Jawad al-Hamad and Hani Sulaiman (Amman: Center for Middle East Studies, 1994), pp. 33–42.

10. Iyad al-Barghuti, interview, *Filastin al-Muslima* [Muslim Palestine], January 1998, p. 16.

11. Muhammad Nazzal, interview, *Al-Dunia* magazine, 18 February 1993.

12. See for example Hamas leaflet dated 22 September 1993; Periodic statement no. 108 of 5 October 1993; and the statement by Sheikh Yassin in the Jordanian paper *Al-Sabeel*, 2 November 1993.

13. See leaflet, “The Hamas Movement Condemns the Assassination of al-Saftawi as a Criminal Act,” 12 October 1993.

14. See letter from Hamas in *Roznameh Pakistan*, 16 April 1997.

considered to be a sellout of Palestinian rights. Hamas issued a declaration on the subject, which is quoted extensively below because of its importance under the circumstances and because it sums up Hamas's position on pluralism and dealing with "the Other." This declaration contains what Hamas wanted to be a methodological program for the practice of pluralism in Palestinian affairs.

Differences of political opinion, position, and viewpoints are a natural and healthy phenomenon found among all peoples in the world, and differences of opinion do not ruin the cause of friendship. Each faction has the right to express its positions, viewpoints, and beliefs in the manner it chooses, as long as that manner is civilized, not dictated, and avoids violence.

We declare that we categorically are opposed to hegemonistic attitudes, the silencing of others, and the disregarding, belittling, undermining, or elimination of opposing viewpoints. No faction has the right to force its opinion on others or to claim for itself a mandate over others.

No faction has the right to encroach on, obstruct, nullify, or abrogate the political activities of another faction, so long as such activities are within the realm of acknowledged civilized and acceptable acts of opposition, such as statements to the media, or sit-ins, marches, demonstrations, and strikes, etc.

No faction has the right to claim that it represents the majority or that other factions are in the minority in the absence of free, honest, and unbiased elections to choose which side shall represent the majority of our people. [Failing that], any claims in this regard shall remain mere speculation or illusion with no legitimate or rational foundation.¹⁵

Hamas carved out a distinctive niche for itself on the Palestinian political scene by accepting ideological pluralism and by conducting itself in conformity with a pragmatic agenda.¹⁶ However, the rush of events following the establishment of the PA and the arrests it conducted on several occasions in the wake of guerrilla operations by Hamas markedly strained Hamas's rhetoric and conduct. Neither Hamas members nor the general Palestinian public could detect signs of the creation of the mechanisms for a pluralistic democracy, as stipulated in the Oslo Accord. The opportunities for democratic practice were limited, and Hamas repeatedly

15. Hamas declaration entitled "An Appeal to the Honorable and Wise in our Precious Land," dated 6 November 1991.

16. Ali Jarbawi, *Hamas' Bid to Lead the Palestinian People* (Annandale, VA: United Association for Studies and Research, 1994), p. 10.

rejected what it referred to as “counterfeit democracy” and “fake slogans of freedom and democracy.”¹⁷ Hamas refused to participate in the elections for the Legislative Council (discussed below) but insisted that its “refusal to participate in the self-governing council is not a rejection of democracy.”¹⁸

HAMAS AND ELECTIONS

Elections occupy a special place in the political thought and practice of Hamas, as well as in the movement’s history. Hamas leaders often talk about the founding role of Islamic student groups in the 1970s and 1980s, up to the outbreak of the intifada. They point out that those student groups were the basic manifestation of the political existence of the Palestinian Islamist movement. This manifestation took the form of involvement in electoral contests against the PLO lists of candidates. The repeated reference by the Islamists to participation in those elections is part of their quest for the missing link in their history, during the period of their absence from the arena of armed struggle. In relating their history, they first speak of the intermittent participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in jihad during the 1948 war in Palestine. Then they tell of the Brethren enlisting in the camps for resistance fighters set up by Fateh in the Jordan Valley during 1968-70. Following that, the Islamists speak about “building the educational, political, and organizational infrastructure that surfaced in the form of Islamic student blocs in the Occupied Territories,” adding that “these blocs succeeded in pulling the rug out from under the secular trend represented by the PLO.”¹⁹

Consequently, the significance and role of elections for the Palestinian Islamists expanded to become a principal aspect of political practice inside the Occupied Territories. After the establishment of Hamas, the movement discovered that the outcome of numerous elections under the aegis of the intifada gave it powerful, popular momentum and a basis for political legitimacy. It was in dire need of the latter because it still was struggling to establish itself. This experience evolved into faith in the electoral process, particularly in the later stages of the political competition

17. See Hamas press releases, “No to the Counterfeit Democracy,” of 18 January 1996, and “The Martyrdom of Hamas’s Heroes and the Arrest of Supporters of the Opposition: New Indications of the Falseness of the Slogans of Freedom and Democracy,” of 20 January 1996.

18. See Hamas leaflet, “A Memorandum from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) Concerning the Scheduled Elections for a Palestinian Self-Governing Council,” of 16 January 1996.

19. Ibrahim Ghosheh, interview with *Keyhan* (Tehran), 16 July 1992.

between Hamas and the PLO over settlement plans. It also impelled Hamas to challenge the PLO, albeit tacitly, on the issue of who was the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

The political thought and practice of Hamas differentiate between two different kinds of elections. Each has its characteristics and individual nature, and each requires a different position on the part of the movement. Student, professional association, and municipal elections belong to the first type. General elections of a political nature relating to settlement proposals, such as self-rule or the Oslo Agreement, belong to the second type.

Student, Professional Association, and Municipal Elections

The first type of elections include those held to elect officers for student unions at colleges, institutes of higher learning, and universities; directors of professional associations such as the medical and engineers' unions, legal, teachers' and nurses' associations, and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) employees' union; and officers for the chambers of commerce and industry. Under the banner of the Islamic bloc, Hamas has participated in most, if not all, the elections held by these associations. On rare occasions, Hamas did not put up its own candidates or endorse candidates sympathetic to the movement (e.g., in the cases of the press union or labor unions) because it had no chance of winning. No municipal elections were held in the Occupied Territories after Hamas was formed.

In the brief period of its existence, Hamas made considerable achievements in the field of electoral competition in the areas mentioned. This was at the expense of Palestinian leftist forces first and foremost, but Hamas also made inroads into areas of traditional Fateh control. Support for either Hamas or Islamic bloc candidates approached the level of support Fateh enjoyed in most cases. In many instances Hamas tied with Fateh, and in some cases it exceeded Fateh's support. Al-Zahhar, a prominent Hamas member in the Gaza Strip, studied the results of 23 elections at institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip over a twelve-month period in 1991–92.²⁰ The institutions included the Nablus, Qalqilya, and Ramallah

20. The results of the study were published in *Al-Quds* (Jerusalem), 10 November 1992, as well as in *Majallat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya*, no. 13 (Winter 1993). Dr. al-Zahhar told the author that former President Jimmy Carter had said to him that he had seen the study during a meeting with another group of Hamas leaders in Gaza on 19 January 1996 prior to the self-rule council elections and that [his contacts in] the United States had been severely troubled by it.

chambers of commerce; the Union of Jerusalem Electricity Company Employees; the Teachers' Training Institutes in Ramallah and Qalandia; the College of Arts at Jerusalem University; the student unions at Hebron University, the Polytechnic, the Arab College for the Medical Professions, the College of Sciences at Jerusalem University, and al-Najah University; the West Bank Engineers' Union; and the unions of employees of al-Najah University and the Maqasid Charity Hospital. The institutions in the Gaza Strip included the Union of UNRWA Employees, the chamber of commerce, the Medical Society, the Society of Engineers, the Society of Lawyers, and the Accountants' Society.

According to the aforementioned study, 96,256 voters participated in the elections in the West Bank. Of the total, 50.88 percent, or 48,971 people, voted for the National Bloc (which supports the resistance organizations belonging to the PLO), whereas 45.81 percent, or 44,091 individuals, voted for the Islamic Bloc (which supports Hamas); the remaining votes, 3.12 percent of the total, went to independents. In the Gaza Strip, 34,221 voters participated, of whom 52.65 percent, or 18,016, cast their ballots for the National Bloc, while 42.62 percent, or 16,050 people, voted for the Islamic Bloc; the independents received 4.53 percent of the total.

Because of several methodological reservations and limitations, one cannot apply these results to the whole of Palestinian society. However, the large size of the sample gives special significance to al-Zahhar's results. Hamas has cited the election outcomes as evidence that it enjoys the support of 40 to 50 percent of the Palestinian public, and this figure is the ratio of representatives it requested in its 7 April 1990 memorandum to the Palestine National Council. This issue requires further discussion and is addressed at the end of this section.

What is remarkable about these elections is that Hamas entered the contest alone most of the time and against an alliance of nationalist forces represented by the organizations within the PLO, including those that later would oppose the PLO's policies on Madrid and Oslo. In those rare cases where an electoral alliance was formed between Hamas and the other factions opposed to Oslo, the alliance was decisive in winning the elections. The most outstanding example was the November 1993 Bir Zeit University student council elections, in which the Jerusalem Bloc, consisting of a Hamas-led coalition, won all nine seats on the council. This victory represented an important penetration of a traditional Fateh power center in the West Bank and was interpreted by Hamas as a victory for its political line and for the Palestinian opposition to the Madrid-

Oslo process.²¹ However, such an electoral coalition remained rather exceptional, because the leftist organizations remained reluctant to align themselves with the Islamists, while the Islamists felt in many cases that they were strong enough on their own and did not need such a coalition. It was apparent that the alliance with leftist forces against Fateh and against the path of settlement had not evolved into a strategic alliance “but took on a tactical nature to a large extent. When the Islamic movement discovers that it will derive direct benefits from an alliance, it forges one. However, if the movement feels that the alliance will be of no use to it, considering that it can achieve victory alone, or if it realizes that victory is out of reach, alliance or not, then it avoids an alliance.”²²

Moreover, the ratio of 40 to 50 percent of the vote in institutional elections that al-Zahhar found in his study continued to hold for Islamic blocs in subsequent years. The attitude of Hamas toward such elections was one of enthusiastic participation. This was because the consistent political message conveyed by the election results was that either new areas of traditional Fateh control were being won from the organization—thereby encouraging Hamas’s aspiration to acquire representational legitimacy—or Hamas was gaining legitimacy and grass-roots support as an opposition movement. An example was the results of the Ramallah Chamber of Commerce elections in 1992, which constituted an unexpected defeat for Fateh in one of its most important strongholds. The results led to considerable speculation at the time concerning the legitimacy of the PLO as the political representative of the Palestinian people.

In the post-Oslo period, Hamas pointed to the results of elections in which it was victorious against Fateh and the supporters of the PA as an indication that the public opposed the Oslo process. In fact, the general trend in student and professional association elections, particularly during 1996–98, ran in favor of Hamas. This trend was interpreted as a decline in support for Oslo. In those years, Hamas candidates won important elections with considerable political significance. In Nablus, Hamas was victorious in 1996–97 in the first elections for a student council at al-Najah University (which had become a stronghold for the PLO after the PA came into being); it won 46.7 percent of the vote,

21. See Hamas leaflet, “The Results of the Bir Zeit University Elections Are a Rejection of the Capitulationist Farce,” of 25 November 1993.

22. Iyad al-Barghuti, “Ast’arath wa taqwim al-tajarab al-intikhabiyya al-sabiqah,” in Jawad al-Hamad and Hani Sulaiman, eds., op. cit., pp. 33–42.

whereas Fateh won only 43.5 percent. Hamas won again the following year, gaining 49.5 percent of the vote compared with 43.2 percent for Fateh. However, Hamas lost the medical union elections in 1997, securing only 30 percent of the vote compared with 70 percent for Fateh. Hamas won the student council elections in Hebron University (53 percent versus 40.7 percent for Fateh) in 1996–97. In the student council elections at the College of Engineering and Technology that same year, Hamas obtained 48.2 percent of the vote; Fateh received 41.9 percent for Fateh. Hamas won again the following year (61.3 percent versus 38 percent for Fateh). At Bir Zeit University, one of Fateh's most important strongholds, Hamas secured 44.7 percent of the vote compared with 33.6 percent for Fateh in 1996–97. In Gaza, Hamas held on to its control of the Islamic University in 1996–97 by winning 75.5 percent of the ballots cast versus 17.3 percent for Fateh. It won again the following year (77.2 percent versus 15.6 percent). Hamas was also victorious in the Engineering Union elections in Gaza, gaining 65 percent of the vote, compared with 35 percent for Fateh.

Hamas supported the holding of municipal elections, which it viewed as nonpolitical; it considered municipal councils to be service institutions. It objected to and strongly resented the appointment of mayors and municipal council members rather than having them elected, and it condemned this practice whether undertaken by the PA or the Israeli occupation authorities. When rumors circulated that the occupation authorities wanted to resort to this practice, one of Hamas's press releases declared: "We oppose appointment in principle, because it comes from the power of the occupation and not from our people. We also reject the politicization of municipal elections; these are service institutions like chambers of commerce and unions. We believe that municipal elections should enjoy a national consensus in the interest of our people."²³ When the PA appointed municipal council members without elections in 1994, Hamas condemned the action and "the manner in which the municipal councils of Gaza, Nablus, and Hebron were formed. Hamas considers this style to be factional and dictatorial, one that ignores the wishes of the Palestinian people and forces."²⁴ Hamas reiterated its belief that for municipal councils to enjoy the respect of the people, they must be elected freely and honestly.

23. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 86 of 7 May 1992.

24. Hamas, Periodic statement no. 114 of 6 August 1994.

Political Elections

As in the case of student, union, and municipal elections, Hamas has paid particular attention to general elections of a political nature and the proposals pertaining to them. The idea of holding general elections inside Palestine to select leaders who would represent the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel had been proposed in a clear and forceful way in the clauses of the Camp David agreements devoted to self-rule for the Palestinians. The PLO rejected the proposal at the time (1979), as did the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Nevertheless, the idea of Palestinian elections remained alive in the various proposals for resolving the Arab-Israeli dispute. The idea was revived during the intifada, notably in the Shamir plan of 1988, the ten-point Egyptian plan of 1989, and the Baker plan of 1989. The principle gained new life at the Madrid Conference in 1991 and was incorporated into the 1993 Oslo Agreement and the Cairo Agreement of 1994. Hamas realized early on that holding elections in the occupied Palestinian territories concerned it directly and was integral to the issue of political legitimacy—on which point Hamas was challenging the PLO's long-standing and exclusive claim.

Hamas first addressed the idea of general political elections when it was put forward as a principal article in the Shamir Plan, which was based on the idea of self-rule as stipulated in the Camp David agreements. Subsequently, the Israeli and international media showed interest in Hamas's position on the holding of elections. Ever since the end of 1988, the issue of whether Hamas was prepared to take part in elections, which had become inseparable from the settlement proposals, began to haunt the movement's leaders and luminaries. At times it took on nightmarish qualities.

Initially, Hamas approved of the idea of choosing Palestinian representatives by way of elections. It formulated the broad lines of its policy in 1988–89 and subsequently amended and elaborated on that position. As the founder and spiritual guide of the movement, Sheikh Yassin stated that position with greater precision in a series of statements and press interviews. The main lines of that position are that Hamas welcomes the idea of elections because “there is no other way to choose representatives of the people except by electing them.”²⁵ From Hamas's perspective, the only elections acceptable to the Palestinians are “those which are conducted under international supervision, [because that] guarantees the freedom of the

25. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, interview, *Al-Nahar* (Jerusalem), 31 January 1989.

majority of citizens.”²⁶ Sheikh Yassin elaborated on this later, saying that prior to holding elections, there should be a “total Israeli withdrawal, and that a United Nations force should oversee the transition to a Palestinian state.”²⁷

However, this position, which was clearly enunciated in Hamas statements under the slogan “No Elections Except After the Expulsion of the Occupier,”²⁸ did not endure for long. Hamas began to debate new conditions for holding elections, shelving the demand for an end to the occupation because it realized the difficulty of achieving that goal. In a lengthy interview at the beginning of 1990, Hamas luminary al-Zahhar analyzed Israel’s motive for proposing elections. He said that if the Palestinians reject the idea, they will “appear to the world to be rejecting the practice of democracy,” but if the Palestinian people accept elections, they will be putting Israel on the spot.²⁹ He outlined the issues that Israel had to address: “determine the deployment of Israeli army before, during, and after the elections; determine the situation of the security detainees and prisoners; determine who would supervise the elections; determine how to guarantee the honesty of the elections; determine how much coordination between Palestinians inside and outside Israel will be permitted; and determine the status of Palestinians outside [Palestine]. If these issues are resolved in a satisfactory manner, then the holding of and participation in elections will be acceptable.”³⁰

This measured position regarding the elections soon became more rigid, especially after the convening of the Madrid Conference and the beginning of the Washington talks. Hamas realized that the idea of elections had become inseparable from a settlement, which in essence did not differ much from the Camp David formula for self-rule. The issue changed as well. Prior to Madrid, the emphasis had been on whether elections should take place under Israeli occupation or under United Nations supervision. Now Hamas’s critique and analysis focused on the nature of the elections, namely, that their aim would be to choose an administrative and executive body, not to choose representatives for a legislative body. Hamas refused to participate in such elections, arguing that they could not break through the ceiling on self-rule and the task of the victors would be

26. Ibid.

27. *Al-Nahar*, 10 April 1989.

28. See, for example, Hamas, Periodic statement no. 36 of 25 February 1989.

29. Mahmoud al-Zahhar, interview, *Sawt al-haq wal-hurriya* [The voice of truth and freedom], organ of the Islamist movement in Israel, 26 January 1990.

30. Ibid.

to implement and administer a preset agenda. However, Hamas would be willing to participate if the elections were for a legislature, not tied to self-rule, and the objective of such elections was to choose an elected body representing the Palestinian people, which then would implement its own agenda in the service of Palestinian national goals.³¹ Even in this respect and in spite of the slogan, “No to Elections Associated with Self-Rule,”³² there were a few signs that this position could be modified. In October 1993, Sheikh Yassin sent letters to the movement from prison; these were published in the press and showed new flexibility on the entire issue. He reiterated Hamas’s desire for elections in which it could participate:

If the Council is to enjoy legislative authority, I believe it is preferable to participate in [the elections] rather than not. Because we express our opposition by going out into the street, why shouldn’t we express our opposition from within the heart of the legislative institution which, in the future, will assume the right to represent the Palestinian people and to pass laws and regulations that suit its fancy and its leanings?³³

Sheikh Yassin then addressed the practice of the issuing of *fatwas* banning participation in the elections. He denounced such measures with his well-known pragmatism, recalled that the participation of Hamas in “municipal, societal, student body, and professional elections is [nevertheless] taking place under occupation,” and asked “Is it permissible that a Muslim may serve as an errand boy in a cabinet minister’s office or in parliament, but that he may not be a deputy in parliament, in which capacity he is better able to serve his faith, his calling, and his *ummah*?”³⁴

Sheikh Yassin’s position on elections effectively altered perceptions. Despite the persistent assertions in Hamas’s statements that the movement would refuse to participate in elections called for in settlement plans drafted in Madrid, Washington, Oslo, and Cairo, many persons in the PLO—and to a certain extent also in Israel—became convinced that Hamas was thinking seriously about participating in the elections which were to be scheduled in accordance with the 1993 Oslo Agreement. Although Hamas continued to insist on its seemingly categorical position, prominent figures and leaders in the movement treated the elections

31. Hamas, special leaflet, “Hamas’s Positions on the Self-Rule Authority,” dated 7 July 1994.

32. As set out early on in Hamas, special leaflet, “Our Position on Self-Rule and the Elections Associated with it,” dated 9 September 1992.

33. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, “Letter from Kfar Yona Prison to the Movement’s Leaders and Followers,” dated 3 October 1993 and published in *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

34. *Ibid.*

proposed in the Oslo Accord as a reality that eventually would take place. They kept abreast of developments and proceeded to analyze the question. In this respect, it is worthwhile to review the substance of a working paper that Muhammad Nazzal, Hamas's representative in Jordan, submitted in August 1994 to a political symposium in Amman.³⁵

Nazzal suggested implicitly that Hamas might come around to accepting elections despite the movement's official rejection of them. He maintained that there are four different Palestinian political positions with respect to participation in the self-rule elections. The first position supports holding elections and considers them a manifestation of sovereignty. The second position supports elections but is concerned about the results. The third position opposes elections and refuses to take part in them; this category includes Hamas, the PFLP, and Islamic Jihad. The fourth position opposes the elections but believes it is necessary to participate in them. Significantly, Nazzal observed the following concerning the fourth perspective: "Of course, there are no specific political groups that propound this view. However, the view has been put forward by certain opposition forces that do not constitute a clear majority [within their organizations]."³⁶ In a clarification to a question as to whether he was referring to Hamas and factions within the movement that might hold this view, Nazzal replied in the affirmative.³⁷ Moreover, some observers of the Palestinian *fasa'il* predicted that Hamas would participate in any elections that might be held.

Other parties, particularly Israel, silently hoped that Hamas would participate in the elections provided for in the Oslo framework because that would enhance the legitimacy of the entire agreement. Nevertheless, the media brouhaha made by Israel and its extortionist tactics in the Cairo negotiations concerning the details of the elections were designed to prevent Hamas and the Palestinian opposition from taking part in the elections, despite various assertions to the contrary.³⁸

In summary, it can be said that Hamas in practice viewed general elections as a source of representational legitimacy, which would allow it to reinforce its political views with the electoral power that it hoped to gain,

35. Muhammad Nazzal, "Palestinian Forces and the Self-Rule Elections," paper presented to the symposium on "The Palestinian Self-Rule Elections," organized by the Center for Middle East Studies, Amman, 17–18 August 1994.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Muhammad Nazzal, interview with author, Amman, 28 April 1995.

38. See, for example, Shimon Peres, interview, *Jerusalem Post* (International Edition), 31 December 1994, where he referred to Hamas's participation in the elections as "destruction, not election."

as it had with professional and union elections. The movement therefore wanted to benefit positively from diverse elections. Nevertheless, its desire to acquire representational legitimacy through elections proposed within the Oslo framework ran counter to the political preconditions for those elections, conditions that fully contradicted the basic position of the movement on the Madrid-Oslo process. Hamas also realized, however, that boycotting the elections altogether would allow its competitor, the self-rule authority, to gain both power and legitimacy, regardless of the extent of the boycott that it and the opposition were able to mount. Consequently, Hamas tried to find a common denominator between rejecting the Oslo process, including the elections, and participating in or influencing those elections. This quest for a common denominator is the key to understanding the demand by a number of prominent figures in Hamas that the PA conduct honest and fair elections, because “holding fair elections is a just demand by the people; it is a realistic [expectation] and not an unattainable fancy. It is up to the Palestinian Authority, through its actions, to alleviate the fears, doubts and suspicions of the opposition, and to prove in practice that it seeks fair elections in the service of the general interest of the Palestinian people.”³⁹

Self-Rule Elections of January 1996

The decision whether or not to participate in the self-rule elections of January 1996 may have been the most difficult one that Hamas has faced to date. Although the official position of Hamas was not to take part in any elections related to the Madrid-Oslo framework, local, regional, and international momentum built up as the date for the elections approached; when the actual elections were held, there was consternation in the ranks of Hamas. Sticking to the original choice of nonparticipation gave rise to fears of internal dissent. Some Hamas leaders and others affiliated with the movement in the Occupied Territories spoke up about the need to participate. These included ‘Imad al-Faluji, who subsequently was expelled, and Isma‘il Haniyah, Khaled al-Hindi, and Sa‘id al-Namruti, who registered as independent candidates but had to withdraw their names as a result of pressure from Hamas, which feared that their candidacy would

39. Khaled Mish‘al (then a member and now head of Hamas’s Political Bureau), “The Conditions for and Probability of Fair Elections,” working paper presented at symposium, “The Palestinian Self-Rule Elections,” Amman, 17–18 August 1994.

confuse the public and weaken the movement's official position.⁴⁰ More significantly, the eminent al-Zahhar, who had been the official spokesman for Hamas inside the Occupied Territories during 1994–96, also favored taking part in the electoral competition.⁴¹ Outside the Occupied Territories, the most important supporter of participation in the elections was the then head of Hamas's Political Bureau, Abu Marzouq, who was under arrest in the United States. His opinion caused open confusion within the movement.⁴² Retrospectively, Abu Marzouq explained that his view was based on an assessment of what Hamas could gain organizationally in terms of positive publicity and being at the center of events; he did not believe, however, that the council would have a significant role or that it could change the course of events.⁴³

Prior to the elections Hamas put out a statement to explain once more the five main reasons for the position it had adopted:

the Council whose members were to be elected derived from Oslo, and it would be limited by the ceiling set by Oslo; Israel would retain the right to abrogate any Council resolution that it did not like; holding these elections meant abrogating the rights of four million Palestinians living in the diaspora because they were not permitted to participate; the manner in which the elections were to be conducted would consolidate the annexation of Jerusalem by Israel, given that the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem would be required to send in their ballots by mail, confirming their status as foreigners residing on foreign soil; and ultimately what is required of the Council is to legitimize Oslo. It would be an ineffectual body that would have no choice but to endorse the steps toward a final settlement.⁴⁴

In contrast, those in favor of participating in the elections argued that such participation was a political way to demonstrate the presence of Hamas and to activate that presence in Palestine. Furthermore, the act of participation would not undermine the credibility of the movement's stand

40. Hamas issued a statement prior to the elections concerning the candidacy of these prominent figures, explaining that their decision was an individual one and that they did not represent Hamas; see Hamas leaflet, "A Statement of Clarification from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)," dated 31 December 1995.

41. In a written response to the author on 9 March 1996, al-Zahhar avoided a question about his view of Hamas's decision not to participate in the election by saying: "My personal opinion differs from the opinion of the movement, and I do not wish to state it."

42. Abu Marzouq interview, *Al-Hayat*, 19 January 1997.

43. Abu Marzouq, interview with author, 19 May 1998.

44. Hamas leaflet, "An Important Statement from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), Concerning the Elections for Limited Self-Rule," dated 19 November 1995.

on the Oslo Agreement. In fact, Hamas could wage an electoral campaign in which its position on the agreement would be declared clearly and openly; it even could adopt as its slogan, "Down with Oslo!"⁴⁵ Haniyah elaborated this position by listing the points in favor of participation, points that represented the thinking of a significant number of Hamas's members inside the Occupied Territories:

- A careful assessment of the daily state of affairs and of concrete developments calls for a strategy to maximize advantage without compromising fundamentals.
- Participation in the elections will not amount to a surrender of Hamas's political position as long as the movement contests the elections under the banner of all the principles with which it is identified.
- Participation would guarantee a legitimate political presence for the movement after the elections, and Hamas would have secured a guarantee against decrees that could outlaw the movement.
- Hamas would be kept informed of, and be in a position to participate in, the formulation of legislation governing civil society that will emanate from the elected Council, thus securing a guarantee against exclusion.
- Hamas would be in a position to introduce significant and badly needed reforms in domestic institutions and could combat the spread of corruption.
- Hamas could participate in the creation of official institutions, something for which it always has asked, in keeping with its emphatic desire to participate in civil society and to promote internal development.
- Hamas would be well informed of developments in the final status negotiations and what is to come after that.
- Hamas could secure protection for itself and the institutions it has sponsored over the years, and its political leaders and prominent figures would enjoy parliamentary immunity.
- Participation in the elections would be a response to the demand of a significant number of our people who are looking for an honest alternative and God-fearing candidates so that they can rest at ease about action in various areas of life.⁴⁶

45. Isma'il Haniyah (a Hamas leader in favor of the elections) in response to author's queries, 2 March 1996.

46. *Ibid.*

Haniyah was quoted at length to clarify an important point of view with respect to the elections, held by a significant faction in Hamas. This view is in contrast to the movement's official position, which has received extensive publicity. Clearly, Hamas faced a dilemma. On the one hand the political requirements of operating in the open under the cover of political legitimacy (even its security requirements) were best served by securing the largest possible number of seats in the council. On the other hand the need to remain true to its principles and to its position against the Oslo Agreement and to live up to its slogans dictated that it boycott the elections.

The position of its allies in the Ten Resistance Organizations (TRO) also played an important role in Hamas's decision because the decision to boycott the elections was a collective one on the part of the alliance, and it would have been difficult for Hamas to set aside the decision. However, it is not so easy to understand why Hamas and the TRO did not try a different approach. Although some explicit and many implicit views supportive of the participation in the election were spread across the political tendencies constituting the TRO, the "collective decision" of the *fasa'il* was to boycott and thus to lend itself to futile rhetoric instead of practical policy. That is, if the TRO allies had chosen to contest the elections by turning out the vote and using a united list of candidates to capture an outright majority, they may have been able to abrogate the Oslo Agreement, which, after all, was their goal. This outcome would have turned the tables. Israel would have had two alternatives: Either to dissolve the council and reject its decision—a right Israel retains under the Oslo Agreement, in which case the accord would have landed in trouble; or to work with the council in view of the electoral legitimacy and public support it enjoyed and allow alternatives to Oslo to be proposed. Even if the opposition coalition did not win a majority in the council, it still would have constituted a significant bloc and could have formed parliamentary coalitions with independents or Fateh opponents in order to improve the political direction of Palestinian politics, particularly with respect to the final status negotiations, while continuing to oppose the Oslo and Cairo agreements. The expectation of the opposition coalition winning a majority in the council is not far-fetched; the independent Islamists won 8 out of 88 seats in the council even though Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not get involved. 'Imad al-Faluji, a former Hamas member and one of the winners in the council elections, estimated that if Hamas had taken part, it would have scored "an even bigger victory than we had expected, because the election results indicated that Fateh was burdened with a deep internal crisis.

Furthermore, the killing of the engineer 'Ayyash occurred at the height of the electoral campaign and created additional sympathy among the Palestinian public for Hamas.⁴⁷

The PA urgently pressed Hamas to take part in the elections, because this would have given greater legitimacy to the elections and the political situation created by Oslo. In fact, this pressure and also the demand that Hamas give up armed operations were the central issues in the negotiations between the PA and Hamas in Cairo in December 1995, only a few weeks before the elections; both were rejected by Hamas. Israel and the United States also wanted Hamas to participate in the elections for the same reason. Their objective was to convince Hamas to restrict itself to political action and to give up armed operations. An indication of this desire on Israel's part was its granting of permission to the expanded Hamas delegation, representing its leadership in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, to travel to Cairo for the talks with the PA.

The elections were held on 20 January 1996 under international supervision. Hamas did not participate, but it did not call for a boycott of the elections. Those who registered to vote accounted for 86 percent of the eligible electorate, quite a high ratio that was interpreted to mean support for the Oslo peace process and a weakened position for Hamas. Arafat personally obtained an extremely high ratio of the vote for president, because he was running without any serious opposition. Hamas felt obliged to interpret the results of the elections, to defend its position, and to explain why the turnout had been so high. Ten days after the elections, on 1 February 1996, Hamas put out a special statement that maintained the PA had pressured citizens to register to vote, for example by requiring anyone who wanted to process an official application (such as for a passport) to show a voter registration card. Hamas also charged that the PA had mounted a campaign that portrayed not voting as unpatriotic. Furthermore, Hamas attempted to refute the election results by issuing its own vote statistics (although these were not free of miscalculation, as shown below where I have put corrected figures in brackets following the figures cited in Hamas's statement).

For example, Hamas contended that although the percentage of those who had voted (in the West Bank only) was 68.46 percent of all registered voters (who constituted 86 percent of all eligible voters), 18 percent of the ballots were blank (according to the count by the Cen-

47. 'Imad al-Faluji (a leader in favor of the elections), in response to the author's queries, 2 March 1996.

ter for Palestine Research and Studies [CPRS]. Hamas's interpretation was that those who cast blank ballots were afraid not to vote, but they had reservations about the elections and went through the motions. This would reduce the actual number of participants to 50.46 percent [56.13], which Hamas said was about half of the 86 percent who initially had registered to vote. This meant that the actual ratio of those who exercised the right to vote was 43 percent [48.27] of all eligible voters. Hamas therefore concluded that 57 percent [51.63] of the population in fact had boycotted the elections. Hamas then pointed out that the winners on average had obtained 25 percent of the votes, meaning that they were the delegates of 25 percent of the eligible voters. Finally, according to Hamas, the voting had taken place in the West Bank and Gaza, the population of which represented only 30 percent of the entire Palestinian people; consequently the representational value of the Legislative Council was extremely limited.⁴⁸

Share of the Electoral Vote and Opinion Polls

The leaders of Hamas constantly reiterate that popular Palestinian support for the movement runs between 40 and 50 percent. This projection is based on the results of student, union, and chamber of commerce elections, as noted above. Opinion polls, on the other hand, yield different percentages, particularly those carried out by the CPRS in Nablus, an institution set up by Palestinian academicians in 1993. CPRS conducts a monthly opinion poll that attempts to identify attitudes among the general Palestinian public in the Occupied Territories on important issues and to gauge support for political movements and organizations. According to the CPRS, the mean level of support for Hamas between 1993 and 1997 was just slightly over 18 percent; in contrast, support for Fateh in the same period slightly exceeded 40 percent.⁴⁹

Hamas's leaders reject the CPRS statistics. They try to refute them and accuse the center of being biased.⁵⁰ They claim that the samples chosen

48. Hamas leaflet, Al-Bireh, dated 1 February 1996.

49. See the monthly reports and publications of CPRS, as well as the paper of its director, Khalil Shikaki, "Tawajahat al-nakhib al-filasteeni" [Attitudes of the Palestinian voter], presented at the symposium, "Palestinian Self-Rule Elections," Amman, 17–18 August 1994; also see his summary of poll results over a limited time period in idem, "Mostaqbal al-tahowal nahw al-dimoqratiyya fi filastin" [Prospects for a turn to democracy in Palestine], *Majallat al-dirasat al-Filastiniyya*, no. 25 (Winter 1996): 7–38.

50. Ibrahim Ghosheh, interview with author, 26 April 1995.

are not representative and that a number of pollsters working for the center are Fateh supporters who slant the results.⁵¹ Some prominent figures in Hamas also have alleged that the polls are conducted on Fridays during the noon prayers when Hamas supporters are at the mosque; they have alleged that the poll takers are instructed to avoid universities and mosques, organizational headquarters, the offices of lawyers, doctors, and engineers, and other places of support for Hamas.⁵² Furthermore, it can be said that, because Hamas has become the opposition to the PA and since Israeli and Palestinian security forces arrest anyone whom they suspect of being involved in Hamas's military arm, respondents might be intimidated from declaring their support for Hamas, whereas there is no reason to be afraid of declaring support for the PA. These charges have given rise to the hypothesis that the poll results might be deceptive, because those who do not wish to participate in them, for example, are often on the side of the opposition, particularly Hamas.⁵³

Some studies that are sympathetic to Hamas rely on opinion surveys conducted in the Gaza Strip after the Oslo Agreement. The results have been contradictory: some surveys found that 61 percent were opposed to the agreement while only 31 percent approved of it; but others maintained that 55 percent thought that the proposals of the opposition were realistic, while only 32 percent did not think so.⁵⁴ So far, it seems that no poll has been recognized as impartial by all sides. Thus, the assessment of electoral and popular support must depend on various estimates and indicators.

The large turnout for the Palestinian elections held in January 1996 (which some viewed as an indicator of support for the Oslo Agreement) undermined the logic behind Hamas's estimates of public support for the movement. Moreover, one cannot use the results of those elections as a measure of Hamas's electoral strength, because it did not participate and the mass public was eager for any sort of general political elections to express its thirst for freedom and independence. The elections had been

51. According to Mahmoud al-Zahhar, "this center has specialized for some time in assigning the ratio of 18 percent to Hamas; CPRS had predicted in a poll conducted before the al-Najah University elections that Hamas" could win at most only 32 seats, whereas in fact it won 39 seats (the same as Fateh). "Therefore, we doubt the credibility of the center and its polls," said al-Zahhar in an interview with *Al-Sabeel*, 27 June 1995.

52. See further Ahmad 'Abdel 'Aziz, *Filastin al-Muslima*, April 1997.

53. Jarbawi, *Hamas' Bid*, p. 15.

54. 'Aref al-'Adwan and Jawad al-Dalu, "Tawajahat al-nakhil al-filasteeni" [Attitudes of the Palestinian voter], paper presented at the symposium, "The Palestinian Self-Rule Elections," Amman, 17–18 August 1994.

preceded by a massive public awareness campaign to turn out the vote, and in the Gaza Strip alone, some 7,000 teachers took part. All these factors make it difficult to rely on the election results as an indicator of the strength of Hamas's popular support.

Hamas's own estimate of its popular support as being between 40 and 50 percent of the electorate is based on the results of professional, student, and chambers of commerce elections. Although these results can be verified independently, they cannot be generalized to Palestinian society as a whole. The general population is less educated and less politicized than are members of professional associations, college students, or members of chambers of commerce. These groups also have more experience with elections than does the general public and have attitudes that are more difficult for authorities to influence.⁵⁵

Moreover, one can argue that the electoral platforms of the contending groups in institutional elections are not purely political but also are service oriented. They stress administrative competence, financial integrity, and the personal ethics of the candidates, as well as their dedication to the service of the profession or their ability to advance the interests of the organization in question. As a general rule, these considerations give an advantage to the candidates of Islamic blocs because of their religious faith and Islamic discipline. That said, political affiliation and loyalty remain essential factors for many voters in determining which blocs to join. Nevertheless, a large group of nonaligned voters in the middle do not belong to any bloc or give priority to ideological considerations. In the election of officers for professional and similar associations, these voters in the middle are more likely to be influenced by candidates' conduct and personal records rather than by political factors.

In contrast, the platforms of the different contestants are political first and foremost for general elections, while the public service aspect is linked integrally to political ideology and what can be achieved in practice. Therefore, questions of administrative competence, personal conduct, and a good reputation pale in significance to the big question of what one or another candidate actually can deliver. That is the question Palestinian voters—even the unpoliticized and uneducated ones—ask themselves before they cast their ballots. And their “responses” are closely related to their standards of living, the reality of the Israeli occupation, the existence of Israel, Arab weakness, and the international recognition accorded to

55. Iyad al-Barghuti, “Asf‘arath wa taqwim al-tajarab al-intikhabiyya,” pp. 33–42.

the PLO and the PA. The PLO candidates have a ready answer: to negotiate with Israel to get what is possible. The candidates of Hamas, in contrast, answer with a call to resistance and jihad, the real impact of which on the voter's life will be further pain and suffering in the hope of achieving liberation. But the realities of life have their sober aspects: "The national dream is dissipating, and its sun is setting. As the glorified objective moves further beyond their reach, people will vote in accordance with their immediate interests and pursue selfish goals in other aspects of their lives. This trend is on the increase in the Occupied Territories. A person will vote for whoever promises to help if he is elected."⁵⁶

That is not to say that voters will be unsympathetic to the appeals of Hamas for jihad and resistance, but it is unlikely that they will vote for Hamas. More precisely, voters' hearts may be with Hamas, but they will vote for the PLO or to support the PA. One's vote will be based on an assessment of the relative merits of two approaches: a long-term and multistage project of resistance or a pragmatic plan. The voter perceives the immense chasm between the two plans. According to al-Zahhar, "Hamas's plan is divine, while Fateh's plan is human."⁵⁷ To be fair, that is not Hamas's official view because it implies an infallibility that Hamas does not claim. And it also implies a human failing—the inability of people to attain the putative "celestial" heights of Hamas's plan, their inability to live up to such an expectation, and their consequent embrace of the rival "human" plan. This is an outcome and an outlook that Hamas does not wish to encourage.

Another reason why Hamas's claim of 40 to 50 percent support is too high is that the PA has been set up in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank. This situation, which is supported by Israel, the neighboring Arab states, and the major powers, has a strong, if indirect, effect on public opinion. First, consider the media: the public relations effort of the PA and the media in Israel and in the neighboring Arab countries are turning the peace process into a fact of life, mobilizing support for it and playing up its strengths. In contrast, Hamas and the opposition groups have a weak information campaign that barely reaches the followers of the organizations opposing the PA. In the case of television, which is the most effective medium in the region, the governments (including the PA) have a tight monopoly; it is the same with respect to radio, excepting a few stations loyal to the opposition but limited in their broadcast range and efficacy. As far as the press is concerned, the most influential and widely read news-

56. Ibid.

57. Mahmoud al-Zahhar, interview, *Al-Hayat*, 16 December 1994.

papers support the PA. The few publications that are loyal to the opposition are weeklies with modest circulation and limited influence; they also have difficulty publishing on a regular basis, either due to difficulties relating to the business or because the PA or Israel have closed them down.

The very existence of the PA has had an impact on Palestinian public opinion. The PA has been moving forward with the peace process, going through one stage of the process after the other and through one round of detailed negotiations after the other. Although voters barely can keep abreast of developments, the process nevertheless raises expectations, even as the voter goes through one waiting period after the other. The expectation is that the whole process will lead either to political outcomes that are acceptable to Palestinian nationalists or to the provision of services and the introduction of changes that will improve his or her life. Although this situation leads to disappointments, it nevertheless encourages the voters to suspend judgement, to give the process enough time to resolve all the difficulties of the interim period—which will last for years—until they can judge the final outcome. Giving the process time (to work) naturally means voting for the candidates who are asking for patience, that is, for the PLO or supporters of the PA but not for Hamas, which is refusing to ask for it in the first place.

Reviewing the various estimates of Hamas's public support (the CPRS estimate of 18 percent and Hamas's own estimate of 40 to 50 percent), the results of the 1996 Legislative Council elections, and the frequent Hamas victories in professional and student associations can be confusing. Given the circumstances that surround any attempt to conduct free and objective polls, it is in fact difficult to obtain an estimate of Hamas's public support that is based on solid, scientific methodology. Therefore, I use a tentative estimate that derives from my own close study of the movement and its position in Palestinian politics since 1987. Taking into account the aforementioned indicators as well as my own personal and extensive observations, I believe it is plausible to estimate Hamas's support at around 30 percent of the Palestinian public.

HAMAS AND SOCIAL ACTION

Hamas's social thought and its political views and practices are intertwined. This is a result of the movement not following the path of formation and development typical of political parties. As discussed in chapter 1, the Muslim Brotherhood, the organization out of which Hamas emerged, spent many years grappling with social problems as its first priority. With some

exceptions, the social and educational aspect of the Brotherhood's activities took priority over its political dimension from the early 1960s until nearly the end of the 1980s. Thus, Hamas's distinct interest and involvement in the social dimension of the Palestine problem is traceable to the roots of the movement's ideology in the Muslim Brotherhood's religious and social thought that emphasized the priority of social development as a necessary stage in the path of political change. This organic connection between the social and the political imparted its legacy in Hamas's political thought and practice.

Hamas's concern with social issues found expression in the extensive infrastructure of charitable social services the movement established for the poor. Various Palestinian social strata came to depend on the health care, vocational training, and charitable works services that Hamas provided. These activities led to a rise in Hamas's popularity.⁵⁸ Subsequently, these social services became one of the most important sources of influence that Hamas had with broad strata of the public. Nevertheless, the literature on this subject, either by Hamas or others, remains meager.

By reading Hamas's Charter and its subsequent press releases, one can see that its social action theory has two main, interrelated components. The first concept is that the struggle against Israeli occupation must be waged by a "fortified society." The second notion is that "fortifying society" in the necessary manner only can be done through religious education and a commitment to Islam. The discourse and practice of Hamas on this subject revolves around these two ideas.

The Charter broadly outlines the first concept and discusses at considerable length the importance of "fortifying society" by giving it the Islamic preparation necessary to undertake struggle. There are separate articles on educating future generations, the role of Muslim women, social solidarity, and similar topics. All these concerns are intended to build the foundation that Hamas sums up in the phrase: "Building Muslim society is a necessity in the struggle for liberation." This "building" is a collective effort in which women work alongside men, "Muslim women have a role in the liberation struggle that is no less important than the role of men; woman is the maker of men, and her role in guiding and educating the generations is a major role." This role, as Hamas conceives it, is to educate children and prepare them for "their contribution to the jihad that awaits them."⁵⁹

58. Jarbawi, *Hamas' Bid*, p. 9.

59. The Hamas Charter, Articles 17 and 18; see Appendix, document no. 2.

A cohesive society characterized by solidarity has to be built. Such a society can withstand the “the tyranny of the enemy.” For “our enemy relies on collective punishment, stealing people’s homeland and possessions, and pursuing them in the lands of exile, and the places where they gather. Our enemy has adopted the practice of breaking our bones and shooting women, children, and old men—with or without reason. . . . [The enemy’s] treatment of and terrible behavior toward people is more violent than would be that of war criminals . . . To cope with this behavior, people need social solidarity. We must confront the enemy as one body; if one member suffers, the rest must be vigilant and come to his defense.”⁶⁰

Building society on a sound ideological basis, then, is necessary and must take place in tandem with the confrontation with the enemy and the struggle for liberation. The two processes are coherent and complementary. The first process fortifies society through education, and the second challenges the occupation with a fortified society.

Fortifying Society through Religious Education

The practical embodiment of the theoretical vision in the Charter finds expression in various areas. The first area of activity pertains to Islamic charitable institutions and societies, including mosques, classes that teach students to memorize the Quran, *zakat* (alms tax) committees, medical clinics, relief societies, orphanages, schools and nurseries, and cultural and sports clubs. The Islamists focused on these activities both before the intifada (as the Muslim Brotherhood) and after it (as Hamas). Funding sources were private contributions, from both inside the occupied territories and outside, notably the Arab oil-producing states of the Gulf.

The network of social services that Hamas set up enabled it to keep in touch with the concerns of the poor and working classes and to influence their religious conduct, political choices, and beliefs. This success was due largely to the Islamic ethics of these societies and the honesty and integrity with which they conducted their activities. The individuals directing these societies won the trust of the public, particularly when the public compared them to their PLO counterparts. The latter had been discredited due to incompetence, nepotism, and occasional managerial or financial corruption.⁶¹ Even foreign journalists noticed this trend. For

60. *Ibid.*, Article 20.

61. See Jarbawi, *Hamas' Bid*, p. 10.

example, a Reuters article about Islamic charitable activities reported that a 1994 charity event organized in the Gaza Strip by a close Hamas affiliate, the Islamic Reform Society, had raised \$200,000 for the society's charitable projects. According to Reuters, many people who were not Hamas supporters nevertheless chose to make their donations through Islamic societies indirectly affiliated with the movement. It quoted one person who had donated \$8,000 as saying that although he did not like Hamas, he had given money because he trusted his donation would reach its intended target. Another contributor said that he was a follower of Fateh but politics had nothing to do with charitable activities; he added that it was his religious duty to donate part of his income to charity and would give money to whomever he thought could be trusted with it.⁶²

The second area in which Hamas was active, even if it was not as effective as the first, was in the provision of social justice on the basis of the *shariah*. This area concerns almost exclusively the activities of Sheikh Yassin before and during the intifada and up to the time of his arrest in May 1989. During the 1980s, Sheikh Yassin became a very prominent religious figure in the Gaza Strip. He acquired the reputation of sparing no effort to help people and of being unstinting with his material and moral support. This reputation won him enormous respect. People began to come to him to arbitrate and resolve their disputes, and they accepted his judgments. A lengthy 1988 Agence France Press (AFP) report on the delays in Israeli courts, the loss of popular trust in them, and the effect of the collective resignations by the police in protest of the poor status of justice in the Gaza Strip shows the emergence of Hamas's legal role. Hamas leaders were carrying out the role of the police and the courts by handling small torts, personal real estate, and financial disputes among the population of Gaza. The performance of these judicial functions by the Muslim fundamentalists, according to AFP, was not a cause for concern among the supporters of the PLO, who saw Hamas as undertaking the function of adjudication and social regulation during troubled times. Dr. Haidar 'Abdel-Shafi, the head of the Palestinian Red Crescent in Gaza, and a prominent figure in the Palestinian nationalist Left, says that in those days, "Hamas was very efficient in administering justice."⁶³

This situation gave Hamas a measure of moral authority in the Occupied Territories, especially if one considers that Hamas was not being paid

62. Reuters News Agency report, 11 April 1994.

63. Carried in the Jerusalem daily *Al-Quds*, 16 November 1988.

for administering justice.⁶⁴ However, this judicial function was undermined, particularly in the Gaza Strip, by the arrest of Sheikh Yassin because none of the other Hamas leaders could fill his place. It can be argued that the popular authority stemming from the exercise of that legal function—and the quasi-legal role recognized by all—may have been one of the reasons for the sheikh's arrest. The emergence of any authority that enjoyed a measure of popular legitimacy such as Sheikh Yassin had attained worried the Israeli occupation authorities, who perceived this as a threat of potential collective action and fought it relentlessly.

Hamas used its periodic statements and other communiqués during the intifada to spread religious awareness and to encourage Islamic conduct. Its statements stressed the significance of worship and religious observance, such as fasting during Ramadan and praying regularly, and appealed to women to be modest and wear *hijab*; it related all these matters to resistance against the occupation, invoking the example of historic paradigm cases in which Muslims had won victories. Hamas drew a causal connection between victory and adherence to the Islamic faith. It appealed for discipline and adherence to Islamic rules of conduct out of inner conviction but did not try to alter inappropriate conduct through force. Moreover, hard evidence or witnesses have not supported charges that Hamas adopted a policy of force to compel adherence to proper Islamic behavior.⁶⁵ These charges appear to be based partly on the exaggeration of a few, rare incidents committed by marginal extremists in Palestine and partly on speculation inspired by the practices of extremist Islamic groups outside Palestine. What can be said, however, is that Hamas created a “deterrent” environment, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where religious norms of behavior prevailed and conduct that violated those norms, especially during the intifada, were exceptions to the rule and brought public condemnation upon the perpetrators.

Hamas also spoke out about interpersonal social relations, especially during the intifada. Its leaflets condemned deviant behavior and corruption, encouraged economy, and condemned spendthrift behavior. It

64. Ziad Abu 'Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 70.

65. See, for example, the charges in Fayez Sarrah, “Al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi filastin: wahdeh al-ideolojiyya wal-inqisamat al-siyasiyya” [The Islamic movement in Palestine: Unity of ideology and political divisions], *Al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi* (June 1989): 48–64; and Rema Hammami, “From Immodesty to Collaboration: Hamas, the Women's Movement, and National Identity in the Intifada,” in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork, eds., *Essays From Middle East Report* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1997), pp. 194–210.

warned merchants against establishing monopolies and raising prices. One leaflet even discussed traffic problems and appealed for observance of traffic rules.⁶⁶

The other important area of concern for Hamas in social matters was education. Education suffered considerably due to the repeated strikes during the intifada, and schools were closed down for months at a time between 1987 and 1993. Hamas differed from the PLO-affiliated Unified National Leadership of the Intifada on the subject of declaring general strikes affecting schools. The Unified National Leadership insisted on the participation of all students in the general strike, which led to the closing down of schools, whereas Hamas exempted educational establishments from general strikes and called on students to attend classes.⁶⁷ In order to compensate for the time lost by students due to the prolonged closure of their schools, Hamas devised the temporary solution of “public education in mosques,” and the Unified National Leadership for its part organized informal education through popular committees. Mosques in various regions were used as substitutes for local schools and were put under the supervision of educational committees. Evening classes were held, with teachers adhering to school curricula. The Hamas and Unified National Leadership experiments were partially successful, but they were aborted after the first year when the Israeli authorities closed down a number of mosques where students were being taught, declared educational committees to be illegal, and subjected their members to imprisonment.⁶⁸

In brief, Hamas tried to “fortify” society through religious education, which aimed to create social solidarity and prepare society as a whole to resist the occupation. This effort constituted the second prong of Hamas’s agenda for social action. The essence of the educational plan was to strengthen society to confront the occupation by instilling religious values

66. For examples of leaflets containing detailed social and educational messages on various issues, see Periodic statement no. 14 of April 1988, no. 22 of June 1988, no. 36 of 25 February 1989, and no. 86 of 7 May 1992.

67. In its Periodic statement no. 45 of 21 July 1989, Hamas appealed to students to attend classes; the statement’s heading read: “Read, in the name of thy God, the Creator. Learning and studying are a sacred right that we safeguard. No one outdoes us in this regard.” Meanwhile, the Unified National Leadership’s release no. 42 called on all teachers and schools to go on strike; according to the *Jerusalem Post*, 31 July 1989, many Palestinians ignored the Unified National Leadership’s leaflet because the prevalent sentiment of the population tended to support Hamas’s call for schools to remain open.

68. See ‘Imad ‘Abdel Rahman, “Al-Ta’lim al-sh’abi fi zhal al-intifada” [Popular education under the Intifada], *Al-Quds*, 29 June 1990; also see *Filastin al-Muslima*, July 1989.

that extolled sacrifice and martyrdom. Although this campaign reached a new intensity during the intifada and after the creation of Hamas, its origins predate Hamas, as explained earlier. In fact, literature sympathetic to Hamas boasts of the successes during the period of preparation preceding the uprising: “The process of development and preparation begun by the Islamic movement in Palestine [produced] fodder for the flames such as had not been seen in the history of our people and our cause. The number of detainees, wounded, and martyred from among the student members of Islamic blocs, the students, faculty, and employees of the Islamic University, the mosque-going faithful—young and old, the imams, and the young heroes are absolute proof that the launching of the intifada was the result of that preparation and development. The PLO has been around for over a quarter of a century, but why have we not seen an uprising swept forward by such rapid momentum before?”⁶⁹

Hamas combined Islamic social-instructional discourse with the discourse of nationalist resistance, placing each at the service of the other. The commitment to an Islamic code of conduct served the objectives of resistance and liberation. At the same time, enlistment in the intifada and the resistance effort became a religious commitment. Hamas brought this composite perspective to bear on the significant issues arising from resistance to the occupation, the most serious of which was that of [Israeli] agents. These people were exposed, and death sentences were passed on a number of them on the basis of nationalist and religious codes. Their only means of avoiding the punishment of death was to confess publicly and repent before they were found out.⁷⁰ Hamas used this same composite Islamic-instructional-nationalist-resistance code of conduct to combat monopolies (a nationalistic and consequently religious issue), and violations of the holiness of Ramadan (a religious and therefore nationalistic issue). It even ordered merchants to boycott Israeli goods for which there were Palestinian-produced alternatives, covering both industrial and agricultural products, in order to support the national economy.⁷¹

69. Jihad Saleh, *Hamas: Harakat al-moqawama al-Islamiyya: nazhrat fi al-fekr wal-mamarasa* [Hamas, the Islamic resistance movement: A look at its ideology and practice] (Kuwait: Al-Manah Library, 1989), p. 73.

70. Interview with Sheikh Ahmad Yassin conducted in prison by 'Abdel Jawad Saleh on the subject of collaborators with the Israeli occupation and published in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, 9 October 1993, and in *Al-Nahar*, 14 October 1993.

71. See, by way of example, Hamas, Periodic statement no. 22 of June 1988, no. 35 of 30 January 1989, and no. 60 of 1 July 1990.

The Role of Mosques and Islamic Institutions

Mosques and Islamic institutions played a vital role in the above activities. Hamas relied on what could be achieved through mosques and charitable institutions to translate its social discourse into palpable reality. By removing hundreds of mosques and dozens of Islamic societies and institutions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip out from under the direct control of the Israeli occupation authorities and of the Jordanian *awqaf* (religious endowments), and later even of the PA (until March 1996),⁷² Hamas contributed to the formation of an autonomous Palestinian civil society. The independence of Islamic institutions that either directly or indirectly were associated with Hamas was a major concern for the movement. Hamas tried hard to hold on to its gains, and it considered any assaults on those institutions after the establishment of the PA to be comparable to crossing a red line, which Hamas could not accept quietly. Hamas stated this point explicitly in one press release that was issued to condemn the PA decision to close mosques except during prayer hours and to limit their activities: “Our steadfast mosques are the castles which always have been the fortresses of rebellions against all forms of occupation since the turn of the century. They are one of the most important pillars of the independence of Palestinian civil society from any occupation or tyrannical rule. Maintaining the free and independent status of mosques is a red line which our people will observe strictly.”⁷³

In the same vein, in reply to a question regarding Hamas’s response if the PA were to take over its Islamic institutions, mosques, and libraries, Sheikh Yassin said: “We have expressed our rejection of self-rule in civilized and nonviolent ways. In that case we should be [treated as] an opposition which has the right to its own institutions that may not be encroached upon. In the event of an assault on them, it will not pass easily. It should be resisted violently.”⁷⁴ In fact, however, Hamas did tolerate the PA’s crossing of the red line, despite the enormous significance it attaches to its social infrastructure. It did not respond violently, even though the PA laid siege to Hamas’s infrastructure and confiscated its basic components. In 1997

72. The independent status of mosques came to an end in March 1996, when the PA took over all mosques controlled by Hamas and placed them under jurisdiction of the Department of *Awqaf*, which is part of the PA; this action was one policy of a campaign to dismantle Hamas’s infrastructure following a chain of suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in February and March 1996.

73. Hamas leaflet, “The Independence of Mosques Is the Buttress of Our Civil Society; It Is a Red Line about which Our People Will Not Be Lenient,” 7 June 1994.

74. Sheikh Yassin’s letters from prison, *Al-Wasat*, 11 November 1993.

alone, for example, the PA closed down over 20 charitable institutions belonging to Hamas. This action coincided with intense American and Israeli pressures on the PA to cripple the infrastructure of Islamic social movements.⁷⁵ At the same time there also was a US media focus on Hamas's social role, which was depicted as pulling the rug out from under the PA.⁷⁶

Two relevant points remain to be made. The first point is that Hamas's thought and practice regarding social issues developed during the intifada, reflected the high spirits during the uprising, and interacted with it. However, after the uprising ended, there was no corresponding evolution in Hamas's thought to reflect the passing of one era and the beginning of another, in which the basic variable was the presence of a PA in parts of the Occupied Territories. The peace agreements and the forced end of the resistance phase undermined Palestinian solidarity. This was reflected in a new social atmosphere akin to the dominant one in the region, under which the sense of an external threat (Israel in this case) is replaced by an internal governmental authority-society conflict. This new atmosphere is incompatible with high-spirited theorizing as occurred during the intifada.

The second point directly concerns the PA but has repercussions for Hamas. This has to do with Palestinians' growing disappointment with the PA and its repressive tactics and social policies since 1994.⁷⁷ Autonomous structures in civil society have been seized, the atmosphere has been militarized, and there is rapid movement toward a traditional kind of police state, where the state exercises its hegemony over civil society. The widespread social institutions and networks that used to underpin poor Palestinians during, and even before, the intifada have been crippled severely if not damaged completely by the PA. According to the World Bank, Palestinian charitable nongovernmental institutions paid for 60 percent of the costs for primary health care and 50 percent of the costs for secondary health care prior to Oslo.⁷⁸ By imposing heavy legal regulations on Islamic and other charitable institutions, monitoring their

75. *Al-Quds Press*, August 1997.

76. See for example William Drozdiak, "Steadily Hamas Fills a Social Void," *International Herald Tribune*, 18 August 1997.

77. It is not difficult to demonstrate the PA's negative record in its dealings with its citizens during the years after the Oslo Agreement; many reports by human rights organizations—Palestinian ones (whose directors have been arrested), Israeli ones, and international ones, such as Amnesty International—attest to this. Concerning the PA's dismantling of the institutions of Palestinian civil society, see George Giacaman and Dag Jorund, eds., *After Oslo* (Pluto Press, 1998).

78. *International Herald Tribune*, 12 July 1997.

funds, interfering in their internal affairs, and eventually putting them under the supervision of the security services, the overall social atmosphere became charged with fear and occupied by the PA apparatuses. Hamas thus was deprived of functioning freely within one of its most cherished domains of work.⁷⁹

What is more worrisome about the human rights record of the PA and its modeling itself on the traditional Arab mold is that world public opinion is turning a blind eye to the violations in the name of giving peace between Israel and the Palestinians time to succeed. This tendency amounts to giving the PA a green light to do as it pleases without fear of exposure in the media or worrying about international political pressures being brought to bear. Such has been the experience of the PA in its first few years. The PA is determined to destroy or suppress any opposition to the peace process, even if it is nonviolent. Mohammed Dahlan, the PA's chief of preventive security, was quoted as saying: "I don't care if it is armed or unarmed: any activity of Hamas will be an obstacle to the peace process."⁸⁰

MILITARY ACTION

The military option came to occupy a central place in Hamas's thought, practice, and strategy, especially after 1992, when it formed its military wing, the Martyr 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades. Military operations became for Hamas an important source of mass appeal and political legitimacy, even as they became a source of disagreement and explosive contention with the PA after its institution in Gaza and Jericho in mid-1994. The following discussion will trace the evolution of Hamas's thinking on and practice of military action and examine the main policies adopted, including the question of targeting Israeli civilians.

In theory, interest in the military option and its exercise emerged naturally from the movement's view of the best methods and tools to fight occupation, namely, the view that armed struggle, or "force," is necessary for the liberation of Palestine. The Hamas Charter states:

There is no solution to the Palestine problem except through struggle (jihad). As for international initiatives and conferences, they are a waste of time. [For] . . . when an enemy usurps a Muslim land, then jihad is

79. See further Graham Usher, *Palestinians in Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 1997), pp. 44–60.

80. *International Herald Tribune*, 11 June 1998.

an individual religious duty (*fardh'ain*) on every Muslim; and in confronting the unlawful seizure of Palestine by the Jews, it is necessary to raise the banner of jihad.⁸¹

Hence, for Hamas, the goal of military action is to liberate Palestine. However, Hamas's view with respect to the role of military action within the totality of all action was ambiguous in the first few years of its existence. Indeed, political action started out as secondary and subordinate to military action. At that time, Hamas established the link between the political and the military in an indirect way, as follows: "Political action in our view is one of the means of jihad against the Zionist enemy. It aims in our understanding to reinforce the struggle and steadfastness of our people in the confrontation with the Zionist occupation and to mobilize the energies of our people and nation in support of our cause."⁸² This view evolved, however, and the role of military action became sharply clearer as a means to achieve political ends. For example, Sheikh Yassin maintains that "Hamas's policy is one of realizing the goals of the Palestinian people. If these goals are achieved by peaceful means, then there would be no need for other sorts of action."⁸³

On a practical level also Hamas's exercise of military action underwent a gradual change. Before the emergence of Hamas in the latter part of 1987, a few military units connected to the Muslim Brothers had existed. They paralleled the detachments of Islamic Jihad that originally were formed of Fateh members with Islamic leanings, but they were less important and less effective. Their voices remained muted through 1984–87, primarily because of their structural weakness but also for fear that they would be tied, if discovered, to the movement's main body, thus endangering established and semiofficial institutions of the Islamic movement.

With the outbreak of the intifada in December 1987, unarmed popular demonstrations became the methods of choice for confronting the occupation. For approximately three years, mass demonstrations, throwing stones, closing streets, and burning tires were the important methods used. During this period, the intifada reached the peak of its effectiveness by succeeding in recruiting masses of ordinary people to participate and by managing to draw international support. However, as popular participation waned (for many reasons), the use of firearms by the various factions and

81. The Hamas Charter, Articles 12 and 15; see Appendix, document no. 2.

82. Introductory Memorandum; see Appendix, document no. 3.

83. Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, *Al-Quds Press*, 7 May 1997.

organizations began to increase. Hamas also began to use weapons and carried out a few military operations.⁸⁴

It is important to note here that there were two exceptions to the unarmed manner in which Hamas conducted itself in the first three years. There were two operations that had a profound effect and dealt a blow to the pride of the Israeli security apparatus. In one incident, an Israeli soldier, Avi Sasportas, was kidnapped inside the “green line,” that is, the Israeli heartland, in February 1989; in the other, and less than three months after the first, a second soldier, Ilan Sa'don, was kidnapped in May of the same year. Hamas claimed responsibility for the operations, executed both soldiers, and concealed the remains of the second soldier for years. Israel offered to exchange the freedom of Sheikh Yassin for the body, an offer that was rejected by Yassin himself as insulting, especially because the offer included the provision that Yassin renounce violence.

A quantum jump in Hamas's military activity occurred when the Qassam Brigades were formed at the beginning of 1992 and promptly carried out a series of operations culminating in the kidnapping and killing of an Israeli border guard, Nassim Toledano, in December 1992. In 1994, the military work of these brigades took a more violent turn when they carried out a series of suicide attacks in the heart of Israel against buses carrying Israeli soldiers and settlers (according to Hamas); these attacks resulted in the killing of tens of Israeli civilians. These operations were carried out in retaliation for the Hebron massacre in which a Zionist settler killed 29 Palestinian worshipers in the Abraham Mosque in February 1994. They were followed in February and March 1996 by another series of bus attacks in Jerusalem, 'Asqalan, and Tel Aviv to avenge the assassination of Yahya 'Ayyash. These attacks caused Israel to freeze the commencement of the final status negotiations, created confusion in the Israeli domestic scene, weakened the position of the Labor party led by Shimon Peres, and indeed led to the defeat of Peres and the election of Netanyahu as prime minister in the May 1996 elections.

It should be noted that after the signing of the Oslo Agreement in September 1993 and the establishment of the PA in Gaza and Jericho, Hamas's military operations faced a real quandary. For the Qassam Brigades, the Gaza Strip was one of the main arenas for organizing, preparing, and executing their operations. However, the Oslo Agreement made the PA

84. Concerning the operations carried out by Hamas during this stage and in the period preceding the intifada, some under names such as the “Palestine Mujahidin” and others under no names, see Ghassan Do'ar, “Hamas Lions” (London: *Muslim Palestine* Publications, 1993).

responsible for any attacks against Israelis carried out from areas under its control. Consequently, potential military action by Hamas added a new tension to an already tense relationship between Hamas and the PLO in its new form as the PA. Hamas had two difficult choices: continue military action and risk a bloody confrontation with the PA and a possible civil war or freeze such operations and risk losing its distinctiveness and becoming another tame political faction.

Internationally, most of Hamas's work was described as "terrorism" in conformity with the American position, which in turn echoed Israeli characterizations. This had negative repercussions for Hamas regionally. Some countries were hesitant to go too far in their support or contact with Hamas for fear of arousing American wrath. Others relented to the pressure and condemned Hamas's military operations explicitly or implicitly.⁸⁵

Policies and General Tendencies of Hamas's Military Action

By perusing Hamas's political statements about military matters, the communiqués of its military wing, and the declarations of its major figures, it is possible to ascertain five policy tendencies. First, Hamas confined military action to the occupied territory and made a commitment not to attack Israeli targets abroad. By adopting this position, as pointed out earlier, Hamas undoubtedly tried to learn from the experience of some PLO factions and to avoid being categorized as a "terrorist" organization. Thus, military action from conception to execution was to remain within the occupied land; Hamas can be credited both for its ability to conduct its operations under occupation and for not letting them spill outside the borders of historic (pre-1948) Palestine.

Second, Hamas was committed to attacking only "legitimate military targets," and in the early years up to 1994 it did not target civilians. The movement declared this commitment more than once⁸⁶ and did not violate it except in the seventh year of its existence, and only after the Hebron

85. Initially, some Arab and Muslim countries issued diffident and indirect condemnations of Hamas's operations. Since the end of 1994, however, the tone of condemnations gradually increased in sharpness until they reached a peak after the series of explosions set off by the assassination of Ayyash in January 1996, when the condemnation was open, direct, and strong; most countries in the region condemned those operations, with the exception of Iran, Lebanon, Sudan, and Syria.

86. See, for example, "An Important Statement Issued by the Political Bureau of Hamas," which included the initiative of Hamas's Political Bureau in April 1994; in Appendix, document no. 4.

massacre and in accordance with the principle of reciprocity. In fact, the Hebron massacre and Hamas's reply represented a turning point for Hamas's military strategy. Ehud Sprinzak observed that "Hamas only resorted to this atrocious type of terrorism after February 1994, when Baruch Goldstein, an Israeli physician and army reserve captain, massacred 29 praying Palestinians in the Hebron shrine."⁸⁷ After these events, Hamas offered Israel a mutual "armistice" in which civilians would be removed from the arena of struggle.⁸⁸ Israel rejected the offer and did not respond to it. It should be noted that Hamas regarded settlers in the West Bank and Gaza as legitimate military targets both for being armed and for their continual attacks against unarmed Palestinian civilians.

In an attempt to deflect the widespread international condemnation that followed its suicide operations in February and March of 1996, Hamas expressed "regret" for the "death of some innocent people" and pointed out that "such outcomes are a common and familiar result of conventional wars. It was not possible to avoid such collateral damage completely under conditions of resisting occupation and retaliating in kind."⁸⁹

Hamas managed, in the period preceding the Hebron massacre (that is, before violating its own policy of not targeting civilians), to embarrass Israel militarily, politically, and in front of public opinion. It did this by restricting its struggle to the occupied land and by targeting only the military. General Shlomo Gazit, former chief of Israeli military intelligence, commented on Hamas's modus operandi as follows:

Lately, we have been facing operations that seem to be based on a policy of concentrating more and more on soldiers and security forces. This change in trend implies two conclusions: First, it robs our actions of the moral justification that was based on the inhuman Palestinian violence normally directed at innocent civilians, children, women, and the elderly. In the struggle for international public opinion, nobody can reject or condemn the revolt of a people that has been suffering under military occupation for forty-five years, especially if they direct the struggle against occupation forces. The second conclusion, the success of operations of guerrilla cells, deals a heavy blow to the pride of the Israeli army, its image of invincibility, and its deterrent power. If this trend continues, then without doubt it will embolden the cells of violence, extend

87. "How Israel Misjudges Hamas and Its Terrorism," *Washington Post*, 19 October 1997.

88. "A military communique issued by the Martyr 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades/the Unit [in charge of] Defending Palestinian Civilians," 17 May 1994.

89. "A Memorandum Issued by the Hamas Political Bureau," 13 June 1996.

their life, and may encourage other Palestinian youth to join their ranks.⁹⁰

Here, it is worthwhile to give special consideration to Hamas's shift toward a policy of targeting Israeli civilians because of its moral importance and its political and informational repercussions. For despite expressing regret and notwithstanding talk of reciprocity, there exists a theoretical justification that goes deeper and beyond regrets or adopting a tit-for-tat policy. In the first place, it should be remembered that the goal and strategy of Hamas are long-term, and theoretically, point toward "liberating Palestine from the river to the sea." Bearing this in mind will help us understand the strategic point of striking at civilians. Hamas's goal has been to transform Israel from a land that attracts world Jews to a land that repels them by making its residents insecure. Further, by targeting civilians, as some of its leaders contend, Hamas would be striking at "the weakest and most vulnerable spot in the Zionist body."⁹¹ In this context, Sheikh Yassin states that despite the conviction of his movement that such operations would not in themselves lead to the liberation of Palestine, it is convinced that they exhaust and weaken Israel.⁹² Along the same line, Ibrahim Ghosheh explains that among the results of such operations are [negative] "impacts on the structure of Zionist society, on immigration programs from abroad, and on various other activities including tourism."⁹³

From a broader perspective, it should be stated that the matter of striking at Israeli civilians is an indirect extension of views and modes of operation that occupied an important place in Palestinian military strategy generally, and specifically in PLO strategy in the 1970s and 1980s. The basic logic held by Hamas now in permitting strikes on the "most vulnerable" Israeli target—civilians—is the very logic held by the PLO in the past. It might seem somewhat overdrawn to quote, even if extensively, from the writings of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) to demonstrate this point, especially because Abu Mazen is the one who negotiated the Oslo Accord and renounced all military actions against Israel. Nevertheless, what he wrote on this topic in the past represents the essence of the Palestinian view

90. *Yediot Aharonot*, 12 August 1993.

91. A Hamas leader, who preferred to remain anonymous, in an interview with the author, 6 May 1998.

92. Sheikh Yassin, *Al-Hayat*, 24 May 1998.

93. Ibrahim Ghosheh, *Al-Quds Press*, 2 October 1997.

on the subject, the very view that now has been inherited by Hamas. Abu Mazen contended in 1983 that Israeli military strategy always aimed to insulate its civilian population from the dangers of war as it sought to occupy as much Arab land as possible. This strategy, according to him, was very protective of the population factor because of its small size and its vital importance to the Zionist project, it being irreplaceable, unlike weapons, factories, and other property. Abu Mazen stated:

The human element is forever the most difficult problem one that America itself cannot solve satisfactorily in the required shape and size; it constitutes the Achilles heel of the Zionist project. . . . [Hence] All military operations should target population centers to inflict the greatest magnitude of losses on the enemy by striking its most precious possession. This would erase what little sense of security remains from the hearts of settlers and plant doubt in their psyches about their future . . . The first and last duty of every Palestinian gun is to head toward the occupied land to expel its Zionists from the battlefield with all available, legitimate, and possible means and to target the human being, then the human being, then the human being. Or, in other words, targeting equipment, plants, buildings, institutions, and factories should be its last choice . . . We have only to know the joint that aches the most.⁹⁴

It should be clear from the above that if Hamas now were to engage in a public and theoretical discourse on the subject of killing civilians, it would not differ at all from Abu Mazen's former discourse.

Moreover, in order to justify the logic of targeting civilians, Hamas repeatedly asserts that the balance of power always has been in favor of Israel because of American backing and that there is no comparison between its military might and Palestinian weakness. This fact also justifies the resort to unconventional means of resistance and concentration on the enemy's weak points. In this context, one of Hamas's leaders points to the justification given by Winston Churchill, Britain's prime minister during World War II, of allied bombing of German cities where he asserted that the allies cannot confront Hitler conventionally, army against army. Therefore, they employ unconventional methods such as striking population centers. By analogy, the Hamas leader contends, Hamas is fighting an unconventional and incommensurate war against a foe whose military

94. Mahmoud Abbas, *Istithmar al-fawaz* [Utilizing the victory] (Kuwait: Union of Palestinian Writers and Journalists, 1983).

power is formidable. Hence, it has the right to resist it with unconventional means by striking at civilians.⁹⁵

The third policy tendency is the tying of the painful strikes that Hamas dealt Israeli targets, especially the ones that aroused international concern and condemnation, to the various massacres committed by the Zionists against the Palestinian people. Hamas deliberately would announce that specific operations were carried out to avenge the victims of one massacre or another. For example, Hamas carried out retaliatory operations after the massacre of 'Oyoun Qarah in which seven Palestinian workers were killed on 20 May 1990, after the massacre at the al-Aqsa Mosque in which nearly twenty Palestinians died, and after the previously mentioned Hebron massacre. It also carried out a series of bombings in February and March 1996 in retaliation for the assassination of the leader of the Qassam Brigades, Yahya 'Ayyash. Through this policy, Hamas tried to justify its actions to the public at large in order to continue the armed struggle as long as possible, particularly after the establishment of the PA.

Hamas also tried to exploit popular anger and bitterness engendered by Israeli attacks by carrying out its operations while the atmosphere of anger and bitterness was still high. In this way, Hamas gained extra popularity, being perceived as the only Palestinian power willing and able to respond to Israel with the language of force. Furthermore, in order to retain mass support, Hamas tied its military actions to short-term objectives to which people easily could relate, such as the release of prisoners in Israeli jails,⁹⁶ a halt to construction of Israeli settlements, and disarming the Israeli settlers. Despite all these attempts, however, the rationale for Hamas's military operations remained ambiguous to the international news media, which persisted in depicting Hamas as a terrorist and unrealistic organization.

A fourth trend is that, despite the centrality of armed action and its importance to Hamas, such action nonetheless was intensified, slowed down, or even regarded as subject to suspension in accordance with prevailing circumstances. For example, when in the eighth year of Hamas's existence tension between it and the PA reached a high pitch and civil war

95. A Hamas leader, who asked to remain anonymous, in an interview with the author, 6 May 1998.

96. See, for example, the statement by Sufian Abu Zaydeh, a Fateh official in Gaza, to Israeli radio on 12 October 1994, commenting on a Hamas kidnapping of an Israeli soldier: "The Palestinian street is with the demands of the kidnappers and with the release of the [5,000] Palestinian prisoners." Transcript cited in *Al-Quds Press*, 12 October 1994.

became a distinct possibility, and when popular support for its armed operations began to ebb in response to Israel's policy of sealing off Gaza after every operation and preventing Palestinian workers from going to their jobs in Israel, some voices within Hamas began to call for a reassessment of the entire policy of armed action. This was in addition to calls for a suspension of military operations in areas under the PA's control or the launching of operations from those areas.⁹⁷

The fifth and final policy trend is the way the movement fiercely defended its right to use armed resistance. It tried (but without success) to counter extensive Israeli and American propaganda campaigns aimed at attaching the label "terrorist" to Hamas. These campaigns persisted in spite of Hamas's protestations that armed resistance to occupation is legitimate under all laws, human and divine, and notwithstanding the dispatch of letters to the United States explaining its philosophy on the subject clearly and in detail.⁹⁸

Undoubtedly, fast-moving events, set in motion by Hamas's spectacular suicide operations and the international condemnation and the tightening of the rope around the movement that followed, have forced at least some important figures in Hamas to contemplate the necessity of freezing military actions. The greater danger threatening Hamas's position is, of course, the possibility of erosion of popular support for its operations. Israel was always ready to give this possible erosion a push by means of its policy of collective punishment against the Palestinian people for the actions of Hamas. Thus, although Hamas had been unresponsive to all international requests to stop its military operations, the erosion of popular backing for such action is sufficient to twist its arm to do just that. Indeed, Hamas sees popular support as the oxygen that prolongs its life. For instance, the unfolding of events up to the tenth year of Hamas's existence (1998)—in other words, five years after Oslo—pointed to a

97. There are several statements by Hamas officials to the same effect; see for example a statement made by Ghazi Hamad, a Hamas official from Gaza, who declared: "The majority in the movement are for suspending military operations temporarily" in *Al-Hayat* (London), 31 January 1996. A similar statement was made by Mahmoud al-Zahhar in May 1996 in which he called on the Qassam Brigades to stop their operations to thwart a victory by Likud; this call was described by Hamas as a personal opinion that did not represent its view; see a Hamas statement on this topic dated 18 May 1996.

98. See Hamas, "An open letter from Hamas to Mr. Bill Clinton, president of the United States of America," 26 October 1994; see also its memorandum sent to the Sharm al-Sheikh Conference, which was held on 13 March 1996 on the heels of Hamas's suicide operation and after the Palestinian elections, in Appendix, document no. 5.

continual diminution of popular support for the peace process among the Palestinians because it failed to deliver to them benefits or tangible results. This left Hamas a margin for maneuver that enabled it to prolong the life of military operations, which continued to be nourished by support that was commensurate with the deterioration of support for the political alternative represented by Oslo. By the same token, it is almost certain that this margin will erode a second time, if the final status negotiations manage to arrive at a solution that convinces the majority of the Palestinian people that Hamas's military work must cease.

Conclusion

This study has examined in detail the emergence and evolution of Hamas's ideology, political thought, and practice. It showed the qualitative leap in the self-perception of the mainstream Palestinian Islamists at the end of 1987, when the intifada was launched. The Islamists reinvented themselves, making the transition from being a social-educational-proselytizing movement (predominantly in the shape of the Muslim Brotherhood) to a political, armed resistance organization (mainly in the form of Hamas). The political and ideological development of Hamas was traced, and the most important ideas embraced by the movement and translated by it into practice were analyzed, as well as the manner in which the movement influenced and was influenced by political events during its existence. One can sum up this study under three headings: Hamas's political thought; Hamas's practice; and Hamas's future.

POLITICAL THOUGHT

In its first three years of existence (1987–90), Hamas's total involvement in the intifada, which accompanied the birth of the movement, limited the depth and scope of its political thought. The intifada was the biggest and the most consuming issue on Hamas's agenda. During those initial years in particular, the movement suffered from the absence of an organizational extension outside the Occupied Territories. Such an extension could have provided it with a regional or international perspective and could have helped it to formulate a political ideology in keeping with the growth of the movement, the spread of the intifada, and the expansion of its base of

support. A disparity between the growing popular base of the movement and its political inexperience was abetted by the constant change in the top echelons of Hamas's leadership due to the continual arrests of its leaders. These developments forced Hamas to promote its second-, third-, fourth-, and, occasionally, even fifth-level leaders to the first rank to fill the vacuum. Consequently, the movement's political leaders had no opportunity to acquire experience and to capitalize on that experience in formulating Hamas's ideology or deciding on its political positions.

A comparison with the PLO will serve to emphasize the above point. The PLO benefited from a continuity of leadership and institutional structure outside Palestine, and this allowed it to accumulate uninterrupted political experience. If one compares Hamas to other Palestinian resistance organizations that maintain their primary institutions outside the Occupied Territories, one finds that the level of theorizing is more limited in Hamas's case—quite apart from the question of whether this is to the advantage or disadvantage of Hamas. On the one hand, it indicates that Hamas primarily is engaged in direct action and is using the time available to it to score concrete, not theoretical, gains. On the other hand, this lack of theoretically elaborated positions has led to the neglect of the formulation of tactics for dealing with several issues, such as how to translate general strategy into interim tactics and how to relate aspirations to reality.

In addition, some important social issues concerning women, culture, and the arts have remained outside the sphere of concern for Hamas and are not on the agenda of issues in need of theoretical elaboration, aside from those matters that fall under the heading of proselytizing and Islamic religious education. Nevertheless, as the movement matured, it became possible to identify some hesitant development over the years in the number of issues with which it dealt, as well as the depth to which they were examined. Thus, an undeniable process of maturation was at work in the theoretical treatment by Hamas of some matters as the movement gained political experience. For example, when the Hamas Charter first was formulated, it was replete with empty generalities and lacked a clear political dimension. Hamas's subsequent programs and its Introductory Memorandum (which is reprinted in the Appendix) generally indicate a growing political awareness of issues, greater use of policy analysis, and a decreasing reliance on slogans and generalities.

Hamas's ideology and political practice also are shaped by international and regional circumstances. Hamas is not an isolated phenomenon; it is a part of the rising Islamic tide, a phenomenon that appeared in the late 1970s and has been gaining influence ever since. This Islamic wave has

been gaining mass support faster than it could absorb it, and its capacity to forecast the future course or to devise formulas that would enhance its own progress has been outstripped by events. Thus, the political thought of the Islamist movement in general—the source from which Hamas derives its sustenance—has remained meager and disproportionate to its size. This is reflected in the manner in which Islamist organizations have made forays into the domains of political sociology, culture, and economics.

The modest nature of contemporary Islamic advances in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) has not helped to expand Hamas's horizons or pave the paths that the movement might pursue. In the final analysis, Hamas cannot step outside a religious frame of reference in its political practice. Hamas therefore needs *fatwas* when it is faced with political choices that seem to extend outside the confines of the accepted religious framework. This need became apparent under the pressure of the unprecedented acceleration of local, regional, and international political developments bearing on the Palestinian problem.

Since 1988, American and international efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have intensified, while an Arab military option became remote as a result of the Iran-Iraq war. When that conflict ended, the Gulf War swept through the region, the Arab states became severely divided, foreign troops came to the region, and the most important Arab military power was destroyed. Then the peace process was launched. The Madrid Conference was convened in 1991, and the Oslo and Cairo agreements followed in 1993 and 1994. Furthermore, the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc collapsed at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, upsetting the international balance of power, with repercussions for the Arab region. New slogans concerning democracy and human rights circulated around the globe as part of the (American) "new world order." Political opportunities shrank for all Third World (not just Arab) political movements opposed to American hegemony in the wake of the Cold War. The fast pace of these developments called for political flexibility, a capacity for improvisation, and a quick response time with which the slow pace of traditional *fiqh*-style *ijtihad* could not cope.

In the case of other Islamic movements in the Middle East, the inability to deal with political change through such *ijtihad* has contributed to the creation of real impasses, which have hindered the success of Islamic projects. Algeria and Afghanistan are only the most glaring examples. Hamas was not far from such an impasse itself. However, the special circumstances of the Palestinian case, namely, having to operate under military occupation, were to a large extent responsible for postponing the need to deal with

a number of social and cultural questions, because the principal program of the Palestinian Islamists was to resist the occupation. Although this fact does not excuse them for not dealing with other aspects of political society, it did provide them, in theory, with more time for reflection on other issues and an opportunity to produce political literature and to put their ideas into practice.

Nevertheless, the accelerating pace of events relating to the Palestine conflict and the succession of settlement proposals put the growing Hamas movement in an unnatural position. Hamas's political thought was hesitant in adapting to these demanding developments and in striking the requisite, delicate balance between issues of principle and the demands of self-interest. This hesitation was most apparent in the movement's feeble and ineffectual political relations with Palestinian, Arab, and foreign parties. It also was observed in Hamas's positions on whether to participate in the elections for the self-rule council, whether to form a political party, whether to continue or suspend armed operations, and on similar issues that came to a head with the formation of the PA in 1994. These events followed in rapid succession and put Hamas in a difficult situation, because the movement felt obliged to choose between remaining true to its principles or obeying the dictates of political self-interest. Nevertheless, Hamas more often than not was able to create a gray area that combined principle and self-interest—insofar as that was possible—and allowed it to perpetuate its political lease on life while safeguarding its objectives.

Still, the above characteristics did have an impact on the political thought of the movement, and consequently on its practice. Identifying this impact provides one way to assess the achievements and failures of Hamas. Had its positions, orientation, and discourse been decisive (instead of being confused and hesitant), it would have been able to capitalize on and develop those areas for which a solid basis had been laid.

PRACTICE

Hamas has a mixed record of success in the implementation of its strategies and tactics governing its political relations with the PLO, the PA, and Palestinian resistance organizations, as well as with Arab, Islamic, and other states, at both the governmental and nongovernmental levels. Hamas's relations with the PLO were strained during the years of the intifada and the PA's post-1994 sweeping arrest campaigns and expanded assault on Hamas's infrastructure. The most severe of these were the arrests and crackdown on Hamas's institutions in the wake of the February and March 1996

suicide bombings, after which an international conference to combat terrorism—called the Peace-Makers' Conference—was held in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, at the invitation of the United States. The periods of tension were interspersed with periods of relative calm and of dialogue during which Hamas and the PA searched for common denominators. Unfortunately, those efforts never bore fruit.

At the pan-Arab level, as a general rule, Hamas avoided joining political blocs or siding with one camp against the other. It managed to stake out a middle-of-the-road position that maintained certain political relations with most states in the Middle East: Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Sudan, Yemen, and non-Arab Iran. It fortuitously escaped the Gulf War imbroglio by adopting a middle-of-the-road position to the right of the PLO, coming out in favor of the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the withdrawal of foreign forces from the Gulf. It did this at a time when no popular movements or parties in Palestine or Jordan—the two areas where Hamas's popular base is concentrated—dared to call for the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Hamas's relations with Iran and Sudan were particularly important, and its relations with Syria and Libya came next in order of importance. Hamas managed to retain permanent, albeit fluctuating, ties with Jordan and relatively good ties with the Gulf states, but its relations with Arab governments were constrained for the reasons explained earlier in the book. Hamas's relations with the Arab public were much better; and Hamas won the support of most Arab Islamist opposition movements, although that support never translated into close cooperation. Of course, Hamas collaborates with Islamic movements in organizing conferences and workshops for such movements. Hamas's cooperation with leftist and nationalist parties that support its position or are in the same camp—insofar as they reject American hegemony in the Middle East—does not go beyond solidarity in information dissemination.

In its relations with non-Arab states (other than Iran) and international organizations, Hamas suffered from a serious handicap in that it was unable to gain the support of any major power. The end of the Cold War and its bipolarity worked to the disadvantage of Hamas, in view of the international consensus that the United States was able to secure on a peace settlement in the Middle East, i.e., the Madrid Conference and the Oslo agreements. In fact, Hamas was burdened with international condemnation because of its continued use of armed operations. Its numerous appeals, memoranda, and explanations that resistance to occupation was legitimate from the perspective of the United Nations and international law were of no avail in altering the overall Western per-

spective on its practices. Particularly after the series of suicide bombings it mounted following the January 1996 assassination of Yahya 'Ayyash, Hamas's activities and its style of resistance to occupation came to be seen as terrorism.

Hamas's armed operations were the most significant of the movement's activities. It can be said that without Hamas's armed operations, in tandem with the expansion of its mass appeal, the movement would not have acquired the political and media significance that it did, particularly between 1992 and 1997. Hamas devised a strategy that allowed it to continue its armed activities and avoid a civil war at the same time, pursuing this plan successfully from 1994 to 1996. In this context, Hamas is credited for tolerating the harshest measures taken against it by the PA without responding violently. Thus, a Palestinian civil war—which many observers were certain would erupt—was averted. However, Hamas's suicide bombings of February/March 1996 resulted in a vigorous crackdown and compelled Hamas to scale back its armed activities. Netanyahu's term as Israeli prime minister during 1996–99 was a setback for the peace process, and people began to despair for Oslo. This provided Hamas with a breathing spell and strengthened its argument with respect to the need for armed operations. During this period, Arab governments proved to be more sympathetic of Hamas's activities, a position reinforced by the resentment in the region against the policies of the Netanyahu government.¹

The implementation of other aspects of Hamas's developing ideology, such as the advocacy of political pluralism and involvement in social services, proved to be less contentious than the movement's armed operations. Hamas was able to achieve some progress in these areas, as explained previously. The most noteworthy aspect of Hamas's activities in this respect has been the strength of Hamas's grass-roots support among the poor and the middle classes, the result of years of perseverance, of feeling the pulse of the man in the street, and sharing in ordinary people's concerns. The movement did not encourage the emergence of an elite with complicated ideas incomprehensible to ordinary people.

1. Ibrahim Ghosheh, official spokesman for Hamas, explained that the movement had begun to sense "an increasingly pragmatic understanding on the part of Arab governments that it was time for Hamas to do its part in resisting the Zionist occupation;" see further *Al-Quds Press*, 2 October 1997.

THE FUTURE

Because of the difficulties that Hamas has encountered since the establishment of the PA, the threat of being marginalized in the wake of the Palestinian Legislative Council elections (which Hamas boycotted) and the fierce campaign against the movement waged by Israel, the PA, the United States, Jordan, and others and aimed at undermining its organization and infrastructure, there was a high probability that the movement would freeze its armed operations temporarily and pursue a purely political course while it tried to rebuild its organization. The timing of the official announcement of the creation of the National Islamic Salvation Party (*Hizb al-Khalas al-Watani al-Islami*) after Hamas had suffered these blows strongly indicated such a probability.² Subsequent events up to the end of 1998 demonstrated that Hamas had reduced the intensity of its armed attacks. That does not mean, however, that Hamas will abandon the use of armed operations on a permanent basis while Israel continues to exercise its hegemony essentially unchanged, because if it were to do so, it would cease to be Hamas.

At any rate, the continued existence of Hamas as a grass-roots movement is not in doubt. It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to destroy it because it is so deeply rooted. Even if the current organization is eliminated, it will reproduce itself once again in a new guise. As long as a large percentage—if not the majority of Palestinians in this case—feel that the bare minimum of Palestinian rights have not been achieved, the soil will be fertile for the reemergence of Hamas or an organization closely resembling it. “Even if outside support were to end, the Palestinian Islamic groups have sufficient support among Palestinians inside the territories to continue operating.”³ (The issue of domestic contributions as a source of financing for Hamas’s social infrastructure projects was addressed in chapter 5 under Hamas’s social activities.)

2. The founding of the National Islamic Salvation Party was announced in Gaza on 21 March 1996, in the midst of the battle by Israel and the PA against Hamas’s bases and infrastructure. Although the party has denied any official connection with Hamas, the fact that most, if not all, of the party’s leaders and prominent members belong to Hamas makes it difficult to separate the two.

3. Congressional Research Service, “Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Recent Developments, Sources of Support and Implications for U.S. Policy,” Report submitted to the Foreign Relations and National Security Committee of the U.S. Congress (Washington: Government Printing Office, December 1994), p. 13.

What may happen, however, is that Hamas could be weakened and its public support undermined if the movement can be driven to adopt positions that the majority of the Palestinian people perceive as extremist. Such a development would deprive Hamas of its lifeblood: mass support. This could happen, in tandem with the rise of Islamic organizations or parties that are closer to the political middle, as perceived by average political attitudes, and that are sincere in their Islamic principles but are autonomous of the PA. Under those circumstances, Hamas could lose. Similarly, if a settlement were reached that a majority of the Palestinian people found to be reasonable and acceptable, Hamas's line would be defeated. However, such an eventuality is unlikely in view of the nature of the Oslo Agreement, unless it is revised entirely and reformulated in such a way that it does not simply recreate the occupation in a new guise. If a political environment is created that is favorable to a settlement that secures the basic rights of the Palestinians—a state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip that is free of Israeli domination, Palestinian sovereignty over East Jerusalem, a return of the refugees, and the dismantling of Israeli settlements—then Hamas would be obliged to give up its armed operations to avoid being isolated.

Under a scenario whereby Hamas would try to outflank maneuvers to cut it off from its grass-roots base by abandoning armed operations even temporarily and adopting a program of political and social action, it is quite likely that a group of angry young men belonging to its military arm and not guided by a moderate political agenda may split from the movement. In that event, Hamas would stand to lose a great deal. But that same eventuality would be a loss for the PA, and even more so for Israel. The appearance of any armed militaristic group that is not guided by politics would lead to a vicious circle of violence—what Israel and the PA call “terrorism.” This would prevent peace negotiations from moving forward. If the Palestinian situation is “Algerized” in one way or the other, and numerous armed groups emerge, one would face a great unknown. Then everyone would lament the passing of the days when there was Hamas with which to talk, a political organization in control of itself and able to decide whether to continue, freeze, or abandon its armed operations. Many of the answers to these questions depend on the outcome of the final status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

However, the future of Hamas, or more accurately, the future of Hamas's objectives in Palestine, is tied to very complicated factors exogenous to the Palestinian context. Whether Hamas continues its armed

operations or freezes them will become more dependent on the regional context than ever. Specifically, it will depend on the success or failure of the Israeli-Syrian-Lebanese track of negotiations, the nature of any bilateral agreement that may be concluded between Israel and Syria, and the general Palestinian reaction to an Israeli-Syrian accord. If such an agreement were reached, the entire political climate in the region could change, and then Hamas would face its most difficult dilemma yet.

Appendix

DOCUMENT NO. 1

First Communique of Hamas

DOCUMENT NO. 2

The Hamas Charter

DOCUMENT NO. 3

Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) Introductory
Memorandum

DOCUMENT NO. 4

An Important Statement Issued by the Political Office of Hamas

DOCUMENT NO. 5

An Important Memorandum from the Islamic Resistance
Movement (Hamas) to the Kings, Presidents, and Ministers
meeting at Sham al-Sheikh

DOCUMENT NO. 1

First Communique of Hamas

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful:

O you who believe, endure, outdo all others in endurance, be ready, and observe your duty to God, in order that you may succeed.

(Quran, 3:200)

Our steadfast Muslim masses:

Today, you have a date with God's powerful decree against the Jews and their helpers. Nay, you are an integral part of this decree that, God willing, ultimately shall uproot them.

Indeed, during one week, hundreds of wounded and tens of martyrs offered their lives in the path of God to uphold their nation's glory and honor, to restore our rights in our homeland, and to elevate God's banner in the land. This is a true expression of the spirit of sacrifice and redemption that characterizes our people. This spirit has robbed the Zionists of their sleep and rocked their foundations, even as it proved to the whole world that a people that welcomes death shall never die.

Let the Jews understand that despite the chains, prisons, and detention centers, despite the suffering of our people under their criminal occupation, despite the blood and tears, our people's perseverance and steadfastness shall overcome their oppression and arrogance. Let them know that their policy of violence shall beget naught but a more powerful counter policy by our sons and youths who love the eternal life in heaven more than our enemies love this life.

The intifada of our vigilant people in the Occupied Territories comes as a resounding rejection of the occupation and its pressures, land confiscation and the planting of settlements, and the policy of subjugation by the Zionists. It also comes to awaken the consciences of those among us who are gasping after a sick peace, after empty international conferences, after treasonous partial settlements like Camp David. The intifada is here to convince them that Islam is the solution and the alternative.

Let the reckless settlers beware: Our people know the way of sacrifice and martyrdom and are generous in this regard; their military and settle-

ment policies shall avail them nothing; and all their attempts at dissolving and exterminating our people shall crumble despite their bullets, agents, and infamy.

Let them understand that violence breeds nothing but violence and that death bestows but death. How true is the adage: "I am drowning, why would I fear being wet?"

Lift your hands off our people, our cities, our refugee camps, and our villages. Our battle with you is a battle of belief, of existence, of destiny.

Let the world know that the Jews are committing Nazi crimes against our people and that they will drink from the same cup.

"And you shall know its news after a time."

(Signed) The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)

14 December 1987

DOCUMENT NO. 2

The Hamas Charter

THE CHARTER OF ALLAH: THE PLATFORM OF THE ISLAMIC RESISTANCE MOVEMENT (HAMAS)

In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate:

You are the best community that has been raised up for mankind, enjoining right conduct and forbidding what is bad, and believing in God. If the People of the Book had believed, it would be better for them; some among them have faith, but most of them are sinners. They will not harm you, except for trifling annoyances; if they fight you, they will turn their backs, and no help shall they get.

Shame is pitched over them wheresoever they are found, except when under a covenant from God and from the people. They have incurred the wrath of God and pitched over them is destitution. This is because they rejected the signs of God and slew the Prophets in defiance of right. This is because they rebelled and transgressed beyond all bounds.

Quran, Surah 3 (*al-Imran*), v. 109–111.

Israel will rise and will remain firm until Islam eliminates it as it had eliminated what was before.

The Martyred Imam Hasan al-Banna (may God have mercy on his soul)

The Islamic World is burning. Therefore, it is incumbent on everyone to put a little of it out so that he can extinguish what he is able to do without waiting for anyone else.

Sheikh Amjad al-Zahawee (may God have mercy on his soul)

Introduction

Praise be to God, whose help we seek, whose forgiveness we beseech, whose guidance we implore, and on whom we rely. We give peace and blessings upon the Messenger of God, his family, his companions, his followers,

and those who spread his message and followed his tradition. May they endure as long as heaven and earth and eternally ever after.

O, people, from the center of events, from the depth of suffering; from the hearts of believers, immaculate arms; upon realizing the duty, responding to the call of God, we meet and join together with discipline based on the path of God. The will was firm to offer its role in life to overcome all difficulties and to surmount all obstacles in the path. Our preparation was continuous, and we are ready to sacrifice body and soul for the sake of God. Thus it was that the seed was formed and began to chart its path in the tempestuous sea of hopes and dreams, dangers and difficulties, and pains and challenges from within and without.

When the idea matured, the seed grew, and the plant took root in reality detached from the temporary emotional outburst and unwelcome haste, the Islamic Resistance Movement came forth to perform its role of *mujahidah* (struggle) for the sake of its Lord. The Movement placed its hands with the hands of all *mujahidin* (strugglers) who strive to free Palestine. The souls of its *mujahidin* gather with the souls of all the *mujahidin* who stoved with their souls on the land of Palestine for all time since it was conquered by the companions of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), until this very day.

This is the Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement [Al-Harakah al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya (Hamas)], showing its form, revealing its identity, stating its position, clarifying its expectations, discussing its hopes, and calling for aid, support, and a joining of its ranks, because our struggle with the Jews is long and dangerous, requiring all dedicated efforts. It is a phase that must be followed by succeeding phases, a battalion that must be supported by battalion after battalion of the vast Arab and Islamic world until the enemy is defeated and the victory of God prevails.

This is how we perceive them approaching over the horizon.

And you shall certainly know the truth of it after a while.

Surah 38 (*Sad*), v. 88.

God has decreed: It is I and my messengers who must prevail, for God is one full of strength and able to enforce His will.

Surah 58 (*al-Mujadilah*), v. 21

Chapter One: Introduction to the Movement

Ideological Origin

ARTICLE 1:

The Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is its system. From Islam, it reaches for its ideology, fundamental percepts, and view of life, the world, and humanity. It judges all its actions according to Islam, and it is inspired by Islam to correct its errors.

The Link between the Islamic Resistance Movement and the Society of the Muslim Brotherhood

ARTICLE 2:

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Palestine. The Muslim Brotherhood Movement is an international organization. It is one of today's largest Islamic movements. It has a comprehensive understanding and precise conceptualization of the Islamic percepts in all domains of life: concept and belief, politics and economics, education and society, jurisprudence and rule, indoctrination and training, communications and the arts, the hidden and the evident, and the rest of life.

Structure and Essence

ARTICLE 3:

The structure of the Islamic Resistance Movement is comprised of Muslims who are devoted to God and worship Him verily.

I have created humans and spirits so that they may worship Me.

Surah 51 (*al-Dhariyat*), v. 56

They knew their obligation toward themselves, their families, and their country. They reached awareness and fear of God. They raised the banner of Jihad in the face of the oppressors in order to free the country and the people from the [oppressors'] desecration, impurity, and evil.

Nay, We hurl truth against falsehood, and it destroys it, and behold, falsehood does perish!

Surah 21 (*al-Anbiya'*), v. 18

ARTICLE 4:

The Islamic Resistance Movement welcomes all Muslims who share its beliefs and ideology, enact its program, keep its secrets, and desire to join its ranks to carry out the duty and receive their reward from God.

The Historical and Geographical Dimensions of the Islamic Resistance Movement

ARTICLE 5:

The historical dimension of the Islamic Resistance Movement originates in its adoption of Islam as a way of life. It reaches back to the birth of the Islamic Message and to the Righteous Predecessors. Therefore, God is its goal, the Prophet its leader, and the Quran its constitution.

Its geographical dimension extends to wherever Muslims are found, to those who adopt Islam as a way of life in any region on earth. Thus, it establishes a firm foundation in the depths of the earth and reaches to the highest heavens.

See thou not how God sets forth a parable? A goodly word is like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed and whose branches reach to the heavens. It brings forth its fruit at all times, by the love of its Lord. So God sets forth parables for the people in order that they may receive admonition.

Surah 14 (*Ibrahim*), v. 24–25

Differentiation and Independence

ARTICLE 6:

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a distinct Palestinian movement. It gives its loyalty to God, it adopts Islam as a way of life, and it strives to raise the banner of God over every inch of Palestine. Therefore, in the shade of Islam it is possible for all followers of different religions to live in peace and security in their person, property, and rights. In the absence of Islam, conflict arises, oppression and destruction are rampant, and wars and battles prevail. The Muslim poet, Muhammad Iqbal, eloquently states:

When faith is lost, there is neither security nor life for those who do not receive religion. And whoever is satisfied with life without religion, then he has allowed annihilation to be his partner.

The Universality of the Islamic Resistance Movement

ARTICLE 7:

By virtue of the distribution of Muslims, who adopt the system of the Islamic Resistance Movement all over the globe, they work toward aiding it, accepting its positions and strengthening its Jihad. Therefore, it is a universal movement, and it is prepared for this because of the clarity of its ideology, lofty goal, and the holiness of its objectives. Upon this basis it should be considered, given a fair evaluation, and acceptance of its role. Whoever cheats it of its right, avoids supporting it, or is so blind as to ignore its role, then that is a person who argues with fate. And whoever closes his eyes to reality, intentionally or unintentionally, one day will wake up to find himself left behind and worn down by efforts to justify his position. *Reward is for those who are early.*

The oppression of close relatives is more painful for the soul than the blow of a sharp sword.

And unto thee We revealed the scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety: So judge between them by what God has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that has come to thee. To each among you We have prescribed a law and an open way. If God had so willed, He would have made you one people, but He tests you in what He has given you. So strive as if in a race in all virtues. The goal of all of you is to God. It is He who will show you the truth of matters wherein you differ.

Surah 5 (*al-Mā'idah*), v. 48

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a link in the chain of Jihad against the Zionist occupation. It is tied to the initiation of the Jihad by the Martyr 'Izzidin al-Qassam and his Mujahid brothers in 1936. And it is connected to other episodes in the Jihad of the Palestinian people, the Jihad of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1948 War and the Jihad operations of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1968 and thereafter. This is so even though the episodes were few and far between and the Jihad was intermittent due to the obstacles placed in the way of the *mujahidin* by those in the Zionists' orbit. The Islamic Resistance Movement looks forward to implementing God's promise no matter how long it takes because the Prophet of God (may peace be upon his soul), said:

The Final Hour will not come until Muslims fight against the Jews and the Muslims kill them, and until the Jews hide behind rocks and trees, and a stone or tree would say: O Muslim, servant of God, there is a Jew hiding behind me, come on and kill him! But the tree of Gharqad would not say it, for it is the tree of the Jews (cited by Bukhari and Muslim).

The Motto of the Islamic Resistance Movement

ARTICLE 8:

God is its goal;
 The messenger is its Leader.
 The Quran is its Constitution.
 Jihad is its methodology, and
 Death for the sake of God is its most coveted desire.

Chapter Two: Objectives

Goals

ARTICLE 9:

The Islamic Resistance Movement has developed at a time when the absence of the spirit of Islam has brought about distorted judgement and absurd understandings. Values have lost meaning, a plague of evil doers, oppression, and darkness has become rampant, and cowards have become ferocious. Nations have been occupied, their people expelled and fallen down. The state of truth has disappeared and the state of evil has been established; as long as Islam does not take its rightful place in the world arena, everything will continue to change for the worse. The goal of the Islamic Resistance Movement, therefore, is to conquer evil, crushing it and defeating it, so that truth may prevail, so that the country may return to its rightful place, and so that the call may be heard from the minarets proclaiming the Islamic state. And aid is sought from God.

And if God had not checked one set of people by means of another, the earth indeed would be full of mischief. But God is full of bounty to all worlds.

Surah 2 (*al-Baqarah*), v. 251

ARTICLE 10:

Meanwhile, the Islamic Resistance Movement, as it is making its own path, will support the weak, defend the oppressed, and, with all its might, will use its energy to realize the truth and defeat falsehood in speech and in action, here and everywhere it can reach out and effect change.

Chapter Three: Strategies and Methods

The Strategy of the Islamic Resistance Movement: Palestine is an Islamic Trust

ARTICLE 11:

The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic land entrusted to the Muslim generations until Judgement Day. No one may renounce all or even part of it. No Arab state nor all Arab states combined, no king or president nor all kings and presidents, and no organization nor all organizations, Palestinian or Arab, have the right to dispose of it or relinquish or cede any part of it, because Palestine is Islamic land that has been entrusted to generations of Muslims until the Day of Judgement. Who, after all, has the right to act on behalf of Muslim generations until the Day of Judgement?

This is its status in Islamic law, and it is similar to all lands that were conquered by Muslims, where Muslims made the conquered lands a trust for all generations of Muslims until the Day of Judgement.

And it was so when the commanders of the Islamic army, after they conquered Iraq and Syria, sent to the Muslim's Caliph, Umar ibn al-Khatab, a question concerning the conquered lands: Shall they divide up the land among the army or leave the land to the original owners? And after discussion and consultation between the Caliph of the Muslims, Umar ibn al-Khatab, and the companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him), they decided that the land should remain in the hands of its owners to benefit from it and its wealth; but the control of the land and the land itself ought to be endowed as a Waqf [in perpetuity] for all generations of Muslims until the Day of Resurrection. The right of its owners is of the benefits only, and this trust is permanent as long as the heavens and earth last; and any action taken in contradiction of Islamic law with respect to Palestine is unacceptable action to be rescinded by its claimants.

Verily, this is the very truth and certainty. So, celebrate with praises the name of thy Lord, the Supreme.

Surah 56 (*al-Waqi'ah*), v. 95–96

Nation and Nationalism from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement

ARTICLE 12:

Nationalism from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement is part and parcel of religious ideology. Nothing is loftier in nationalism or deeper in devotion than this: If an enemy invades Muslim territories, than Jihad and fighting the enemy becomes an individual duty on every Muslim. *A woman may go fight without her husband's permission and a slave without his master's permission.*

The likes of this do not exist in any other system, and this is a truth about which there is no doubt. If other nationalisms have materialistic, humanistic, and geographical ties, then the Islamic Resistance Movement's nationalism has all of that and in addition, which is more important, divine reasons providing it with spirit and life, where it is connected to the originator of the spirit and life, raising in the heavens the divine banner to connect the earth with the heavens with a strong bond.

When Moses comes and throws his cane, sorcery and sorcerers indeed became invalid

Truth stands out clear from error: Whoever rejects evil and believes in God has grasped the trustworthiest Handhold that never breaks. And God hears and knows all things.

Surah 2 (*al-Baqarah*), v. 256

Initiatives, Peace Solutions, and International Conferences

ARTICLE 13:

The initiatives, what is called a “peaceful solution” and “international conferences” to resolve the Palestinian problem, are contrary to the ideology of the Islamic Resistance Movement, because giving up any part of Palestine is like giving up part of religion. The nationalism of the Islamic Resistance Movement is part of its religion; it educates its members on this, and they perform Jihad to raise the banner of God over their nation.

And God has all power and control over His affairs, but most men know it not.

Surah 12 (*Yusef*), v. 21

From time to time an invitation for an international conference is made to search for a solution to the problem. Some accept and others decline for one reason or another, demanding some condition or conditions be fulfilled before agreeing to attend and participate in the conference. Because of the Islamic Resistance Movement's awareness of the parties participating in the conference, especially their past and present opinions and positions on Muslim interests, it does not believe that conferences are capable of meeting demands, restoring rights, or giving justice to the oppressed. Those conferences are no more than a means of forcing the rule of unbelievers in the land of Muslims. When did the unbelievers justly treat the believers?

Never will the Jews or the Christians be pleased with thee unless you follow their religion. Say: "The guidance of God is the only guidance." Were you to follow their desires after the knowledge that has reached you, then you would find neither Protector nor Helper in God.

Surah 2 (*al-Baqarah*), v. 120

There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except through struggle [jihad]. As for international initiatives and conferences, they are a waste of time, a kind of child's play. The Palestinian people are too noble to be fiddling with their future, rights, and destiny. As it says in the honorable tradition:

The people of Syria are God's whip on His earth. He takes revenge on whom He pleases of His servants. It is forbidden for the hypocrites to rule over the believers, and they will die in worry and darkness.

(Ahmad and Tabari)

The Three Circles

ARTICLE 14:

The problem of the liberation of Palestine relates to three spheres: the Palestinian circle; the Arab circle; and the Islamic circle. Each of these circles has a role to play in the struggle against Zionism, and each one has its own responsibilities. It would be an unmitigated error and sheer igno-

rance to neglect a single one of these circles, because Palestine is an Islamic land accommodating the first *qibla* [direction to face during prayer] and the third holiest sanctuary, from whence the ascent of the Prophet (may peace be upon him) took place.

Glory to God who did take His servant for a journey by night from the sacred place to the farthest place, whose precincts We did bless in order that We might show him some of Our signs: for He is the One who hears and sees all.

Surah 17 (*al-Isra'*), v. 1

Because of such, its [Palestine's] liberation is obligatory on every Muslim no matter where he lives, and the problem should be looked at on this basis. Every Muslim must know this.

When the problem begins to be resolved on this basis, where all the resources of the three spheres are utilized, then the current situation will change and the day of liberation will be near.

Of a truth you are stronger because there is terror in their hearts from God. This is because they are a people devoid of understanding.

Surah 59 (*al-Hashr*), v. 13

Jihad for the Liberation of Palestine is Obligatory

ARTICLE 15:

When an enemy usurps a Muslim land, then jihad is an individual religious duty on every Muslim; and in confronting the unlawful seizure of Palestine by the Jews, it is necessary to raise the banner of jihad. That requires that Islamic education be given to the masses locally and in the Arab and Islamic spheres. The spirit of Jihad, fighting, and joining the ranks must be broadcast to the *umma* [Muslim community]. The education process must involve scholars, teachers, educators, communicators, journalists, and the educated, especially the youth of the Islamic movement and its scholars. Fundamental changes must be made in the educational system to liberate it from the effects of the ideological invasion that was brought by the Orientalists and missionaries. Their attack suddenly descended on the area after Saladin al-Ayyubi defeated the Crusaders. Then the Crusaders knew that it was impossible to defeat the Muslims except by preparing the ground with an ideological attack to confuse their thoughts, stain their heritage, and defame their history; after this a military attack could occur. That paved the way for the imperialist attack in which

[General Edmund] Allenby claimed when he entered Jerusalem: "Now the Crusades are over;" and General Guroud stood by the tomb of Saladin and said: "We have returned, O Saladin." Imperialism helped the ideological invasion establish its roots firmly and it still does. And all that was preparation for the loss of Palestine.

We must instill in the minds of Muslim generations that the Palestinian cause is a religious cause. It must be solved on this basis because Palestine contains the Islamic holy sanctuaries of the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Haram Mosque, which are inexorably linked, as long as the heavens and earth exist, to the night journey (*isra*) of the Prophet of God (may peace be upon him), who ascended to the heavens (*miraj*) from there.

To guard Muslims from infidels for one day in God's cause is better than the world and all that exists on its surface. A place in paradise as small as that occupied by the whip of one among you is better than the world and all that exists on its surface. And a morning or evening journey with the worshipper in God's cause is better than the world and all that exists on its surface.

(Imam al-Bukhari)

By Him in whose Hand is Muhammad's life, I love to be killed in the path of God, then to be revived to life again, then to be killed and then to be revived to life and then to be killed.

(Agreed upon *hadith*)

Training the Muslim Generation

ARTICLE 16:

We must train the Muslim generation in our area, an Islamic training based on performing religious duties, studying God's book very well, and studying Prophetic tradition (*sunnah*), Islamic history and heritage from its authenticated sources with the guidance of experts and scholars, and using a curriculum that will provide the Muslim with the correct world view in ideology and thought. In addition, it is necessary to study carefully the enemy's material and human potential, to know his weaknesses and strengths, and to know the powers that support him and stand by his side. Along with necessity of knowing current events and new trends, we must study the analyses and commentaries on them. It is important to plan for the present and the future and to study every trend, so that the fighting Muslim (*mujahid*) can live in his time with the full knowledge of his destiny, purpose, path, and the events surrounding him.

O my son, if there be but the weight of a mustard seed, and it were in a rock, or in the heavens, or in the earth, God will bring it forth. For God understands the finer mysteries, is well acquainted with them. O my son, establish regular prayer, enjoin what is good, forbid what is evil, and bear patiently whatever may befall thee. This is firmness in all matters. Swell not thy cheek at men or walk insolently through the earth, for God does not love any arrogant boaster.

Surah 31 (*Lugman*), v. 16–18

The Role of Muslim Women

ARTICLE 17:

Muslim women have a role in the liberation struggle that is no less important than the role of men; woman is the maker of men, and her role in guiding and educating the generations is a major role. The enemies have understood her role; they think that if they can direct her and raise her the way they want, far from Islam, then they have won the battle. You will find that they support their efforts with continuous spending through the mass media and cinema industry, and also through the education system by way of their teachers who are part of Zionist organizations that assume different names and forms, such as the Masons and Rotary Clubs, and intelligence networks and other organizations. These are all centers of destruction and saboteurs. Those Zionist organizations have great material resources that enable them to play a significant role in society to realize their Zionist goals and enforce the understanding that serves the enemy. While these organizations play their role, Islam is absent from the arena and alienated from its people. The Islamists should play their role in confronting the schemes of those saboteurs. When the day comes that Islam has its way in directing life, it shall eliminate those organizations that are opposed to humanity and Islam.

ARTICLE 18:

The woman in the house of the *Mujahid* and the striving family, be she a mother or sister, has the most important role in caring for the home and raising the children with the ethical character and understanding that comes from Islam, as well as training her children to perform their religious obligations and preparing them for their contribution to the Jihad that awaits them. From this perspective, it is necessary to take care that the schools and curricula educate the Muslim girl in order to become

a righteous mother aware of her role in the battle of liberation. She must have the necessary awareness and attentiveness in running a home. Being economical and avoiding carefree spending of the family's income are required to continue the struggle in the overwhelmingly arduous situation. She must always keep in mind that money is blood that must flow only in the veins to sustain the life of children and parents equally.

For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who have humility, for men and women who give to charity, for men and women who fast, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage in God's praise—for them has God prepared forgiveness and great reward.

Surah 33 (*al-Ahzab*), v. 35

The Role of Islamic Art in the Battle for Liberation

ARTICLE 19:

Art has rules and standards by which one can determine whether it is Islamic or ignorant. The Islamic liberation is in need of Islamic art that lift the spirit and does not stress one aspect of humanity over the others but raises all aspects equally and in harmony. Man is a miraculous being, made out of a handful of clay and a breathed spirit. Islamic art communicates to man on this basis. Ignorant art communicates to the body and emphasizes the element of clay.

Books, articles, newsletters, sermons, pamphlets, poetry, plays, etc., if the characteristics of Islamic art are included in them, are necessary for ideological education and provide invigorating nourishment to continue the struggle and relax the soul, because the struggle is long and the work hard. The souls will become bored but Islamic art revives the vigor, imparts excitement, and invokes in the soul high spirits and correct deliberation.

Nothing corrects the soul if it is deliberating than a change from state to state.

All this is serious with no mirth included because a nation in Jihad does not know merriment.

Social Solidarity

ARTICLE 20:

The Muslim society is a cooperative society. As the Prophet (may peace be upon him) said: *“The best of people are the Asharites. If a difficult situation befell them, at home or during travels, they would gather what they had and divide it up equally among themselves.”* This is the Islamic spirit that ought to prevail in every Muslim society. The society that confronts a vicious enemy, like a Nazi in its behavior of not differentiating between men and women or elders and youth, must be first in adorning this Islamic spirit. Our enemy relies on collective punishment, stealing people’s homeland and possessions, and pursuing them in the lands of exile, and the places where they gather. Our enemy has adopted the practice of breaking our bones and shooting women, children, and old men—with or without reason—and creating concentration camps to place thousands in inhuman conditions, not to mention the demolition of homes, orphaning of children, and the issuing of tyrannical laws against thousands of young people so that they spend their best years in the obscurity of prisons.

The Nazism of the Jews has included women and children. Terror is for everyone. They frighten people in their livelihood, confiscate their wealth, and threaten their honor. Their treatment of and terrible behavior toward people is more violent than would be that of war criminals. Deportation from one’s homeland is a form of murder.

To cope with this behavior, people need social solidarity. We must confront the enemy as one body; if one member suffers, the rest must be vigilant and come to his defense.

ARTICLE 21:

Part of social welfare consists of helping all who are in need of material, spiritual, or collective cooperation to complete various projects. It is incumbent upon the members of the Islamic Resistance Movement to look after the needs of the people as they would their own needs; and it is incumbent upon them to spare no effort in realizing this and protecting them. They must avoid, without resorting to foul play, whatever might harm future generations or cause damage to their society because they come from the masses; their power and their future is [the movement’s] power and future. It is a duty of all members of the Islamic Resistance Movement to share the people’s happiness and grief, and they must consider it their duty to meet the demands of the people and do what

benefits them. When this spirit becomes dominant, love will be deepened, cooperation and compassion will prevail, and the ranks will be strengthened in the confrontation with the enemies.

Forces Abetting the Enemy

ARTICLE 22:

The enemies have planned well to get where they are, taking into account the effective measures in current affairs. Thus, they have amassed huge fortunes that gave them influence that they have devoted to the realization of their goals. Through money they gained control over the world media, such as news services, newspapers, printing presses, broadcast stations, and the like. With money they financed revolutions throughout the world in pursuit of their objectives. They were behind the French Revolution, the Communist Revolution, and most of the revolutions here and there that we heard about and are hearing of. With wealth they established clandestine organizations all over the world, such as the Free Masons, the Rotary and Lions clubs, etc., to destroy societies and promote the interests of Zionism. These are all destructive intelligence gathering organizations. With wealth they controlled imperialist nations and pushed them to occupy many nations to exploit their resources and spread mischief in them.

Concerning the local and international wars, let us speak without hesitation. They were behind the First World War in which they destroyed the Islamic Caliphate, picked the material profit, monopolized the raw wealth, and got the Balfour Declaration. They created the League of Nations through which they could rule the world. They were behind the Second World War, in which they grew fabulously wealthy through the arms trade. They prepared for the establishment of their state; they ordered that the United Nations be formed, along with the Security Council, in place of the League of Nations, so that they could rule the world through them.

There was no war that broke out anywhere without their hands behind it.

Every time they light the fire of war, God extinguishes it. But they strive to do mischief on earth, but God loveth not those who do mischief.

Surah 5 (*al-Maidah*), v. 64

So the imperialist powers in the Capitalist West and the Communist East support the enemy with all their might, with material and human aid, and they change roles. When Islam appears, the powers of the unbelievers unite against it because the community of unbelievers is one.

Oh you who believe! Take not into your confidence those outside your ranks: they will not fail to corrupt you. They desire only your ruin. Base hatred already has appeared from their mouths; what their hearts conceal is far worse. We have made the signs plain for you, if you have wisdom.

Surah 3 (*al-Imran*), v. 118

It is not by chance that the verse ends with “if you have wisdom.”

Chapter Four: Our Position

Other Islamic Movements

ARTICLE 23:

The Islamic Resistance Movement regards the other Islamic movements with respect and appreciation. Even if differences arise in one perspective or viewpoint, there is agreement between them on several other perspectives and viewpoints. If their intentions are pure, and they are true to God, the Islamic Resistance Movement regards these movements as an exercise of independent judgement in theological matters [*ijtihad*], provided that their conduct remains within the confines of Islam. Each person who uses independent judgement shall have his share of truth.

The Islamic Resistance Movement considers these movements as a reserve fund on which it can draw. It asks God to give His guidance to everyone and Hamas shall miss no opportunity to call on others to rally to the banner of unity, which it shall seek to forge on the basis of the Quran and the Tradition [*sunnah*].

And hold fast all together to God's rope, and do not be divided among yourselves.

Surah 3 (*al-Imran*), v. 103

ARTICLE 24:

The Islamic Resistance Movement does not allow slander or condemnation of individuals or movements because the believer is not a slanderer or

curser. Despite the need to differentiate between this and that position and the actions of individuals or groups, whenever there is a mistake in a position or action, the Islamic Resistance Movement has the right to point out the mistake, warn against it, and to clarify the truth. It adopts this in current circumstances with impartiality. Wisdom is the object of the believer's persevering quest, and he takes it wherever he finds it.

God loves not that evil should be broadcast about in public speech, except where injustice has been done. For God is He who hears and knows all things. Whether you publish a good deed or conceal it, or cover evil with pardon, verily God does blot them out and has power.

Surah 4 (*an-Nisa'*), v. 148–49

Patriotic Movements in the Palestinian Arena

ARTICLE 25:

[The Islamic Resistance Movement] gives them due respect, appreciates their circumstances and [the influences in] their environment, and will lend its support to them as long as they do not give loyalty either to the Communist East or the Crusading West. The Islamic Resistance Movement assures their members and heroes that it is a moral and struggling movement, ethical and attentive in its view of life and its cooperation with others. It abhors opportunism and only wishes well to individual people and groups. It does not aspire for material gain or personal fame, or reward for people. It uses its own resources and what is available to it.

Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power.

Surah 8 (*Anfal*), v. 60

It [Hamas] has no other ambition than to perform its duty and win God's favor.

All the nationalist groups operating in the arena for the sake of liberating Palestine should be assured that it [Hamas] is a helper and supportet, and never will be anything else. By word and action, past and present, it unites rather than divides, repairs rather than destroys, values good advice, pure efforts, and powerful actions, closes the door to petty disputes, and does not heed rumors and defamation as it realizes the right of self-defense. Anything that contradicts these guidelines is fabricated by the enemy or by those who tread in his footsteps in order to create chaos, divide ranks, and distract us with side issues.

O you who believe! If a wicked person brings you any news, verify it, lest you harm people unwittingly, and afterward repent of what you did.

Surah 49 (*al-Hujurat*), v. 6

ARTICLE 26:

Although the Islamic Resistance Movement has a positive view toward the Palestinian Nationalist Movements that do not owe their loyalty to the East or West, that does not prevent it from discussing the options in the local or international arenas with respect to the Palestinian problem. This is an objective discussion, from an Islamic perspective, clarifying the extent to which they [the options] serve the national interest.

Palestine Liberation Organization

ARTICLE 27:

The Palestine Liberation Organization is closer than any other group to the Islamic Resistance Movement; it includes the fathers, brothers, relatives, and friends [of our members]. How can a good Muslim turn a cold shoulder to his father, his brother, his relative, or his friend? We have but one homeland, one affliction, one shared destiny, and one shared enemy. Being affected by the situation that surrounded the formation of the organization and that overwhelms the Arab world with chaotic ideologies due to the ideological invasion which has swept the Arab world since the defeat of the Crusades and the ongoing consolidation of Orientalism, missionary work, and imperialism, the organization adopted the idea of a secular state and as such we considered it.

Secular ideology is diametrically opposed to religious thought. It is on ideology that positions, actions, and decisions are made. Therefore, despite our respect for the Palestine Liberation Organization and what it might become, and not reducing its role in the Arab-Israeli struggle, we cannot exchange the Islamic nature of Palestine to adopt the secular ideology because the Islamic nature of the Palestinian issue is part and parcel of our religion, and whosoever neglects part of his religion is surely lost.

And who forsakes the religion of Abraham but such as debase their souls with folly?

Surah 2 (*al-Baqarah*), v. 130

The day that the Palestine Liberation Organization embraces Islam as a way of life, we shall be its soldiers; we shall be the fuel for its fire, which consumes the enemies. Until that happens—and we pray to God that it will happen soon—the position of the Islamic Resistance Movement toward the Palestine Liberation Organization is the position of a son toward his father, a brother towards his brother, and a relative toward his relatives. He will suffer if a thorn pricks him, support him in confronting the enemy, and wishes guidance for him.

Your brother, your brother! He who has no brother is like a fighter going to battle without weapons.

And know that your cousin is like your wings. And does the falcon fly without wings?

The Arab Countries and Islamic Governments

ARTICLE 28:

The Zionist invasion is a vicious attack that does not have pity and uses all low and despicable methods to fulfill its desires. It relies to a great extent for its meddling and spying activities on the secret organizations that are its off-shots, such as the Masons, Rotary and Lions clubs, and other such networks of spies. All these secret or public organizations work for the benefit and with the guidance of the Zionists. They are behind the drug and alcohol trade with its wide variety to facilitate the ease of its control and expansion. The Arab states surrounding Israel are requested to open their borders to ease the movement of *mujahidin* to and from it, and that is the least they could do. We should not lose this opportunity to remind every Muslim that when the Jews occupied immaculate Jerusalem in 1967, they stood on the stairs of the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque and loudly chanted: *“Muhammad has died and left girls behind.”*

So Israel with its Jewishness and its Jewish population challenges Islam and Muslims. *So the eyes of the cowards do not sleep.*

National and Religious Groups, Institutions, Intellectuals, and the Arab-Islamic World

ARTICLE 29:

The Islamic Resistance Movement would like for each and every organization to stand by its side on all levels, supporting it, adopting its positions, promoting its activities and movements, and working to gain support for

the Islamic Resistance Movement so the Islamic people can be its backers and victors. A strategic dimension is needed on all levels: human, material, media, historical, and geographical. The public is kept aware of the Palestinian situation and what is facing it and being plotted against it through the holding of supportive conferences and the production of clarifying statements, supportive articles, and purposeful pamphlets, which educate the Islamic people ideologically, morally, and culturally in order to fulfill its role in the battle for liberation. This is the role it played in defeating the Crusaders and pushing back the Tartars and saving human civilization. And that is easy for God.

God has decreed: "It is I and my messengers who must prevail." For God is strong, able to enforce His will.

Surah 58 (*al-Mujadilah*), v. 21

ARTICLE 30:

Authors and scholars, media people, preachers, teachers and educators, and people in the rest of the different fields in the Arab and Islamic world: All of you are called upon to adopt a role and carry out your duty, due to the ferocity of the Zionist invasion, its penetration into most countries, and its materialistic and media control and what has been built on that in most countries of the world.

Jihad means not only carrying arms and confronting the enemy. The positive word, excellent article, beneficial book, aid, and support—if intentions are pure so that the banner of God is held high—also constitute Jihad for the sake of God. *"He who provided equipment to a fighter who fought for the cause of God and he who stayed behind to look after the family of the fighter in the cause of God in fact fought for the cause of God."* (Narrated by Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi)

The People of Other Faiths

ARTICLE 31:

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a humanistic movement that cares for human rights and observes the magnanimity of Islam toward the followers of other religions. It never attacks any of them, except those who show hostility toward it or stand in its way in order to stop the movement or frustrate its efforts.

In the shade of Islam it is possible for the followers of the three religions, Islam, Christianity, and Judaism, to live in peace and harmony. This peace and harmony only is possible under Islam, and the history of the past and present is the best written witness of that.

Followers of other religions should stop fighting Islam over ruling this area, because when they rule there only is murder, punishment, and banishment. They make life hard for their own people, not to mention the followers of other religions. The past and present are full of examples to prove this.

They will not fight you together, except in fortified towns or from behind walls. Their determination is strong among themselves. You would think they were united, but their hearts are divided. That is because they are a people devoid of wisdom.

Surah 59 (*al-Hashr*), v. 14

Islam gives everyone his rights and forbids enmity over the rights of others, but the Nazi Zionist efforts will not last as long as their battles. *The state of oppression is an hour, but the state of truth lasts until the coming of the hour.*

With regard to those who do not fight you for faith or to drive you out of your home, God does not forbid you from dealing kindly and justly with them; for God loves those who are just.

Surah 60 (*al-Mumtahinah*), v. 8

The Effort to Isolate the Palestinian People

ARTICLE 32:

World Zionism and the forces of imperialism are following a clever plan to cause one Arab country after the other to drop out of the battle with Zionism so that in the end the Palestinian people will be isolated from their allies. Egypt, to a very large extent, dropped out of the struggle when it concluded the treasonous Camp David agreements. Now they are trying to entice other countries to conclude similar agreements and drop out as well. The Islamic Resistance Movement calls on the Arab and Islamic people to work seriously and constructively in order not to allow that dreadful scheme to be carried out and to educate the masses about the dangers of withdrawal from the struggle with Zionism. Today it is Palestine and tomorrow it may be another country and then other countries, because the

Zionist scheme has no bounds; after Palestine they want to expand from the Nile River to the Euphrates. When they have occupied the area completely, they look toward another, as such is their plan in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The present is the best proof of what is said.

Withdrawal from the circle of struggle is high treason and a curse on those who do it.

If anyone turns his back on such a day, except as a strategy of war or to retreat to regroup, he brings onto himself the wrath of God and his abode is hell, an evil refuge indeed.

Surah 8 (*al-Anfal*), v. 16

It is necessary to gather together all forces and abilities to confront the Tartaric-Nazi invasion; the alternative is loss of homeland, exiling of the population, the promotion of evil on earth, and the destruction of all religious values. Every person should know that he will be held accountable before God.

Then anyone who has done even a speck of good shall see it, and anyone who has done even a speck of evil shall see it.

Surah 99 (*az-Zalzalah*), v. 7–8

The Islamic Resistance Movement considers itself the spearhead or a step on the path in the circle of struggle with world Zionism. It adds its efforts to efforts of the workers in the Palestinian arena. What is left is that this should be followed by more steps and measures by the Arab and Islamic people and by Muslim organizations in the Arab and Islamic regions because they are the people who are prepared for the forthcoming role in the battle with the Jews, the merchants of war.

Among them We have cast enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgement, and every time they light the fire of war, God extinguishes it; for they strive to do mischief on earth, but God does not love those who do mischief.

Surah 5 (*al-Mā'idah*), v. 64

ARTICLE 33:

The Islamic Resistance Movement sets out with these general concepts, which are equal and in harmony with the patterns of the universe and are being poured into the river of destiny to confront the enemy. Its struggle

is to defend Muslims, Islamic civilization, religious sanctuaries, of which al-Aqsa Mosque is foremost, and to inspire the Arab and Islamic people, their governments, and their nationalistic and official organizations to fear God as they consider the Islamic Resistance Movement and ways to deal with it. It should be, as God has wished, a supporter and helper, spreading out its hand to assist and provide support until God's decision is manifested. The masses join ranks and fighters join *mujahids* and other groups, which sally forth from everywhere in the Muslim world, answering the call of duty and repeating "come to Jihad," a call bursting forth into the highest heavens and reverberating until liberation is complete, the invaders are pushed back, and God's victory prevails.

Verily God will help those who aid Him, for verily God is strong, exalted in might.

Surah 22 (*al-Hajj*), v. 40

Chapter Five: Historical Proof

Facing the Enemy throughout History

ARTICLE 34:

Palestine is the heart of earth, the meeting of the continents, the object of greed for the avaricious since the dawn of history. The Prophet (may peace be upon him) pointed to that in his noble narration to Ma'ath ibn Jabal:

O Ma'ath, God is going to open Syria for you after I'm gone. From Al-Arish to the Euphrates, its men, women, and children will be steadfast until the day of resurrection. Whosoever of you chooses a coastal site of Syria or Jerusalem, then he is in constant Jihad till the day of resurrection.

People have coveted Palestine more than once, and they drowned it with armies to fulfill their covetousness. The hoards of Crusaders, waving their faith and waving their crucifixes, were able to defeat the Muslims for a specific period of time. The Muslims did not get it back until they united together under their religious banner, glorified their Lord, and fought as *mujahids* under the leadership of Salahdin al-Ayyubi for nearly two decades. Then there was a clear victory, the Crusaders were defeated, and Palestine was liberated.

Say to those who reject religion: Soon you shall be vanquished and gathered together in hell, an evil bed, indeed, to lie on.

Surah 3 (*al-Imran*), v. 12

This is the only way to liberation. There is no doubt in the truth of the historical evidence. It is a pattern in the universe and a law of nature that only metal breaks metal; nothing defeats their corrupt belief except the true belief in Islam because belief only can be vanquished by belief. In the end, victory goes to truth; truth is victorious.

Already our word has been passed before to Our servants, sent that they certainly would be assisted and that Our forces surely must conquer.

Surah 37 (*as-Saffat*), v. 171–3

ARTICLE 35:

The Islamic Resistance Movement considers the lesson and wisdom to be learned from the defeat of the Crusaders at the hands of Salahdin al-Ayyubi, the liberation of Palestine, the defeat of the Tartars at the battle of 'Ayn Jalut, the defeat of their forces by Qatuz and Al-Dhahir Baibars, and the world's rescue from the destructive onslaught of the Tartars, who were destroying all traces of human civilization. The current Zionist invasion had been preceded by the many invasions of the crusading West and others, such as the Tartars from the east. The Muslims confronted those invasions, prepared for fighting, and defeated them. They should be able to confront and defeat the Zionist invasion. This is not difficult for God if our intentions are pure, our efforts are truthful, Muslims have benefited from past experiences and been freed from the vestiges of the ideological invasion, and they follow the way of their predecessors.

Postscript

The Islamic Resistance Movement are Soldiers

ARTICLE 36:

The Islamic Resistance Movement, as it is making its way, emphasizes repeatedly to all our people, the Arab and Muslim people, that it does not want fame for itself nor material gains or social status. It is not directed against any of our people in order to rival or replace them; there is nothing of that at all. It never will be against any Muslims or the peacefulness of

non-Muslims in this place or anywhere else. It only shall help associations and organizations that work against the Zionist enemy and those who are in its orbit. The Islamic Resistance Movement depends on Islam as a way of life, its faith, and religion and supports whoever adopts Islam as a way of life, no matter where he is or whether it is an organization, committee, or group. The Islamic Resistance Movement is only its soldiers, nothing else.

We beseech God to guide us and others through us, and to decide the truth between our people and us.

Our Lord! Decide Thou between us and our people in truth, for Thou art the best to decide.

Surah 7 (*al-Araf*), v. 89

And our last prayer is: *"All praise is due to God, the Lord of the Universe."*

Palestine: 1 Muharram 1409 A.H.
18 August 1988 A.D.

Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) Introductory Memorandum

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful:

First: Date of Formation

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) announced itself to the world in a public communique distributed in the Gaza Strip on 12 December 1987 and in the West Bank on 14 December 1987. It declared the beginning of a new stage in the struggle of the Palestinian people against the Zionist occupation, that is, the stage of the blessed popular intifada. Ever since that time, the movement has issued regular monthly statements directing the activities of the intifada as well as occasional memoranda and publications giving its perspective on the nature of the struggle with the Zionist enemy and delineating its positions and policies toward various subjects and events. These positions finally crystallized and were defined in its charter distributed by the movement in August 1988.

Second: Motives for Formation

Hamas came into existence as a result of the interaction of many factors affecting the Palestinian people since the first catastrophe of 1948, and especially after the defeat of 1967. These factors cluster around two axes: the political developments of the Palestinian question and what became of it at the end of 1987, and the evolution of the Islamic awakening in Palestine and the stage it reached in the mid-1980s.

On the first axis, it became increasingly clear to the Palestinians that their case, which to them is a question of life or death and a cultural struggle between the Arabs and Muslims on one side and Zionism on the other, had been transformed into a mere refugee problem in the aftermath of the first catastrophe and into a matter of negotiating a way out of the 1967 defeat by negotiating away occupied Arab land.

In the 1980s, the Palestinian revolutionary program, under the leadership of the PLO, suffered a series of internal and external setbacks that

shook and weakened it. In the preceding decade, the Palestinian position had softened considerably. There were signs from the Palestinian camp signaling the possibility of accepting compromises that were contrary to provisions of the Palestinian National Charter. These signals became clearer and took the form of concrete proposals for a compromise settlement, especially after the signing of the Camp David agreements. This softening notwithstanding, the Zionists invaded south Lebanon and laid siege to Beirut in 1982. This dealt the Arab nation its greatest humiliation since 1967, despite the historic stand of the Palestinian resistance. The siege of an Arab capital continued for three months without any meaningful Arab response. This resulted in further weakening the PLO and its departure from Lebanon. On the heels of this exit, settlement inclinations increased within the organization, inclinations that resulted in disputes and dissension. The settlement proposals included making concessions on two grave points that the Palestinian masses, in conformity with Palestine's long history since the conquest by Omar, vowed never to do:

- Recognize the Zionist existence and its legitimacy
- Cede the larger part of Palestine to the Zionist entity.

Under circumstances wherein these proposals found favorable responses from the PLO, the strategy of armed struggle retreated, as did the interest of other Arabs in the question of Palestine, which became just another routine item on the agendas of their meetings and conferences. Wittingly or unwittingly, Arab countries now started to work separately, shifting the focus from larger national issues to more provincial ones having to do with the meaning and implications of their identity as individual entities.

The Palestine question was marginalized further by the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war, which commanded the interest of the region for nearly the entire 1980s. Simultaneously, the policy of the Zionist entity became more arrogant. Encouraged and supported by the United States, with whom it signed a treaty of strategic cooperation in 1981, it annexed the Golan and destroyed the Iraqi nuclear reactor that same year.

Zionist contempt for Arab ability reached its zenith in 1982 when Zionist forces swept into south Lebanon and laid siege to Lebanon's capital and bombarded it for months and afterward permitted the horrendous massacres of Sabra and Shatilla, which claimed hundreds of Palestinian victims. The odd contrast in that year was the convening of an Arab summit conference at Fez, Morocco, in September 1982, which came as a sort of

indirect response to Reagan's 1981 peace proposal which rejected any solution containing any form of an independent Palestinian state. The resolutions of that conference included one of the most dangerous turns of official, collective, and public policy at the Arab level: the implicit recognition of the right of the state of "Israel" to exist. The resolutions also included a call to create a special confederation between Jordan and Palestine. This call was followed by discussions between the parties that culminated in the agreement of February 1985, later to be cancelled.

While Arab policy was fumbling about in the false hope that it attached to successive American administrations, Zionist extremists in the form of rightist parties were tightening their grip on the policy and administration of the Zionist entity. Meanwhile, the policy of deterrence that the Zionist entity has maintained for decades was one that did not elicit any disagreement among the parties. For that reason, it carried out with haughtiness "Operation Hammam al-Shatt," in which it bombed the headquarters of the PLO in Tunis in October 1985, with the full support and encouragement of the American administration to which Arab summits attach so much hope.

On the international scene, the United States surged ahead of the Soviet Union in the power game, thus imposing its will and spreading its hegemony, not only on the area, but worldwide. Apparently, the Soviet Union was plagued by increasingly more serious internal problems that required it to shift attention to domestic matters. This in turn changed the priorities of the Soviet leadership, leading to a gradual retreat from regional conflict, which left the field to the Americans. The Soviet role in the region ended in a way that was as disappointing to its Arab allies, including some Palestinians, as it was unexpected by them.

By the middle of 1987, the proposal for an international conference to "resolve the Middle East conflict" was dead because of the Zionist-American position. In its place, the Labor Party, the ruling party at that time, proposed a scheme to share functional responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza between the Zionist entity and Jordan.

As for the subject of Islamic awakening, Palestine, like other Arab countries, witnessed a clear and noticeable evolution on this front. This facilitated the ideological and organizational development and growth of the Islamic movement, both in the part of Palestine occupied in 1948 as well as the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Islamic trend came to the realization that it faced a great challenge attributable to (1) the downgrading of the Palestine question to the bottom of the list of priorities of the Arab states; and (2) the retreat of the

Palestinian revolutionary program from a strategy of armed struggle to an acceptance of an imposed political settlement.

In the shadow of these retreats, and with the maturing of resistance among the Palestinians inside Palestine—not outside it—a project of Islamic struggle was inevitable. Its characteristic features emerged with the appearance of, among other groups, the Jihad community in 1981 and the Sheikh Ahmed Yassin group in 1983. By the end of 1987, the conditions had matured sufficiently to initiate a new strategy to liberate Palestine based on new foundations. Thus the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) came into being, and the Muslim Brothers in Palestine had a fundamental role in its formation.

Third: The Political Identity of Hamas

Hamas is a popular struggle movement that seeks to liberate Palestine in its entirety from the Mediterranean Sea to the River Jordan. It bases its ideology and policies on the teachings of Islam and its juridical tradition. It welcomes all those who believe in its ideas and stands and who are ready to bear the consequences of sacred struggle for the liberation of Palestine and the establishment in it of an independent Islamic state. It is thus a broad popular organization and not a narrow party or group arrangement. It believes that its vision, positions, and policies make it a substantive and qualitative addition to the ranks of the national effort. It is not a substitute for any group and considers the arena of Palestinian national struggle large enough to encompass all approaches and visions.

Fourth: The View of Hamas on the Nature of Struggle and the Way to Conduct It

Hamas believes that the ongoing conflict between the Arabs and Muslims and the Zionists in Palestine is a fateful civilizational struggle incapable of being brought to an end without eliminating its cause, namely, the Zionist settlement of Palestine. This aggressive enterprise complements the larger Western project that seeks to strip the Arab Islamic nation of its cultural roots in order to consolidate Western Zionist hegemony over it by completing the plan of greater Israel and establishing political and economic hegemony over it. Doing so implies maintaining the state of division, backwardness, and dependency in which the Arab Islamic nation lives. The conflict as described is a form of struggle between truth and falsehood, which obligates Arabs and Muslims to support the Palestinians and

to bear the consequences of a holy struggle to extirpate the Zionist presence from Palestine and prevent its danger from spreading to other Arab and Islamic countries.

Hamas believes that the Zionist colonization scheme only can be extirpated through a comprehensive holy struggle in which armed struggle is a basic instrument. Hamas also sees that the best way to conduct the fight with the Zionist enemy is to mobilize the resources of the Palestinian people to raise the banner of struggle in Palestine and to keep the embers of conflict burning until the conditions for a decisive battle with the enemy are complete. These include the rising of the Arab and Islamic nation, the acquisition of the elements of power, the mobilization of its energies and resources, and unification of its will and political decisions.

Believing in the sacredness of Palestine and its Islamic status, Hamas believes it impermissible under any circumstances to concede any part of Palestine or to recognize the legitimacy of the Zionist occupation of it.

Fifth: The Movement's Strategy

Based on our understanding of the nature of the conflict with the Zionist enemy and its connection with the Western project to append the Arab Islamic nation to Western civilization by imposing dependency and backwardness on it, and given the complexity of the situation in the world and the region and the clear and lopsided imbalance in the balance of power in favor of the Zionist-American alliance, Hamas builds its strategy in confronting the Zionist occupation as follows:

1. The Palestinian people, being the primary target of the occupation, bears the larger part of the burden in resisting it. Hamas, therefore, works to mobilize the energies of this people and to direct it toward steadfastness.
2. The field of confrontation with the enemy is Palestine, the Arab and Islamic lands being fields of aid and support to our people, especially the lands that have been enriched with the pure blood of martyrs throughout the ages.
3. Confronting and resisting the enemy in Palestine must be continuous until victory and liberation. Holy struggle in the name of God is our guide, and fighting and inflicting harm on enemy troops and their instruments rank at the top of our means of resistance.

4. Political activity, in our view, is one means of holy struggle against the Zionist enemy and aims to buttress the struggle and steadfastness of our people and to mobilize its energies and that of our Arab Islamic nation to render our cause victorious.

Sixth: Positions and Policies of the Movement

- I. On the Palestinian Front
 - A. Hamas sees the Palestinian arena of struggle against the Zionist occupation as broad enough to accommodate all views and approaches. But Hamas believes that the unity of the Palestinian national effort is a goal for which all Palestinian groups ought to strive to achieve.
 - B. Hamas strives to cooperate and coordinate its efforts with all the forces and groups, its guide being the golden rule: "We cooperate in what we agree about; and we excuse one another in what we differ about."
 - C. Hamas is not a substitute for any organization, and it regards the PLO as a national accomplishment and an institution worth preserving. Furthermore, it has no objection to participating within the framework of the PLO on the basis of a commitment by the latter to work for the liberation of Palestine and not to recognize the Zionist enemy by conferring on it the legitimacy of existence on any part of Palestine.
 - D. Hamas believes that, regardless of how deep the differences in point of view or approaches may be, it is not permissible for anyone under any circumstances to resort to the use of violence or weapons to resolve disputes or to impose their views.
 - E. Hamas further believes that, irrespective of the differences in the political orientation of Palestinian groups, it is able to work collectively with them to confront the enemy and to intensify popular resistance represented in the blessed intifada. In this connection Hamas offered initiatives to form a joint leadership for the intifada and a proposal to set priorities in the Palestinian national action.
 - F. Hamas gives special priority to unifying Islamic action groups and believes that the common factors among them are much greater than the factors that separate them.
 - G. Hamas is a broad popular organization dedicated to the defense of Palestinian causes without discrimination on the basis of religion or ethnicity.

II. On the Arab Islamic Front

- A. Hamas maintains contact with all governments, parties, and forces regardless of political disagreements that they may have with Hamas and cooperates with any party ready to support the steadfastness and resistance of our people against the unjust Zionist occupation.
- B. Hamas is not concerned with, and nor does it interfere in, the internal affairs of countries.
- C. Hamas makes an effort to encourage Arab and Islamic governments to resolve their differences and to unify their stands on national causes. However, it refuses to stand with one party to a dispute against another or to join one political axis against another.
- D. Hamas believes in Arab and Islamic unity and blesses any effort expended in this direction.
- E. Hamas requests all Arab and Islamic governments, parties, and forces to do their duty and to aid in the cause of our people and to support its steadfastness and resistance to Zionist occupation and to facilitate the work of our movement by aiding it in performing its tasks.

III. On the International Front

- A. Hamas communicates with all foreign governments, parties, and forces irrespective of their ideology, citizenship, or political system. It has no objection to cooperating with any quarter in the service of the just cause of our people to obtain its legitimate rights or in enlightening world public opinion about the practices of the Zionist occupation and its inhuman and repressive measures against our people.
- B. Hamas harbors no hostility toward anyone on the basis of religious belief or race. And it does not oppose the stance of governments or organizations provided that they refrain from practicing oppression and injustice against our people or aiding and abetting the aggressive practices of the Zionist occupation against our people.
- C. Hamas respects the decisions of international organizations as long as they do not contradict our people's legitimate rights in its homeland and its right to struggle until liberation and self-determination.
- D. Hamas does not believe in moving the battle against the occupation from Palestine to any other international arena. Hamas's program does not include striking at foreign interests.

Seventh: Hamas's Stance on Political Settlement

Hamas bases its position on political settlement on two factors:

1. Its profound understanding of the Zionist enemy, its intellectual background in the Torah and the Talmud, the writings of the founders of the Zionist movement, and its attachment to the myths of the promised land, God's chosen people, and Greater Israel. Moreover, our awareness of the depth of enemy cunning, especially the deception associated with the armistice agreements of 1948 and the Camp David agreement, leads us to believe that the Zionist enemy intends the political settlement to be a mere stepping stone toward a new phase of expansion and colonization. It is capable of realizing its goal, owing to the obvious and clear asymmetry of the international and regional balance of power in its favor.
2. Truly, the principal of political settlement, whatever its source and details, entails the capitulative acceptance of the Zionist right of existence on a part of Palestine. Since this matter enters the domain of Islamic jurisprudence, in our view it cannot be accepted. For Palestine is a sacred Islamic land that has been forcibly seized by the Zionists, and it is the duty of Muslims to conduct a holy struggle to regain it and to expel the invader from it.

Accordingly, the Movement has rejected the proposals of [George] Shultz and [James] Baker, [Hosni] Mubarak's ten points, [Yitzhak] Shamir's plan, and others. Hamas believes that the most dangerous of the settlement proposals proffered to date is the self-rule proposal now under discussion in Washington. Its danger stems not only from its implicit affirmation of the legality of Zionist sovereignty over all of Palestine, the normalization of Zionist-Arab relations, and granting Zionist hegemony a free hand over the region. Its danger also comes from the consent and acceptance of it by a Palestinian side, even if it does not truly represent the Palestinian people. Such acceptance also would mean the closing of the Palestinian file and depriving the Palestinian people of the right to seek its legitimate rights or to use legitimate means to obtain them. Additionally, such acceptance would sanction the principle of depriving most Palestinians of living in their homeland and legitimize the consequences that flow from it, not only for the Palestinians but also for other Arab people.

Because of the danger posed by the currently proposed settlement, the Movement has adopted a position based on the following points:

1. Alerting the Palestinian people to the perils of the self-rule proposal and its implications;
2. Working to unite the Palestinian forces that reject this proposal and to articulate its stand on the matter on the Palestinian, Arab, and international stages;
3. Demanding that the negotiating team and the effective leadership in the PLO withdraw from the negotiations;
4. Contacting the relevant Arab and Islamic governments and requesting that they withdraw from the negotiations and adopt our stand, which rejects the proposal for self-rule.

Eighth: The Organizational Structure of the Movement

The Movement has worked hard to build an organizational structure that both suits the circumstances of the Palestinian people and guarantees the effectiveness and continuity of its efforts. The principle field of action for the Movement is Palestine, where the activity of its apparatuses and institutions takes place. But its systems permit it to expand its activities outside Palestine in proportion as suits its requirements and strategy. The structure of the Movement consists of two main bodies: a consultative council, which determines general policies and approves plans and budgets, and an executive body that directs the activities of the movement. The executive body in turn consists of the following offices and institutions: the political office, the information office, the military wing ('Izzidin al-Qasam Brigades), the security apparatus, the department for the affairs of the occupied homeland, the department of organization and mass mobilization, and the official spokesman (who is headquartered abroad). The Movement has supporters in various parts of the Arab and Islamic world.

Ninth: Hopes and Aspirations

Despite its relative youth, the Movement, with God's help, has played a prominent role in intensifying the struggle of our people against the Zionist occupation. The blessed intifada and its intensification was the first great step that we took. This, together with the participation of other popular forces, caused the struggle of our people to take a qualitative leap as the arena of struggle shifted to the internal Palestinian scene, replacing

the outside field, which had been the focus since the first catastrophe of 1948.

The Movement also transformed Palestinian society into an effective, activist society, a participant in the activities of the intifada, and it transformed the resistance from a narrow, segmented effort into a broad mass effort. This in turn made the world hear and see clearly that the Palestinian people is subjected to repressive Zionist practices that are contrary to all values and standards associated with human rights, and gained numerous supporters all over the world for the Palestinian cause.

Hamas, which has been able to garner the support of half of the Palestinian people within the scope of a few years, fervently hopes that the Palestinian people as well as the Arab Islamic nation, with its strategic human depth and potential support for the Palestinian cause, will embrace it.

We are well aware that the hour of the decisive battle has not yet arrived, but we detect in our people and in the larger Arab and Islamic nation the factors of change and receptivity. "No night but is followed by daylight, and no straitening but is followed by ease."

We in Hamas are determined to proceed on the path of holy struggle (jihad). We have made a pledge to God and to our people to do so. Our hope for triumph is great. If the road is long, "they ask thee when is it [the return to Mecca], say perchance, it is near."

May God grant us success.

DOCUMENT NO. 4

Important Statement by
the Political Bureau

Since assuming office, the terrorist Yitzhak Rabin has continued his repressive measures against all segments of Palestinian society. His orders flow apace to occupation troops to shoot Palestinians without discriminating between a civilian bystander and an armed person or between young and old. He also has given a free hand to hordes of armed settlers to terrorize our people, to murder them, and to desecrate their sacred values and places. Indeed, premeditated acts of murder continue apace at the hands of troops as well as settlers, victimizing women, children, and old men.

Further, despite Rabin's claims of pursuing peace, with the launching of the Madrid-Washington process and the signing of the Oslo Agreement, the crimes of the government of the terrorist Rabin against our people have multiplied, as have stringent security measures including collective punishment and military closure of all areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In response to this murderous policy, our people have intensified their resistance to occupation and attacked its instruments and symbols represented by troops and settlers. This is precisely the strategy adopted by the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas).

Rabin's government outdid itself in its repressive measures, which reached a crescendo when Rabin's troops conspired with settlers in the criminal massacre of Hebron (Al-Khalil) that targeted worshippers at the Mosque of Abraham as they knelt down for the dawn prayers. Likewise, the troops fire at pregnant Palestinian women while in their homes or balconies. These excesses have compelled all of our people to rise up and intensify their resistance to occupation and to seek vengeance for the martyrs of the Hebron massacre.

In loyalty to the blood of martyrs, the 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades, which operate throughout the homeland, vowed to avenge the blood of martyrs. Accordingly, two of our heroic warriors carried out two suicide missions at Afula and Hadera, targeting centers of troop and settler concentrations, despite Rabin's heightened security measures that were espe-

cially strict during their celebration of the anniversary of the usurpation of our country.

Rabin's measures failed to stop our heroic operations, carried out amidst his efforts to implement the Oslo Agreement with all the shameful concessions on the part of the PLO leadership that it entails, and failed to fulfil the longing of the Zionist masses for peace and security. In the face of sharpening Likud opposition to the agreement, this devastating failure caused Rabin to feel deep frustration and frightful floundering.

In commenting on this subject, Hamas wishes to emphasize the following:

First: The prime minister of the enemy, the terrorist Yitzhak Rabin, claiming that Jordan hosts some Hamas leaders, issued a threat to brotherly Jordan, demanding that it take measures against the activities of Hamas. This is a mere pretext, for the Movement's representative in Amman did no more than to confirm the announcement of the Qassam Brigades that they had carried out the heroic operations in Afula and Hadera. Truly, Rabin and the members of his criminal government know with certainty that the Qassam Brigades planned, executed, and announced the operation entirely from within our occupied lands.

But because of his inability to put a stop to these operations and his all too evident deceptions in the settlement process, he exploits these events to threaten Jordan, apparently for the following purposes:

1. To shift attention from the true nature and the failure of his strict and repressive security measures to end either the heroic suicide missions by the Qassam Brigades or other popular resistance operations carried out by our people in all parts of our holy land.
2. To use the American sword to pressure Jordan to sign a separate agreement with his government on the model of Oslo. This threat is consistent with the American administration's policy that employs the inspection of commercial ships in the Gulf of Aqaba as an instrument to achieve the same purpose.

Similarly, the American administration keeps Syria on its list of countries that support terrorism, or those that fail to fight the spread of drugs, as an instrument to pressure Syria to drop its demand for a comprehensive solution on all fronts.

We, in Hamas, are perfectly aware of the true position of the enemy toward peace—which is to get the Arab parties to submit to its humiliating conditions, even as it continues to occupy our land and to consolidate its hegemony in the region. We emphasize once again that Rabin's claims are false and have no factual basis, because our movement works on our soil and we have no concern other than to fight occupation until victory and liberation.

Hamas further emphasizes its fervent desire for the security and stability of all Arab countries where the Movement's political and informational representatives are present and always operate within the framework of the laws in those countries. Hamas is especially careful not to offer pretexts to the occupying enemy to pressure any of these countries.

Second: The authorized Hamas policy has been that the 'Izzidin al-Qassam Brigades target only occupation troops, their equipment, and the settlers in particular because they are reservists in the enemy army. The Qassam Brigades have been careful, within the limits of their abilities, to ensure that no civilians are harmed as a result of military operations.

But the despotic practices of Rabin's government violate the most elementary principles of human rights, especially the policy of discriminating between the fighting holy warriors and unarmed civilians. And they have compelled the Qassam Brigades to adopt a policy of responding in kind, a principle that is accepted by human rights laws and customs as well as revealed religions.

The latest operations at Afula and Hadera, which targeted troops and settlers but did injure some civilians, were for the purpose of deterring the barbaric Zionist aggression against our people. They were also a legitimate retaliation for the blood of martyrs in the criminal Hebron massacre. Nonetheless, this is not the immutable policy of the Qassam Brigades, but an extraordinary policy imposed on us by the government of the enemy.

Yet, Hamas stands ready to reconsider this extraordinary policy on condition that the prime minister of the enemy, his government, and his army pledge finally and irrevocably to cease killing unarmed Palestinian civilians. Our goal is to guarantee the safety and security of our people by deterring murderous aggressors so that our kin may not remain easy targets for enemy soldiers and rabid hoards of settlers. Hamas, of course, will continue its policy of resisting the occupation as long as it oppresses our land.

Third: The intensification of the sacred struggle and of the heroic operations by the holy warriors in the Qassam Brigades comes in the context of the movement's strategy to resist the occupation until it is chased away and our sacred land is liberated.

Steeped in trickery and deception and desiring to cover up the utter failure it suffered at the hands of our holy warriors, the Rabin government, in an attempt to distort the image of Hamas in the international community, maliciously claims that the operations of Hamas and its holy struggle aim to sabotage the peace and to render it worthless.

As we have declared repeatedly, Hamas does not oppose the principle of peace. However, the peace that the government of the enemy offers is not peace but a consolidation of occupation and inequity against our people.

We realize well that the Oslo process is but a process of shameful capitulation on the part of the PLO and a submission to Zionist and American conditions and dictates. It is also a process that carries within it the seeds of its own destruction, and its fate is one of complete failure because it is built on a false and unjust foundation.

The correct beginning [for peace] rests on the following bases:

1. Complete Zionist withdrawal from our Palestinian land and the dismantling and elimination of its settlements.
2. Conducting general and free elections in the West Bank and Gaza to choose representatives and a leadership for our people.
3. The elected leadership would be the ones to articulate the hopes and goals of our people and to decide on all succeeding steps including the future of our cause.

Hamas, as it clarifies its positions to refute the allegations and utterances of the prime minister of the enemy, pledges to our people to continue on the road of holy struggle (jihad) and martyrdom until Palestine—all Palestine—is liberated.

The Political Bureau
The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)
5 Dhul Qi'da 1414 AH/16 April 1994 AD

DOCUMENT NO. 5

An Important Memorandum from the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) to the Kings, Presidents, and Ministers Meeting at Sharm al-Sheikh

In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful:

Majesties, Highnesses, Excellencies—the Conferees at Sharm al-Sheikh:

Being convinced of the necessity of informing you of the nature of the Islamic Resistance Movement and clarifying the imperatives that govern its political and military work, we present to you this memorandum to explain our goals and policies, hoping that it will gain your careful attention.

We, in Hamas, are a political movement resisting occupation and its actions, which violate the canons of revealed law and many principles of international law both in times of peace and war.

Our movement strives to accomplish this in two ways. The first method is political. Inasmuch as Hamas is a part of the national liberation movement of the Palestinian people, it seeks to gain their internationally established national rights, foremost among them being the rights of self-determination, establishing an independent state, and the return of all refugees and displaced persons to their homes.

The second method is military. This flows in the same direction as the first; this method was resorted to only after all political and peaceful means were exhausted without the Palestinian people and its national movement seeing any tangible results that might lead to the realization of our national goals.

Hamas believes in political work, just as it believes in armed struggle, because each has a role in realizing these rights. Further, Hamas with its two wings, the political and the military, is regarded as a national resistance and liberation movement working against the occupiers, who are considered transgressors against contemporary international law. Hence, the armed actions of members of the Qassam Brigades ought to be consid-

ered as defensive actions, with the exception of some unintended injuries to civilians that are in any case contrary to Hamas's established policy.

We regard the Israeli presence in all its forms in the West Bank, Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip to be an occupational presence—this being consistent with the text of successive UN resolutions and with the announced official positions of most governments in the world since 1967.

In particular, UN Security Council Resolution No. 242 called for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories that were occupied in 1967, but the Israeli authorities still refuse to comply with the text and spirit of this resolution.

The fundamental cause of instability in the Middle East derives from continuous Israeli aggression against the rights of the Palestinian people, aggression that began with usurping its land and exiling its people to various corners of the world under the bayonets of terrorism and intimidation. Israel still applies against the Palestinian people all manner of stringent repressive measures that ignore the basic forms of human rights as enunciated in international agreements, the Fourth Geneva Convention, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In addition, it maintains complete control of Palestinian natural resources, arrogating to itself the right to dispose of private and public property as it sees fit, and facilitating the settlement of Jews migrating from Russia, eastern Europe, and other places. Israel continues to do these things despite signing a peace agreement with the PLO.

Legitimacy of Resisting Military Occupation

Using as a point of departure the principle that international law and order rejects the occupation of other's territory by force, the UN Charter obligates member nations to implement the decisions of the UN Security Council in armed conflicts. The charter also gives to members of the Security Council the right to use force and other sanctions against any member not complying with these decisions. Further, international law and conventions give to every individual and group, especially those falling under military occupation by a foreign power, the right to self-defense with every available means. And it gives to others the right to support this resistance in all its forms with the necessary material means until the occupying power complies with UN resolutions and decisions.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the Israeli "death squads" that belong to the Ministry of Defense and operate in the Occupied Territories. As confirmed by Amnesty International, death squad members wear Arab

civilian clothes as disguises and use standard military methods to shoot their victims at very close distances ranging from 1 to 5 meters, usually aiming above the waist, most often at the head, finishing off the wounded while fleeing. The terrorist mission of these squads are backed by units of the Israeli army and endorsed by the Israeli government.

Under international law, Hamas is considered a part of the national liberation movement of the Palestinian people and represents a large segment of it. Hamas thus enjoys certain rights within the general rules of international law in its two parts: rules of peace and rules of war. No party has the right to infringe on them or to deprive Hamas of exercising them, especially in the fields of information, politics, self-defense, and political participation in the self-determination of the Palestinians.

The UN Charter and a number of UN General Assembly resolutions state that if any state continuously violates the rules of international law, particularly rules pertaining to human rights like premeditated killing, torture, widespread destruction of homes, long-term administrative detention, racial discrimination, and other enduring violations of basic, internationally recognized human rights, then the people under its authority—whether colonized, occupied, or submitting to dictatorial fascists or a racist regime—have the right to bear arms and to struggle against such rule. This is considered the same as self-defense.

The Bases for Palestinian Resistance to Occupation

Palestinian resistance of Israeli occupation derives from three bases:

1. The legitimacy of resisting military occupation in accordance with UN General Assembly resolutions adopted unanimously at its fortieth session, and which emphasized the legality of people's struggles and national liberation movements.
2. Israel's refusal to comply with international decisions, which action falls under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter that requires the imposition of sanctions. Thus far, the international community has not done this.
3. The Israeli authorities have been engaging in terrorist practices and wide-ranging transgressions against the human rights of the Palestinian people. These practices require that the people confront and struggle against this terrorism in defense of self, land, wealth, and property.

The Policies of Hamas in Resisting Occupation

In its resistance operations to occupation, Hamas follows a number of basic policies that conform to international laws and conventions. The most important among them are the following:

1. To restrict its engagements and confrontation only to army units and some armed formations that support them.
2. To exercise the right of self-defense against agents of occupation or raids by armed settlers.
3. To focus on military or semi-military targets and to avoid other targets, especially civilians, including women, children, and the elderly.
4. To respect the humanity of the other side even under conditions of armed engagement. Contrary to what the forces of occupation do to our people, we do not engage in mutilation, defacement, or over-killing.
5. Not to target Western individuals or interests in the Occupied Territories or outside.
6. Not to carry out any operation outside occupied Palestine and to concentrate the effort inside the Occupied Territories—that being the natural and legitimate arena of confrontation given the occupation.

In contrast with these policies, statistics of international and human rights organizations confirm the high proportion of Palestinian children and women killed and wounded at the hands of Israeli troops during the years of the intifada. The children were victimized even while playing innocently in the streets; the women were victimized while on peaceful protest marches, while doing their household chores, or as they passed by a demonstration on some street. In one engagement between armed settlers and unarmed Palestinian civilians, a young Israeli woman was killed. The settlers claimed that Palestinians killed her, thus justifying abusing them, but an investigation showed that she was killed mistakenly by one of the settlers.

Meanwhile, secret special forces—death squads—whose practical motto is “aim to kill” murder unarmed Palestinians. They once shot 400 bullets into the body of the martyr Yasir al-Namrouti on 18 July 1992, a clear expression of savagery, barbarism, and terrorism, as the body did not require all these bullets to ensure its death.

As a result of these practices, which represent but a few examples of what unarmed civilians face at the hands of the Israeli occupiers, it was inevitable that the Palestinian people would resort to arms. But Israeli forces, having failed to put an end to this phenomenon that became endemic to every town, street, and neighborhood, resorted to terrorism, revenge attacks, and collective punishment of various forms and types. These included the destruction of Palestinian homes with anti-tank weapons and the destruction of homes of martyrs as well as suspects, leaving their families homeless.

Although in the latest operations only regular army units that practice terrorism against Palestinians were attacked, the Israeli government conducted an international propaganda campaign, accusing us of terrorism in an attempt to cover up its own terrorism against the Palestinians. It resorted to the strategy of “a good offense is the best defense.” Nothing illustrates this better than Rabin’s statement while defense minister: “To achieve our objective, we do not wait for violence from the other side, but rather, stage incidents to teach those who engage in violence a lesson. In most cases, confrontations were at the initiative [of the army]” (*The Times*, 4 April 1988).

Operations of the Qassam Brigades are directed against army units and similar military formations. In one of these encounters, three holy warriors faced one thousand Israeli soldiers with their heavy weapons and support helicopters. In another, the attack was directed against encampments of army units assigned the task of repressing citizens and terrorizing them.

Despite the modest means of Palestinian fighters in comparison with the vast resources of Israeli authorities, they display determination to continue in the uneven confrontation. This is because they are convinced of the justice of their cause and the conformity of their undertaking with international law, UN resolutions, and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. This is especially justified in the absence of intervention on the part of the international community to stop Israeli terrorism and to oblige Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Territories. The Palestinian fighters, moreover, adhere scrupulously to Islamic rules and standards that confirm all the contents of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Fourth Geneva Convention. At the same time, they believe that they are waging a war against an occupation whose implements of repression and terrorism are legitimate targets.

Israel’s continual closure of the West Bank and Gaza and the prevention of movement by people within them, its incursions into the towns to arrest suspects, its declaration of some areas as closed military zones, in

addition to its expansion of settlements and preventing officials of the Palestinian Authority from movement among cities or from entering them—as happened once when Yasir Arafat was denied entry into Nablus after some Hamas military operation—all confirm that the Israeli government still performs governmental functions, particularly security ones, in the PA areas and that the occupation is still in place. Hence armed resistance is legitimate despite the signing of the present peace agreements.

Despite Hamas's rejection of the Israeli project for self-rule and its decision not to participate in the process—because it contradicts UN resolutions and international law, falsifies history and the facts, and makes the future of Palestinians uncertain, it has not used any type of violence or political assassination against the Palestinian side that has participated in it.

Hamas espouses a political and operational program that it believes to be more effective in ending the occupation than the weak self-rule project. It declares that it is for a peace based on truth, justice, and the restoration of rights.

In the light of the preceding, the correct definition of Hamas is that it is a resistance movement, a movement for constructing and building a Palestinian society, a national movement for expressing the hopes and ambitions of a people under occupation or in exile. It should be remembered, however, that resistance to occupation is tied more intimately to the Palestinian people than to Hamas or other movements.

Hamas began its activities by organizing protests, demonstrations, and other intifada programs. This continued for two years. But the escalation of Zionist repression and terrorism pushed it to defend itself and the Palestinian people with more effective means, including military confrontations with the armed pillars of occupation. In this, it has adopted legitimate means in accordance with international law. For instance, it adheres to international conventions pertaining to human rights and does not use force except in the face of terrorism and its Israeli instruments. This is in harmony with international approaches to fighting terrorism and strengthening respect for human rights and spreading freedom and democracy all over the world.

Based on this, it is incumbent upon the international community to support and foster this Movement and to cooperate with it in connection with realizing these goals. It must pressure Israel to implement UN resolutions and respect international conventions pertaining to the occupied Arab territories and force it to withdraw.

In conclusion, we assure you that Hamas has made many offers for a cease-fire on just conditions. But the Israeli side ignored these offers and

intensified its terror of our people and Hamas leaders. Our movement is still ready to consider any effort, regional or international, which aims to achieve the same results especially in relation to preventing civilian casualties on both sides.

The justification for conducting military operations against Israeli targets is the continuation of occupation. These operations will cease automatically once the occupation ends. Contrariwise, international measures that support the Zionist position against Hamas will not be the right door to a solution to the conflict and will be a cause for increased violence, terrorism, and savagery on the part of the Israeli occupiers and perhaps of the Palestinian Authority.

We call on you to adopt your previous positions of demanding an immediate withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces and erasing all manifestations of occupation and opening the way for the Palestinian people to exercise its right for self-determination. We call upon you further to pressure the Israeli government to respond to the voices of wisdom and reason by dealing positively with the initiatives offered several times by Hamas. We would welcome any evenhanded mediation you might offer.

We remind you once again that we reject the principle of political assassination, as we reject achieving political aims by violent means. We believe, however, that it is our right to resist military occupation and Israeli terrorism and its aggressive measures against our people. Even so, we prohibit our military cadres from targeting civilians and affirm our determination to avoid harming them when attacking military targets.

Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)
Palestine
13 March 1996

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