

THE MIDDLE EAST IN TURMOIL SERIES

ISRAEL VS. HAMAS

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Chapter 1

HAMAS AND ISRAEL: CONFLICTING STRATEGIES OF GROUP-BASED POLITICS

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SUMMARY

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis has heightened since 2001, even as any perceived threat to Israel from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, or even Syria, has declined. Israel, according to Chaim Herzog, Israel's sixth President, had been "born in battle" and would be "obliged to live by the sword."¹ Yet, the Israeli government's conquest and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza brought about a very difficult challenge, although resistance on a mass basis was only taken up years later in the First Intifadha. Israel could not tolerate Palestinian Arabs' resistance of their authority on the legal basis of denial of self-determination,² and eventually preferred to grant some measures of self-determination while continuing to consolidate control of the Occupied Territories, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza. However, a comprehensive peace, shimmering in the distance, has eluded all. Inter-Israeli and inter-Palestinian divisions deepened as peace danced closer before retreating.

Israel's stance towards the democratically-elected Palestinian government headed by HAMAS in 2006, and towards Palestinian national coherence—legal, territorial, political, and economic—has been a major obstacle to substantive peacemaking. The reasons for recalcitrant Israeli and HAMAS stances illustrate both continuities and changes in the dynamics of

conflict since the Oslo period (roughly 1994 to the al-Aqsa Intifadha of 2000). Now, more than ever, a long-term truce and negotiations are necessary. These could lead in stages to that mirage-like peace, and a new type of security regime.

The rise in popularity and strength of the HAMAS (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, or Movement of the Islamic Resistance) Organization and its interaction with Israel is important to an understanding of Israel's "Arab" policies and its approach to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. The crisis brought about by the electoral success of HAMAS in 2006 also challenged Western powers' commitment to democratic change in the Middle East because Palestinians had supported the organization in the polls. Thus, the viability of a two- state solution rested on an Israeli acknowledgement of the Islamist movement, HAMAS, and on Fatah's ceding power to it.

Shifts in Israel's stated national security objectives (and dissent over them) reveal HAMAS' placement at the nexus of Israel's domestic, Israeli-Palestinian, and regional objectives. Israel has treated certain enemies differently than others: Iran, Hizbullah, and Islamist Palestinians (whether HAMAS, supporters of Islamic Jihad, or the Islamic Movement inside Israel) all fall into a particular rubric in which Islamism—the most salient and enduring socio-religious movement in the Middle East in the wake of Arab nationalism—is identified with terrorism and insurgency rather than with group politics and identity. The antipathy to religious fervor was somewhat ironic in light of Israel's own expanding "religious" (*haredim*) groups. In Israel's earlier decades, Islamic identity politics were understood and successfully repressed, as Israelis did not want to allow any repetition of the Palestinian Mufti's nationalism or the Qassamiyya (the armed brigades in the 1936-39 rebellion).

Yet at the same time, identity politics and religious attitudes were not eradicated, but were inside of Israel, bringing about great inequality as well as physical and psychological separation of the Jewish and non- Jewish populations.³ This represented efforts to control politically and physically the now 20 percent Arab minority, and dealt with the demographic threat constantly spoken of in Israel by warding off intermarriage, limiting property control and rights, and physical access. Still today, some Israeli politicians call for an exodus by Palestinian-Israelis (so-called Arab-Israelis) in some areas, who they wish to resettle in the West Bank.

For decades, Muslim religious properties and institutions were managed under Jewish supervision— substantial inter-Israeli conflict over that supervision notwithstanding⁴ — and this allowed for a continuing stereotype of the recalcitrant, anti-modern Muslims and Arabs who were punished for any expression of Palestinian (or Arab) nationalism by replacing them— imams or qadis, for instance—with more quiescent Israeli Muslims, and by retaining Jewish control over endowment (*waqf*), properties, and income.

Contemporary Islamism took hold in Palestinian society, as it has throughout the Middle East and has, to a great degree, supplanted secular nationalism. This is problematic in terms of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians because the official Israeli position towards key Islamists— Iran, Hizbullah, and the Palestinian groups like HAMAS, Islamic Jihad, or Hizb al-Tahrir — characterizes them as Israel-haters and terrorists. They have become the existential threat to Israel (along with Iran) since the demise of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Israel steadfastly rejected diplomacy and truce offers by HAMAS for 8 months in 2008, despite an earlier truce that held for several years. By the spring of 2008, continued rejection of a truce was politically risky as Prime Minister Ehud Olmert teetered on the edge of indictment by his own party and finally had to announce his resignation in the summer. In fact, on his way out the door, Olmert announced a peace plan that ignores HAMAS and many demands of the Palestinian Authority as a whole ever since Oslo. If the plan was merely to create a sense of Olmert's legacy, it is not altogether clear why it offered so little compromise.

On the other hand, Israelis have for over a year⁵ been discussing the wisdom of reconquering the Gaza Strip (a prospect that would aid the Fatah side of the Palestinian Authority) and also engage in “preemptive deterrence” or attacks on other states in the region. This could happen at any time if the truce between Israel and HAMAS breaks down, although the risks of any of these enterprises would be high. A potential deal with Syria was also announced by Olmert, similarly, perhaps, to stave off his own resignation, and Syria made a counteroffer.⁶ Turkish-mediated indirect talks were to continue at the time of this writing, though they might be rescheduled.⁷ Support for an Israeli attack on Iran continues to play well in the Israeli media, despite the fact that Israelis argue fiercely about the wisdom of such a course. All of this shows flux in the region, with Israel in its customary strong, but concerned position.

HAMAS emerged as the chief rival to the secularist- nationalist framework of Fatah, the dominant member of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). This occurred as Palestinians rebelled against the worsening conditions they experienced following the Oslo Peace Accords. HAMAS' political and strategic development has been both ignored and misreported in Israeli and Western sources which villainize the group, much as the PLO was once characterized as an anti-Semitic terrorist group.⁸ Relatively few detailed treatments in English counter the media blitz that reduces HAMAS to its early, now defunct, 1988 charter.

Disagreements within the Israeli military and political establishments over the national security objectives of that country reveal HAMAS' placement at the nexus of Israel's domestic, Palestinian, and regional objectives. This process can be traced back to Ariel Sharon's formation of the KADIMA Party and decision to withdraw unilaterally from Gaza without engaging in a peace process with Palestinians. This reflected a new

understanding that Arab armies were unlikely to launch any successful attack against Israel, but Israel should focus instead on protecting its Jewish citizens via barrier methods.⁹

This new thinking coexists alongside the longstanding policies described by Yitzhak Shamir as aggressive defense; in other words, offensives aimed at increasing Israel's strategic depth, or attacking potential threats in neighboring countries—as in the raid on the nearly completed nuclear power facility at Osirak, Iraq, in 1981, or the mysterious Operation ORCHARD carried out on a weapons cache in Syria in September 2007, or in the invasions, air, and ground wars (1978, 1982, 2006) in Lebanon.

Israelis considered occupied Palestinian territories valuable in land-for-peace negotiations. During the Oslo process, according to Israelis, Israel was ready to withdraw entirely to obtain peace.¹⁰ Actually, the value of land to trade for peace and costs of maintaining security for the settlers there, as well as containing the uprisings, were complicated equations. Palestinians and others argue that, in fact, Israel offered no more in the various proposed exchanges than the less valuable portion of the western West Bank and Gaza, and refused to deal with outstanding issues such as the fate of Palestinian refugees (4,913,993 Palestinians live outside of Israel¹¹ and the occupied territories; 1,337,388 according to UNRWA¹² — registered refugees—live in camps, and 3,166,781 live outside of camps),¹³ prisoners, water, and the claim of Jerusalem as a capital.

Many Arabs believe that Israel never intended the formation of a Palestinian state, and that its land- settlement policies during the Oslo period provide proof of its true intentions. Either way, the “Oslo optimism” faded away between Israelis and Palestinians with the al-Aqsa (Second) Intifadha in October 2000.

The Israeli Right, and part of its Left, claimed that the diplomatic collapse, plus Arafat's government's corruption, showed there was no “partner to peace.” Another segment of the Israeli Left has continued until this day to argue for land-for-peace and complete withdrawal from the territories.

According to Barry Rubin, the Israeli military felt the Palestinian threat would not increase, and that if settlers could be evacuated and a stronger line of defense erected, they might better defend their citizenry. That defense could not be achieved with suicide attacks ongoing in Israeli population centers. When earlier Israeli strategies had not achieved an end to Palestinian Islamist violence, Israelis had pushed this task onto the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority in the 1990s.¹⁴ Pointing to the failures of the Palestinian Authority, the new Israeli “securitist” (*bitchonist*, in Hebrew, or security-focused) strategy moved away from negotiations, and called for further separation and segregation of the Israeli population from Palestinians. Neither a full-blown physical resistance by Palestinians, including suicide attacks, or the missiles launched from Gaza could be dealt with in this manner. The first depended on granting Palestinians rights to partial self-

government, and the missile attacks were negotiated in Israel's June 2008 truce.

Israel claimed significant victories in its war against Palestinians by the use of targeted killings of leadership, boycotts, power cuts, preemptive attacks and detentions, and punishments to militant's families, relatives, and neighborhoods etc., because its counterterrorism logic is to reduce insurgents' organizational capability. This particular type of Israeli analysis rejects the idea that counterterrorist violence can spark more resistance and violence,¹⁵ but one proponent also admitted that Israel had not "defeated the will to resistance" [of Palestinians].¹⁶ This admission suggests that the tactics employed might not be indefinitely manageable, and that Palestinians, despite every possible effort made to weaken or incriminate them, to discourage or prevent their Arab non-Palestinian supporters from defending their interests, and to buy the services of collaborators, could edge Israelis back toward comprehensive negotiations, or rise up again against them. Moshe Sharett, Israel's second Prime Minister, once asked: "Do people consider that when military reactions outstrip in their severity the events that caused them, grave processes are set in motion which widen the gulf and thrust our neighbors into the extremist camp? How can this deterioration be halted?"¹⁷

HAMAS and its new wave of political thought, which had supported armed resistance along with the aim to create an Islamic society, had overtaken Fatah in popularity. Fatah, with substantial U.S. support edged closer to Israeli positions over 2006-07, promising to diminish Palestinian resistance, although President Mahmud Abbas had no means to do so, and could not even ensure Fatah's survival in the West Bank without HAMAS assent, and had been routed from Gaza.

Negotiating solely with the weaker Palestinian party—Fatah—cannot deliver the security Israel requires. This may lead Israel to reconquer the Gaza Strip or the West Bank and continue engaging in "preemptive deterrence" or attacks on other states in the region in the longer term.

The underlying strategies of Israel and HAMAS appear mutually exclusive and did not, prior to the summer of 2008, offer much hope of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict. Yet each side is still capable of revising its desired endstate and of necessary concessions to establish and preserve a longterm truce, or even a longer-term peace.

ENDNOTES – SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis has heightened since 2001, while at the same time any major military threat to Israel from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, or even Syria, has visibly declined. Israel, according to Chaim Herzog,

Israel's sixth President, had been "born in battle," and would be "obliged to live by the sword."¹ Yet, the Israeli government's conquest and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza brought about a very difficult challenge, although resistance on a mass basis was only taken up years later in the First Intifadha. Israel could not tolerate Palestinian Arabs' resistance of their authority on the legal basis of denial of self-determination,² and eventually preferred to grant some measures of self-determination while continuing to consolidate control of the territories. However, a comprehensive peace, shimmering in the distance, has eluded all. Inter-Israeli and inter-Palestinian divisions deepened as peace danced closer before retreating.

Israel's stance towards the democratically-elected Palestinian government headed by HAMAS in 2006 has been a major obstacle to substantive peacemaking. The reasons for Israel's position, and HAMAS' continuing verbal support of resistance, even as a fragile truce took hold on June 19, 2008, leads us to examine this relationship.

Since the outset of the Second, or Al-Aqsa, Intifadha in 2000,³ Israeli security forces have killed 4,718 Palestinians and 10 foreign citizens. Palestinians have killed 236 Israeli civilians, 244 Israeli security forces, and 17 foreign citizens.⁴ The numbers of dead and injured would be greatly inflated if we calculated the casualties in all of the Israeli-Arab wars. Another very negative outcome of the conflict that has inhibited Palestinian social and political development is the large numbers of Palestinians detained and imprisoned, more than 700,000 since 1967, and the vast majority were political prisoners. Today, some 8,500 (Israel's figure)⁵ to 11,229 (the Mandela Institute's figure) are in prison, including 375 juveniles, 104 women, and some 870 to 836 (B'tselem's figure) are administrative detainees, in addition to about 3,000 at the time of this writing held by the Palestinian Authority (PA) (who primarily represent HAMAS prisoners of the Fatah-dominated PA in the West Bank). It is difficult to find a Palestinian man, certainly not a HAMAS member of a certain age who has not experienced several temporary detentions and incarcerations. Israel's High Court banned torture in 1999 but still practices isolation, prolonged interrogation, threats to family members, and denial of access to lawyers.

The conflict has moreover become a Muslim cause, and at the same time, remains a national one. To make matters worse, the Palestinian use of suicide attacks increased since their first appearance in the 1990s as a tactic to avenge Israeli killings of Palestinian civilians.⁶ The many suicide attacks, often by self-recruited individuals, that became more frequent since 2000-01, presented a major challenge to Israel's defense of its population centers. The attractions of martyrdom were not a phenomenon that could easily be extinguished by the

Palestinian leadership, particularly when it had nothing concrete to offer its population in its stead, and the condition of that population had worsened, not improved, in the Oslo era. As peace agreements between Israel and Egypt and Jordan had cancelled out the possibility of effective Arab resistance to Israel, only Palestinian bottom-up or popular action remained an option to Palestinians unable to obtain relief through diplomacy or political participation. Nevertheless, Palestinians, and even HAMAS, moved in these latter directions.

The 2006 electoral success, subsequent Western and Israeli boycott of the HAMAS organization, and factional strife among Palestinians are important to an understanding of Islamist movements, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, and political development.

HAMAS' strategic development will be described more fully below. HAMAS members' internal debate on armed resistance is long-standing. As Dr. Naser El-Din Al-Shaer, former Dean of the Islamic University and Minister of Education until the HAMAS government was "fired" by Abbas, and a moderate who met with former President Jimmy Carter, explained:

If there is any attack on the Israelis, they speak of terrorism and terrorism, and more terrorism. If Hamas and Islamic Jihad and all of these armed groups [such as Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade] cease attacking Israel, then Israel will say: "Look, they've lost their power; and they can do nothing against us, so we are not going to give them anything."

So by which means will Israel give our land back to us? If we are fully sovereign and we can attack the Israelis, then they identify us as we are terrorists and the whole world is supposed to side with them against us. And if we talk about peace, they said, "look they aren't able to do anything, so look let us give them nothing." So which language do they understand?⁷

CURRENT CONTEXT

HAMAS confronted the dismantling of its educational and social initiatives over all the West Bank one and a half years after it began its struggle to govern. Citizens of West Bank towns were mistreated, brutally beaten, and detained on a nightly basis, not only by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) but also by Fatah- allied PA security officers.⁸ In just 1 week, Israel made 38 military raids or incursions into the West Bank, killing a child, wounding two others, and abducting 48 civilians (without charge) including juveniles. This included a raid into al-Far`a

refugee camp, responding to children demonstrating at the funeral of the child killed, and a demonstration against the separation Wall at Bil'in.⁹ This was perhaps a typical week in the West Bank, which, according to the Western media, is being peacefully controlled by the PA. Al-Shaer commented on those tortured in PA custody, including a 67-yearold man who had suffered a cerebral hemorrhage from severe beating. PA officers raided and closed the Islamic schools and charities, including one with 1,000 students, in Nablus, Hebron, and Jenin—which have large concentrations of HAMAS supporters—and their institutional boards were reconstituted with Fatah members. This is regarded widely as the PA's efforts to follow Israeli (and perceived American) directions to root out HAMAS' social support structure. Some 2,000 persons were arrested.

Shaer complained that the Abbas-controlled West Bank displayed a policy of "violence, not security," and reported other scandalous types of corruption ongoing in the Fayyad-managed government headed by Abbas. He warned again that the population only sees a choice between continued humiliation and a mass popular resistance, and that it might be impossible to reason against a new Intifadha.¹⁰ Just a day earlier, on August 10, Palestinians had responded to the campaign against HAMAS with a demonstration calling for national unity.¹¹

HAMAS ROOTS IN SHORT

HAMAS was at first a social and educational initiative of certain actors, primarily Shaykh Ahmed Yasin (c. 1937-2004) from within the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Yasin's natal village of al-Jura was destroyed during the 1948 war, and his family fled to Gaza. He became a quadriplegic after an accident at the age of 12, and attended alAzhar University in Cairo, where he was attracted to the Muslim Brotherhood.

HAMAS inherited all the hallmarks of a Muslim Brotherhood organization in its aim to create a more Islamic society out of a conviction that developing the proper structures¹² will bring about a truly moral (but not totalitarian) Islamic society. Further, it has emphasized unity among Muslims and idealizes Palestinian unity, and eschews *takfir* (rejectionism, defining others as false Muslims), a key aspect of the ideology of radical salafis such as Osama bin Ladin. For many years, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood had put political activism on hold in Gaza, and focused instead on delivering religious and social services and missionary activity (*da`wa*). This tactical strategy was necessary to ensure the Brotherhood's survival, as a result of the Egyptian government's severe suppression of the Brethren. Even when the Brethren were released from Egyptian jails, it was with

the understanding that the group would not seek legal party status. The group's tactical approach in Gaza was to focus first on creating an Islamic social and political entity, for doing so, the group held, would eventually return Palestine to the Palestinians.¹³

Eventually, the founders of HAMAS developed a wing for militant action, thus breaking with the Palestinian, Egyptian, and Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's more "movement-oriented" approach. HAMAS was then officially announced shortly after the outbreak of the First Intifadha. It gained support steadily in the population despite the signing of the Oslo Accords which the organization opposed, as did many other Palestinian factions and individuals. The suffering of much of the Palestinian population during the Oslo period, as well as the breakdown of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, together with Ariel Sharon's incitement of Palestinians by insisting on bringing troops and signaling Israeli authority over the Haram al-Sharif — the compound containing the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock that Israelis call the Temple Mount (to indicate the ruins of the Second Temple underneath the ground) in Jerusalem—led to the al-Aqsa or Second Intifadha. In this second popular uprising, HAMAS, as well as Fatah-linked organizations, engaged in militancy.

In the 1990s, HAMAS had become a refuge for many of those Palestinians who disagreed with the aims and leadership of the Oslo initiative. A substantial number of members of the Popular Committees of the PLO, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) also opposed Oslo, but these groups and HAMAS could agree on little other than continued resistance. The main thrust of HAMAS activities was not militant actions against Israel, but rather social, charitable, educational, and political programs aimed at Palestinians.

Civil society organizations delivering services and aid to the population have long been important in Palestinian camps and areas. Those created by the various arms of the PLO rivaled each other, and also to some extent the traditional elites in Palestinian society. HAMAS was also able to draw on the salience of religion in an Islamizing society. The number of mosques in Gaza doubled between 1967 and 1987. The Mujama` Islami model in Gaza established by Shaykh Yassin provided a different type of mosque community than the traditional one, offering affordable services and programs, often located within the mosques themselves.¹⁴

HAMAS also founded the Scientific Medical Association in 1997 which operated medical and dental services and a blood bank.¹⁵ The group established the Association for Science and Culture, and provided education from kindergarten through eighth grade for Gazans. The Islamic Workers Union was set up in 1992. All of these efforts were extremely important, as were the creation

of other educational bodies and the establishment of student blocs of support and organizations of professionals and women's associations which challenged some of the more secular- feminist orientation of other Palestinian groups.¹⁶

Especially after September 11, 2001 (9/11), U.S. advisors argued that a crackdown on HAMAS' charitable activities was of paramount importance. Dennis Ross and Matthew Levitt characterize the group's charitable and educational activities as nefarious efforts at recruitment, or to socialize new suicide bombers,¹⁷ decrying the addition of "Koranic memorization centers" that "mimic in a religious setting the tight clique-like structure of the terrorist cell."¹⁸ American and Israeli targeting of Muslim charitable or social organizations was not a novel policy. Israeli and American pressure had already been put on Arafat who closed more than 20 HAMAS organizations in 1997, and more closures took place in 2001 and 2002.¹⁹ What was new, post-9/11, was an additional series of attacks on organizations thought to provide aid to HAMAS from abroad such as the Holy Land Foundation in the United States which was closed in 2001, but against which the government failed to secure a conviction in the Dallas-based trial which concluded in 2007.²⁰ The logic that the PA could replace the charitable and social services provided by HAMAS was faulty. It did not, but an important aim of HAMAS in 2004-05 was to reinstate some services to which it devotes the majority (something like 95 percent) of its annual budget.

Given the favorable perception of HAMAS, the negative perception of Arafat's clique-like leadership, and chaotic battles between youths loyal to different groups, as well as criminality and corruption, no one should have been surprised by HAMAS' electoral victory in 2006. At the time of this writing, the Israeli military and security sectors are in disaccord over the proper approach to the Palestinian population and HAMAS, despite a fragile truce engineered by external Arab states, which began June 19, 2008.

This monograph suggests that an understanding of the diverging paths of Israeli and HAMAS' strategic thought, along with an overview of HAMAS' development, explains the stand-off. Further, an understanding of the American role in the emergence of a regional security regime is useful. The United States can project power, aid deterrence, provide equipment, elicit cooperation, and provide formal and informal guarantees, thus its role seems essential in any solution to the current deadlock. However, the type of security regime that the United States supports, such as the alliance between Israel and Mahmud Abbas' Fatah elements of the PA, may not necessarily be effective or durable, as Robert Lieber had suggested in a general analysis of the issue in the period following the first Gulf War.²¹

Disagreements within the Israeli military and political establishments over the national security objectives of that country reveal HAMAS' placement at the nexus of Israel's domestic, Palestinian, and regional objectives. This process can be traced back to Ariel Sharon's formation of the KADIMA Party, and the decision to withdraw unilaterally from Gaza without engaging in a peace process with Palestinians.

The reasons for this new strategy were: the assumption that it is unlikely that Arab armies would launch a conventional attack against Israel; fear of vulnerability within Israeli-held areas; and Israeli unwillingness to bargain with key Palestinian leadership (Arafat, the "new" Fatah as represented by imprisoned political figure Marwan Barghouti, or the Hamas leaders). It was now thought that Israel should hold to a defensive line encircling its citizens rather than holding on to Gaza and the West Bank for troop dispersal.²² This new thinking comprised a defensive strategy that did not exactly replace, but stood alongside other Israeli approaches, for instance, that described by Yitzhak Shamir as aggressive defense, in other words, offensives aimed at creating security zones—in the south of Lebanon, notably to extend Israel's strategic depth.

The occupied territories had also been thought of as being valuable in land for peace negotiations, and during the Oslo process, according to one line of Israeli thought, Israel was ready to withdraw entirely in order to obtain peace.²³ Palestinians might argue that, in fact, Israel was never serious about this exchange, and its land-settlement policies during the Oslo period demonstrate this, as hundreds of settlements were established and/or expanded, and settlers were provided with various types of incentives, tax breaks, and other benefits. Settlers' safety, particularly in transit to and from the settlements, is an enormous headache for the Israeli authorities. Their resort to vigilante violence against Palestinians is an aspect of the conflict often overlooked in the Western media. Added to this lack of commitment was the failure of the parties to grapple with final status issues—Palestinian refugees, Jerusalem, etc. The optimism about negotiating and "Oslo expectations" faded with the al-Aqsa Intifadha, and Israelis blamed Palestinians for this failure, leading to claims and frequent statements from the Israeli Right and part of the Israeli Left that there was no "partner to peace."

Another segment of the Israeli Left has continued until this day to argue for land-for-peace and complete withdrawal from the territories. Still others recalculated the main threat as Palestinians who could, and did, threaten Israeli centers of population with suicide bombings, adding to that threat, the Palestinians living inside of Israel (Arab Israelis) who make up 20 percent of the population. Calls for their relocation or repatriation to the West Bank continue, and their employment, and that of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza, has been

supplanted, Israeli policies against immigrant workers notwithstanding, by foreign non-Jewish immigrant workers.

According to Barry Rubin, the Israeli military felt the threat posed by Palestinians would not significantly increase, but that if settlers could be evacuated and a stronger line of defense erected, they could better defend their citizenry. That thinking led to the Wall or Security Fence. The remaining threat was missiles launched from Gaza, and indeed these continued. Israel claimed significant victories in its war against Palestinians by the use of targeted killings of leadership, boycotts, power cuts, etc., but also admitted that it had not “defeated the will to resistance.”²⁴ Of course, this sentiment speaks directly to the ultimate challenge of all insurgencies in which the settler, or colonial, or invading power, essentially loses the war, if not specific battles, from the moment the resistance gains popular support.²⁵ And it shows that the situation might not be indefinitely manageable, and that Palestinians, despite every possible effort made to weaken, incriminate, and separate Arab allies from their interests, or pay collaborators, might yet edge Israelis—if they move away from their own politicians’ and military’s thinking—back toward comprehensive negotiations.

In a remarkable sequence of events, Fatah elements of the PA battled HAMAS and, despite the military training provided to them under U.S. auspices, they lost control of Gaza. The fratricidal 4-day conflict resulted in 80 fatalities; some were the settling of old scores, said Hanan Ashrawi, an independent Palestinian politician. Fatah and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades carried out revenge actions, killing some, abducting some 23 persons, and attacking HAMAS-linked institutions in the West Bank. In a confusing move, thought to originate with U.S. advice but also with Israeli stances toward HAMAS in mind,²⁶ Mahmoud Abbas (whose supporters had lost the election, but who had been named to head the government because HAMAS wanted a unity government with Fatah) said he would dissolve his Cabinet, including Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of HAMAS, and that he would call for new elections. Haniyeh declared his intent to establish order in Gaza and called Abbas’ decision hasty.²⁷

HAMAS, which keeps only a token force in the West Bank, and does not admit its strength there, did not interfere with Abbas, but as his decision to replace Haniyeh with Salim Fayyad was illegal, Haniyeh is regarded as the Prime Minister of the PA by many Palestinians. The issue was that Abbas could dissolve the Cabinet, but had no constitutional right to appoint a new prime minister, or to dissolve the elected Parliament or call for new elections (which Israelis, Fatah, and perhaps Washington, hoped would undo the HAMAS’ majority).

HAMAS set about restoring order in Gaza, and Abbas refused to recognize the HAMAS government there and, likewise, the Israelis and Americans speak

only with his faction. Palestinians in Gaza then experienced an Israeli, American, and European cutoff of funds, then services, fuel, medicines, and finally food. The boycott on funds appeared to be a somewhat desperate attempt to cause Palestinians to overthrow HAMAS in Gaza in 2007. People began using cooking oil to drive automobiles and taxis, and were severely impacted by the boycott and closure.

Sieges abound in the history of warfare. The names of Jerusalem, Vienna, and Missaloughi come to mind. The idea of provoking a popular uprising has also recurred; unsuccessfully pursued by the British, French, and Israelis in the 1956 Suez (or Tripartite) War. Anthony Eden supposed the Egyptian population would overthrow President Jamal abd al-Nasir. Ironically, the attacks cemented Nasir's popularity and vindicated his claims that the former colonial powers were conspiring with the new Zionist state they had helped establish. This time around, the *Jerusalem Post* trumpeted every action against HAMAS in Gaza and every instance of violence against Fatah, and many articles expressed fear of life in an Islamic state, which the *Post* calls "Hamastan." Yet, the Gazan population did not overthrow their leadership.

All in all, HAMAS, after the initial, very regrettable violence in Gaza, restored order, and though continuing to battle certain powerful clans, earned respect; instituting the first "911" emergency telephone service, and operating more efficiently than expected, considering the boycott and the organized violence directed against it by the above-mentioned clans (like the Dughmush) and Fatah, both with external funding.²⁸ HAMAS discouraged the pro-Al-Qai'da groups operating in Gaza, although they did not have total control over the Islamic Army or Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

In February 2008, almost one-half of the 1.2 million Gazan population breached the Egyptian border to buy food and supplies that they had been denied for months under the Israeli boycott. This created a good deal of stress on the Israeli-Egyptian political relationship. Israel expected Egypt to moderate, even terminate its support for HAMAS; something that the Egyptian government could not do, given the strength of popular Egyptian support for HAMAS and the Palestinians trapped in Gaza. Israel (and also Washington) have maintained since that a condition of allowing the Rafah border to be opened would be for the Egyptians to pressure HAMAS from using the tunnels, allegedly used to bring arms into Gaza, although more recently to bring in food. Egypt agreed to dynamite the tunnels, but they remain an issue. Further, Israel wanted Egypt to pressure HAMAS to release Gilad Shalit. Shalit, an Israeli soldier, was captured in a raid on the Kerem Shalom crossing on June 25, 2006, by three armed groups,

one of which was the Army of Islam. He was eventually transferred to HAMAS' custody, and the movement wants a prisoner exchange.

For months Israel steadfastly rejected diplomacy involving HAMAS and HAMAS' truce appeals as offered by Ismail Haniyeh early in 2008, but after efforts by Saudi Arabia and Qatar to mend the conflict between Fatah and HAMAS and a deal negotiated by Egypt, it entered into a temporary 6-month truce with HAMAS on June 19, 2008.²⁹

Israel's greatest fear has been a united, properly coordinated and prepared Arab and Palestinian attack. Given Israel's rejection of all comprehensive peace offers by the Arabs and its forging and maintenance of separate agreements with Egypt and Jordan, it no longer fears such a coordinated attack by Palestinians and other Arab nations. It also seeks to prevent Palestinian factions from uniting and pursuing a full scale resistance as during the Al Aqsa Intifadha. Then actions coincided, although the factions were far from unified.

It has frequently been predicted that Israel should (and could) reconquer the Gaza strip, a rather futile overturning of its "new strategy," or, as suggested prior to HAMAS' electoral victory, engage the Palestinians in a war over the West Bank, or both. The "conflict-oriented" elements in Israel want it to engage in "preemptive deterrence" or attacks on other states in the region, perhaps Iran,³⁰ Lebanon³¹ (because lack of preparation for the 2006 war was deemed the main issue), or Syria³² in the longer term.

HAMAS' initial strategy of armed resistance and popular uprising against Israel has been tamed as it has instead pursued political participation, accepted the notion of a limited area of an envisioned Palestinian state, and in its calmings and truces which acknowledge (and therefore "recognize") Israel in a *de facto* manner.³³ It was severely criticized for this change in strategy by Ayman Zawahiri. Yet it continues to hold out the threat of popular resistance should negotiations fail and occupation continue, and is struggling militarily and politically against Fatah, its brother organization. Such civil strife is not HAMAS' preferred mode, and it has taken many unwanted steps and actions to seek an end to this strife which is fueled by external actors as well as internal divisions. HAMAS has put its vision of an Islamic state on hold as well as its general political stance of "positive versus negative freedom"³⁴—tolerating, even recommending diversity and representation of other groups, if Palestinian autonomy can be pursued.

The underlying strategies of both Israel and HAMAS do not elicit strong optimism in a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian-Arab conflict, but each is still capable of revising its strategies, or desired end-states and establishing a long-term truce, or better yet, a longer-term peace.

A peaceful resolution to this conflict should remain a primary objective of Israel, the Palestinians, other Arab and Muslim nations, and of the United States. The Arab- Israeli conflict has complicated regional development in myriad ways, and remains a key grievance for a far broader Muslim population who see in it perfidy and hypocrisy by Israel, and that Israel's strongest ally, the United States, has not acted as a fair and neutral broker in affairs of the region.

If the next American president turns his attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a sustained, methodical, and creative manner together with other Quartet members and perhaps Arab delegates until resolution, then an important co-condition for success in the Global War on Terror will be achieved, as well as an enormous benefit to the citizens, economies, and political development of the region.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

A better understanding of HAMAS, its history and evolution, the reasons for and level of sympathies from Palestinians and other Muslim and Arab nations for the organization, and its stances on various issues is imperative for policymakers because the Islamist and nationalist base of support for the organization and its essential principles is not likely to disappear.

To the degree that the United States is committed to the establishment of a just and sovereign Palestinian entity, it would also behoove policymakers to consider carefully the ramifications of making alliances selectively with specific groups and actors in any society. The consequences of such alliances forged during the Saddam period with opposition groups can now be seen in Iraq, where the obvious "losers" in the new balance of power, Sunni Arabs, especially those with geographical and political links to the former regime, felt they had no stake in the new government. The Shi'i parties were supposed to include these groups in military and police structures but have not yet done so. In the Palestinian case, the current preferences for dealing with, or restricting U.S. support only to followers of Mahmud Abbas or members of his nonelected government in the West Bank have backfired, given the staying power of HAMAS. It would be best if these elements eventually chose to support a broader Palestinian alliance. Indeed, this is HAMAS' position, but it rests on a shift within the PA.

Meanwhile, more constructive policy avenues such as supporting the building of Palestinian institutions (with appropriate transparency³⁵), aiding reform, and planning for the economic well-being of Palestinian society have taken a backseat to 2006 and 2007 actions intended to strangle HAMAS, all of which were

ineffective, or thus far, destructive. Some similarities with the South African and Irish situations are instructive.³⁶ The violence, while not symmetrical, has gone so far as to injure the moral standing of both parties—Israelis and Palestinians (associated with HAMAS, Palestinian Islamic Jihad [PIJ], and certain other groups) even if national survival is at stake. Yet, in the Irish case, negotiators included the Sinn Fein; and in the South African case, the previously violent actions of the African National Congress were permitted to recede into the past so that a new society, free of racial injustice, could be established.

The first course of action that I had recommended in January 2008 was to accept the offer of Ismail Haniyeh to a restored truce. The temporary truce concluded on June 17, 2008, was therefore an important first step.

A much more significant prisoner exchange needs to take place. Fewer than 500 of the 10,000 Palestinian political prisoners were released in 2006-07. Palestinians should prevail on HAMAS to release Shalit as an act of good faith. HAMAS, however, is adamant that a substantial number of its prisoners be released in the exchange.³⁷ The Israeli and international boycott of the PA government is also supposed to end under the current truce, and this is absolutely essential to restore key services, medicines, foods, and reprovide salaries. HAMAS' and other charitable social services which have been attacked in the West Bank must be put back under professional management. There is no reason for them to operate as Fatah, rather than as HAMAS' entities. However, they can and must do so with the greatest degree of transparency,³⁸ as should town *zakat* committees, which are a very important source of social welfare.

Israel needs to abandon the aspects of its new defensive strategy which are calculated to thwart peace efforts. Reliance on perimeter control as through barriers has, along with years of constricting movement, curfews, and land acquisition policies, led to a terrible apartheid-like separation of the population and threatens any coherence to the West Bank. It may be impossible to convince Israel to dismantle the security fence, known as the Wall. But there would be a great benefit to doing so. The Jewish and Palestinian populations do not need to be herded into separate areas—they need to be reacquainted with each other, as segregation has bred hatred and fear. Further, the Israeli military's desire to engage in limited partial and temporary withdrawals, followed by territorial reconquests is antithetical to conflict resolution as it destroys the prospect of trust.

As a HAMAS spokesperson stated: “We are not against trust or security. We know the Israelis would like to have security. . . but at the same time, we know we cannot live with our own liquidation.” To the same degree, when HAMAS reserves the option of reengaging in violent jihad, the trust that must—if there is to be peace—be extended by Israelis is eroded. A long-term truce must be safe for

all, honorable, bring justice, and a remedy to the Palestinians who have been deprived their self-determination and their freedom, but also ensure an end to violence.

The deepest challenge to HAMAS is that, in return for territory, it must abandon the strategy of militant resistance and focus on supplying good governance. It will need to uncouple the dream of martyrdom from nationalist violence, for its own cadres and other youth. That may only be accomplished, given the religious strictures around jihad that HAMAS recognizes through the device of a long-term truce, but that truce would be desirable.

The world community should discourage Israel from enacting further restrictions on Palestinians that will prevent them from working inside of Israel. This has debased both the Israeli national conception of its citizens and further transformed Gaza and the West Bank into Bantustans, confining a population which used to work inside of Israel. An economic and developmental solution needs the input of all parties, in addition to the political/military situation, so that Palestinians do not live in closed areas devoid of sufficient employment, or food and goods, as prompted the flight to Egypt in early 2008. A return to the more hopeful planning of a Palestinian state, as evinced in several studies,³⁹ is required. In the last years, the United States shifted its emphasis toward state-building in the Middle East to Iraq, and secondarily to Afghanistan, necessarily so. However, it has not been wise to diminish its peace efforts to symbolic exchanges of good intent with select factions of the Palestinians and Israelis (while sponsoring a “Contra-like” action against HAMAS under supporters of Muhammad Dahlan and other Fatah elements). U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East would be greatly strengthened with an *entente* between Israel and all of the Palestinians.

While this should eventually determine “final status” compromises, it need not do so at present, as Haim Malka has recommended, but reentering a phase of negotiating—with all parties, including HAMAS — is essential. (Should negotiations falter, he then recommends a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.)⁴⁰ Palestinians, even Ahmed Qurei, and Sari Nusseibeh, have stated that there is a limited window for negotiations now, and each have suggested a return to the notion of a one-state solution, which I believe would be disastrous for the Palestinians.

BACKGROUND

HAMAS, meaning zeal or enthusiasm (an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya or the Movement of the Islamic Resistance), is an

offshoot of the Islamist trend in Palestinian society. HAMAS' origins are with the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood movement (referred to as Ikhwan or Brethren) which dates back to the 1940s, and the Egyptian parent branch which dates back to 1928. However, it should also be noted that Fatah (the largest of the four organizations of the PLO) was not exclusively or particularly secularist. Indeed, the founding members of Fatah, with the exception of Yasir Arafat, were all members of the Muslim Brotherhood organization, which later produced HAMAS.

HAMAS' rather late emergence evolved from Israel's antagonism to Palestinians and the necessarily quiescent policies of the Muslim Brotherhood toward both Egypt and Jordan. The Muslim Brotherhood was challenged by the Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami, or Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which emerged in the early 1980s and began to attract the support of Palestinian youth. Clearly, other reasons for popular support for a new type of Palestinian resistance movement can also be traced to the exodus of the PLO leadership to Lebanon from 1967-70 and its forced retreat to Tunis, following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. This distant leadership reacted to, rather than led, grassroots developments like the First Intifadha in the Palestinian occupied territories.

Other important reasons for the emergence of HAMAS (and Islamic Jihad and other Islamist actors like the Islamic Movement inside Israel and smaller salafist organizations) were the worsening economic conditions in the territories, and the effect of Israel's counterinsurgent measures taken first against the PLO and later against all other forms of Palestinian political, cultural, intellectual, and militant associations and activities. The heightening of Islamist sentiment in the Middle East as in Palestinian communities in exile has only increased since HAMAS' official establishment in 1987.

Some accounts simply describe HAMAS emerging from the previously-mentioned organization called the Mujama` Islami established by Shaykh Ahmed Yasin, who became an extremely popular preacher and scholar upon his return to Gaza from Egypt. One account links two paramilitary organizations, a Security Section (Jihaz al-Amn) and al-Mujahidun al-Falastiniyun (which included the Izz al-Din Qassam brigades), directly to Shaykh Yasin.⁴¹ In fact, the rationale and preparations for militant activities against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza date to the late 1970s as Yasin and others believed that the "jihad as *da`wa*" must be complemented with jihad as armed struggle.

Earlier the Brotherhood had decided not to support Khalil al-Wazir's initial suggestion in 1957 to form a group to liberate Palestine.⁴² Certain individuals went ahead anyway and formed the Palestine National Liberation Movement, Fatah. Fatah's belief was that a national liberation movement would impel the

Arab armies to fight for the Palestinian cause. President Jamal abd al-Nasir of Egypt, a highly popular figure in the Arab world, had suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood following an alleged assassination attempt on him in 1956. Nasir was supported by Palestinians for his commitment to Arab nationalism and unity. Yet, like King Husayn of Jordan, his aims were not identical with Palestinians' guerrilla efforts, which elicited sharp Israeli responses and military attacks.

The 1967 defeat of the Arab armies showed the disappointing result of Palestinian reliance on Arab governments and militaries as far as many were concerned, among them Shaykh Yasin. He was convinced that Palestinians must mount their own resistance, and began focusing on cadre formation, participation in, and organization of demonstrations and strikes. A conference was held in Amman in 1983 at which time a decision was made to support jihad by the Ikhwan in Palestine. Simultaneously, \$70,000 raised by the Kuwaiti branch of the Ikhwan was received by the Palestine Committee (also known as the Inside Committee).⁴³ Various committees were established by Palestinian Ikhwan from Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf states to support the resolutions taken in Amman, and within a few years, a body, the Jihaz Falastin (Palestine Apparatus), was in operation.

Meanwhile, Shaykh Yasin began buying arms, mainly from the Israeli black market, but was stung by Israeli collaborators. Those involved were caught, tortured by Israelis, and revealed the network up to Shaykh Yasin, who was arrested and put on trial in 1984.⁴⁴ The Israelis found about half of the weapons purchased; the others were hidden. Yasin was released from jail in the Ahmad Jibril prisoner exchange in 1985.⁴⁵ The entire incident bolstered those Ikhwan, particularly in the West Bank, who had maintained that armed jihad against Israel, as a local initiative, would fail, and that the correct path was to continue working toward an Islamic state.

However, the movement acquired martyrs during a 1986 protest at Bir Zeit University and became increasingly popular and participatory in public events. During the Intifadha, the *ʿAmn* (or security arm of HAMAS) became active and went after Israeli collaborators in squads known as the Majd. These in turn also embarked on armed actions against the Israelis after the Intifadha began in 1987.

HAMAS was announced shortly after the outbreak of the Intifadha on December 14, 1987, though it made December 8, 1987, its official date of establishment to coincide with the Intifadha.⁴⁶ Its founders included Shaykh Ahmad Yasin; Salah Shahadah, a former student leader who headed the military wing; Muhammad Sha`ah; Abd al-`Aziz Rantisi, a physician at the Islamic University; `Isa al-Nashar; Ibrahim al-Yazuri; Abd al-Fattah Dukhan; and Yahya al-Sinuwwar.

POSTPONEMENT OF MILITANT ISLAMISM?

As explained above, HAMAS and the Islamic trend emerged more belatedly than in other parts of the Muslim world due to Palestinian dislocation and the struggle against Israel. When those secular Palestinians committed to armed resistance were essentially neutralized with their exile from Lebanon and moved towards negotiation, other ordinary Palestinians were greatly disappointed by the peace negotiation process. They instead arrived at a new commitment to armed resistance so long as Israel opposed the return of territory and sovereignty to Palestinians. This elided with the populism and support for resistance that was expressed in the Intifadha.

Decades earlier, a small militant Palestinian Islamist group was led by `Izz al-Din al-Qassam (1882-1935) who was killed in Jenin by the British, although his followers, the Qassamiyun, continued to fight in the Great Uprising of 1936-39.⁴⁷ HAMAS named its own military wing after this proto-revolutionary movement.

A transregional emergence of similar groups in the region appeared by the late 1970s. However, the growth of viable political institutions in general was inhibited among Palestinians because of their status as a people without a state and the tight security controls imposed by Israel on the population. These, on the one hand, meant close surveillance and frequent detentions or arrests of Palestinians. At the same time, Israel's attacks on Palestinians, land policies, and extreme restrictions on movements, communications, publication, education, and all aspects of normal life which were intended to protect the Israeli population inspired first the guerrilla-style attacks of the *fida'iyyin* and the more secular nationalist PLO.

The Muslim Brotherhood referred to above was established in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, a schoolteacher who believed that Muslims, particularly their youth, required a force for unity, aid, development, and education, and should take a direction other than that proposed by nationalist elites. The Brethren (Ikhwan) set up branches in Syria, the Sudan, Libya, the Gulf states, Jordan (which influenced the West Bank), and Gaza. From 1948 through the 1950s, military rule over the Palestinians was sufficiently repressive, and the Brothers both there and within Egypt were under siege, either underground or put in prison by the Nasir regime, or in exile. For 2 decades, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood focused on its religious, educational, and social missions, and was quiescent politically. That changed with the 1987 (First) Intifadha also known as the *intifadha* of stones, because the Palestinians were primarily reacting to Israeli force in demonstrations by throwing stones and burning tires. However, the outburst of popular resistance even in the face of constant and numerous arrests,

collective punishments, destruction of property, and other punitive actions, and Israel's use of live ammunition against children armed with stones, along with the new use of videos, made Israel subject to international condemnation. This sort of condemnation, emanating more strongly from Europe than the United States, was unlike any it had faced in countering militant attacks of the Palestinian fighters over the border in Lebanon, or as the target of terrorist aircraft hijackings in the period from 1969 to about 1974.

The Muslim Brotherhood had advocated *da`wa*, which is the reform and Islamization of society and thought; *`adala* (social justice); and an emphasis on *hakimiyya* (the sovereignty of God, as opposed to temporal rule). Due to the severe repression of the Muslim Brotherhood in both Egypt and Jordan, the Palestinian Ikhwan were influenced, or even restrained by the parent organization, to support *da`wa* rather than militant jihad (or jihad by the sword⁴⁸). HAMAS broke with the previous tactical thinking of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in an important way when it turned to armed resistance against Israel.

ISLAMIC JIHAD

The Ikhwan were at first sidelined both by the spontaneous activism of Palestinians of various backgrounds (PLO and other) and by Islamic Jihad which had accelerated its operations in 1986 and 1987. *Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filas tin* (The Movement of Islamic Jihad in Palestine, known as PIJ) was established by Fathi Shiqaqi, Shaykh `Abd al-`Aziz al`Awda, and others, including current director general Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, in the Gaza Strip in the 1970s following their acceptance in Egypt of an Islamist vision similar to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. However, these Palestinians distinguished themselves from secular nationalists and antinationalist Islamists in calling for grassroots organization and armed jihad to liberate Palestine as part of the Islamic solution.⁴⁹ The PIJ military apparatus known as Saraya al-Quds (Jerusalem Brigades) was operative by 1985, and attacked Israeli military at an induction ceremony in 1986 known as the Gate of Moors operation. Palestinian youth, who were both territorially and generationally neglected by the PLO leadership that had been forcibly moved to Tunis, admired the militance of this group.

HAMAS' GROWTH

Yasin's successful institutionalization through the Mujama` Islami, fundraising and *da`wa* via the earlier established Jam`iyah Islamiyah (1967) funded HAMAS' growth. In Gaza, where the Muslim Brothers had less prestige in some ways than other Palestinian thinkers, Yasin reprinted the last volume of Sayyid Qutb's monumental *Fi Dhilal al-Qur'an*, a nontraditional *tafsir*, or explanation and interpretation of the "art" of the Quran, with funds from the Jam`iyah. In this way, he was able to introduce Qutb (d. 1966) now known in the West primarily as a "radical" martyr, executed by Egypt's President Nasir, as a "revolutionary fighting for justice and as a scholar of the highest standing"⁵⁰ because of the subject matter (the study of the Qur'an) and his sophisticated treatment. The Mujama`/ mosque-building/charitable phase of HAMAS was also successful due to its international connections.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan was able to deliver aid from Arab countries and scholarships for promising students.⁵¹ While the Israelis were cracking down on the PLO, religious and charitable organizations in the occupied territories encountered somewhat less interference until 1977. The number of mosques under Ikhwan authority doubled and offered kindergartens, Qur'an classes, and free circumcisions on certain days. The Ikhwan paid for the accompanying celebrations for circumcisions, and mobile medical units provided low cost or free services.⁵² As described above, HAMAS moved actively into the areas of labor representation, education, professional associations, and throughout all sectors of Palestinian society in Gaza and also in the West Bank.

Various figures and their connections with the Ikhwan in Egypt were key to HAMAS' emergence, and so, too, was the degree of repression inside Israeli jails. Israeli journalist Amira Hass writes that "tens of thousands of Palestinians came to know Israelis through the experience of prisons and detention camps."⁵³ Palestinians were often held for 2 to 4 months or more without being charged, and were subjected to harsh interrogations, including torture.⁵⁴ As prisoners tried to unite to obtain radios, legally mandated visits, and then later other concessions by going on hunger strikes since 1971, the Israeli authorities first physically separated them in different locations, and, later, more effectively divided them by providing employment within prison to some but not others. The Islamization of Palestinian society ongoing outside of the prison walls began to be replicated inside as well.

The impetus to opposition was fostered in a different way by the nationalist-religious Israeli coalition in power from 1977. This government promoted settlement activity in the West Bank among which a Jewish group with extreme

messianic views, the Gush Emunim, were important. One focus of such right wing groups was on symbols of Judaism, and new sources of conflict erupted where these symbols conflicted with Muslim claims, for instance at the Haram al-Sharif, or Temple Mount site in Jerusalem; the Haram al-Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron; and elsewhere. Two Muslims were killed in 1982 at the Haram al-Sharif, and a group tried to blow up the site in 1984. Another Jewish group threatened to destroy other Muslim shrines, and two students were murdered at the Islamic University of Hebron.⁵⁵ This caused more identification with religious-nationalist causes, certainly seen later after the massacre of Muslims at the al-Ibrahimi mosque, which sparked HAMAS' first suicide attacks, and when Ariel Sharon brought troops onto the Haram al-Sharif.

The Palestinian diaspora was also affected by the growth of the new Islamist thinking. The Palestinian Ikhwan student movement in Kuwait was inspired by such non-Ikhwan figures as Shaykh Hasan Ayyub.⁵⁶ Palestinian politics have played out in student movements featuring strong factionalism between Fatah and the Popular Committees, for instance, and it was in this period that the Islamic trend emerged, no longer tolerating suppression by Fatah supporters.

The General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) was represented at Kuwait University. GUPS had been wholly Fatah in orientation (not only because Fatah's formative body came from Kuwait). Nonetheless, a student group formed under the name al-Haqq, which included Khalid Mish'al, tried to influence GUPS concerning the impact of President Sadat's visit to Israel and the Lebanese civil war's impact on Palestinians.⁵⁷ The students saw these events to be crucial in that Israel was successfully forcing a wedge between the Palestinians and portions of their Arab support. Al-Haqq eventually went its own way as the Islamic Association of Palestinian Students. Similar organizations in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States formed in the early 1980s.

Another important nucleus for HAMAS was at the Islamic University in Gaza, founded mostly by Ikhwan members associated with Shaykh Yasin's al-Mujam`a al-Islami in 1978. The University, backed by Arafat, enabled the Ikhwan in mobilization as the institution educated thousands of Palestinians from an Islamic viewpoint. It became even more important with the outbreak of the First Intifadha.