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**From Religious Salvation to Political Transformation: The
Rise of Hamas in Palestinian Society**

by Dr.

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This study provides a detailed investigation of the factors which led to the birth and growth of the Islamic Resistance Movement - Hamas. In addition to covering historical, social and economic components, it also takes into account the wider regional and global influences on the emergence of the Hamas movement. Making extensive use of some fascinating interviews with a variety of Hamas members and activists, the author illustrates the political program of the movement and its relationship to other forces within the Palestinian political arena as well as to Israel, Arab states and the international community. An investigation of recent events in the region and the subsequent reaction from Hamas leaders suggests possible directions that the Hamas movement may take in the future and the probable effect of this on Palestinian political life. Included is the full text of the covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement.

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Introduction

Since the beginning of the Palestinian uprising of 1987 the Palestinian arena has been the object of massive and dramatic developments domestically, regionally and internationally.

On the international level, the convening of the Madrid conference in October 1991 was a major turning point, not only in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but also in the way the conflict was viewed and dealt with by the two superpowers at the time. This eventually resulted in the United States hosting the two main protagonists to the conflict, Israel and the PLO, to sign a document of mutual recognition in Washington, DC on the 13th of September 1993.

On the regional level, Iraq's takeover of Kuwait in August 1990 and the consequent outbreak of the Gulf War in January 1991 resulted, among other things, in re-shuffling the question of Palestine, demographically, economically and most certainly politically. The PLO found itself struggling with competing political interests in the Arab world which led to a deepening of its isolation, whilst massive waves of Palestinian workers from the Gulf flooded the Jordanian economy.

On the domestic level, the intifada contributed to the mobilization of the society, for some time at least, in spite of heavy losses incurred in terms of human resources, as well as in terms of infrastructural development. However, the outbreak of the uprising was paralleled by another equally important development which was the formation and launch of the Islamic Resistance Movement - *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*, the acronym of which is Hamas. The evolution of Hamas in the midst of very complicated political, psychological, economic and social conditions has affected the fabric of Palestinian society as much, if not more than the intifada itself.

Today Hamas presents itself as an alternative to the PLO. It already enjoys the support of 30-40% of public opinion and has sought to advance its claim by competing with secularist groups both institutionally and at grass roots

level. Since its inception the movement has tried to muster authority on the ground by publishing its own covenant [\[1\]](#) and other material and through institutionalizing its own programs which have not necessarily been consistent with those that secularist trends have tried to implement. How and why Hamas has gathered such support and the implications this has for both Palestinian and Israeli societies, the Arab region and the international community are now vital questions.

In order to make any prediction about the future of Middle East peace, the aims, position and influence of the Hamas movement in Palestine at the present time must be examined, especially bearing in mind its intentions following the signing of the Israeli/PLO Declaration Of Principles in September 1993. To place this in proper context, careful consideration of its background and development is essential. Hamas, after all was not born in a vacuum. While it is true that it emerged as a seemingly new organisation in Palestinian society in the midst of that critical time which was the beginning of the intifada, Hamas was intricately connected to an earlier movement which had already left its mark on this society. Even the most cursory examination of the structure and politico-religious programs of Hamas indicate its strong links to the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Indeed, Hamas itself makes no secret of the fact that it serves as an extension of the Brotherhood, albeit in a violent military manner. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was formed in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan Al-Banna spread its influence over the years to most other Arab countries. The growth of Hamas is directly related to the diversification of the Muslim Brotherhood in several Arab countries, particularly since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war which sent shock waves throughout the community especially given the increased rhetoric of Arab unity and strength which

had preceded it. This discouragement provided an excellent opportunity for Islamic forces to publicize the notion that Islam was the only true path to victory. [2]

Over the past few years, Hamas has undergone a fundamental transformation in the way it has been operating as well as in the manner it has been projecting itself to the outside world. From originally being the underground military wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas leapt into public and political life in late 1987 using the springboard provided by the intifada. In doing so it created the strongest Islamic resistance force in the Occupied Territories and gave the first true challenge to the dominant nationalist trends that had characterized the Palestinian political struggle until that point. Hamas is now a fully-fledged political movement which has effectively overshadowed its parent organization the Muslim Brotherhood, and which commands support rivalling that of Fateh in areas such as the Gaza Strip. [3] While Hamas has undergone this transformation partly by injecting religious teachings and convictions in Palestinian society, ostensibly to bring about that society's salvation, more importantly, it has sown the seeds for a markedly significant political transformation in this society as, it is hoped, this study will demonstrate.

The study charts the rise of Hamas, considering in some detail its historical and political background as a movement and the social and economic background of the individuals within it. The national, regional and international factors affecting the growth of the movement are then examined and the methods it has employed to garner mass support and its relationship to other relevant forces studied. It is hoped that in conclusion some predictions may be made as to how the future of Hamas will affect the future of the Middle East and the prospects for peace in the region.

In conducting this research the author relies on original and secondary published works but his primary source of information is interviews with Hamas leaders, activists and supporters.

The significance of this study stems from the fact that Hamas is now a political force to be reckoned with in the volatile Palestinian arena. Hamas might indeed try to assume full control over the society, a development which would have profound ramifications were it to occur.

Policy makers and scholars particularly, but also the general reader with an interest in the future of the Middle East, will find this study an invaluable insight into the origins, programme and future direction of the movement. It is quite conceivable that its impact could be more far reaching than the domestic level alone, resulting in reverberations throughout the rest of the Arab world and the international community.

[1] For the full text of the Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, see Appendix I.

[2] Jaradat. Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992. pp 7-11.

[3] Abu-Amr. Ziad, "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background." Journal of Palestine Studies. Volume XXII. Number 4. Summer 1993. pp 5.

Chapter One

The rise of the Movement

Historico-Political Background

As is the case with any movement, be it religious, political and/or otherwise, Hamas was not born in a vacuum. Its emergence was surrounded by a variety of circumstances, some of which were psychological in nature, pertaining to the make-up of the personalities of those individuals who launched the movement. Others were grounded in history - a yearning for the ancient past and an attempt to revive long dreamed of hopes. Yet other circumstances were unique to the political environment in which Hamas was born - unique because of the domestic realities inculcated in Palestinian society, because of the ineptness of the Arab World in the situation in which it found itself during the late 1980s and finally because of the suggested demotion of the Question of Palestine by the international community. Hamas had its roots in other preceding movements particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. Owing to the importance of the link between the Brotherhood and Hamas, it is necessary to trace the background of the parent movement to understand Hamas itself.

The Brotherhood movement, founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna, was not involved in Palestine until the Palestinian revolt of 1936-39 during which time Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, Hassan's brother, came to Palestine helping to channel funds and to aid in this revolt. This proved to be the beginning of what subsequently developed into an extensive network of the Brotherhood's presence in Palestine. [\[4\]](#) Nearly two decades after its formation in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood founded its first group in Jerusalem in 1946, ostensibly to resist the Zionist project for Palestine. Soon after its establishment the Muslim Brotherhood of Palestine gained the support of some nationalist leaders such as the preeminent al-Haj Amin al-Husseini. Al-Husseini's endorsement of the movement apparently gave it enough strength to widen its base as it opened offices in other Palestinian cities, such as Haifa and Jaffa, in the same year.

Gradually, the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Palestine attracted the backing of various nationalist groups. The overriding priority at the time was to resist the British Mandate and the Zionist project. Since the Brotherhood portrayed themselves as a resistance force, its endorsement seemed inevitable. Thus, when the 1948 war broke out, the Brotherhood movement participated in spite of opposition from some Arab governments. The leader of the movement in Egypt, Hassan al-Banna, launched three brigades of volunteers to fight in the war for Palestine. Those volunteers were joined by others from Palestine, Jordan and Syria, all fighting under the banner of one movement, the Muslim Brotherhood.

As might be expected, in the aftermath of the 1948 war the membership of the Brotherhood increased considerably in Palestinian society. The Egyptian government banned the movement in the Gaza Strip between 1949 and 1952 although relations improved again between '52 and '54. Despite being outlawed again in 1954 following the attempt on Nasser's life, by the mid 1950s the Brotherhood had become the strongest political force in the Gaza Strip with the size of its constituency exceeding that of some other nationalist groups such as the Communists. When the Brotherhood advocated armed struggle in response to the 1956 Suez invasion, membership increased and the rift between it and the Communists, who advocated non-violent resistance, widened. The Brotherhood formed underground groups to resist the occupation as it had done throughout Egypt in the 1950s. Interestingly enough, members of many of these groups were to move on to the Palestine Liberation Organization, where some of them now hold senior positions.

The rise of the Nationalist and Baathist parties in the late 1950s led to a loss of support and, as the Brotherhood got weaker in the Gaza Strip, it modified its agenda for Palestinian society, focusing in the 1960s on a process of non-violent activities, distribution of pamphlets and social and religious gatherings.

The fact that the Muslim Brotherhood did not advocate military activities in the West Bank apparently provided it with benefits other political parties did not enjoy. The Muslim Brotherhood was officially recognized by the Jordanian government while other parties were outlawed. The openness with which the Brotherhood conducted its activities helped widen its popular base giving it another advantage over other groups.

Closeness between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian government did not mean that their relationship was always cordial. On the one hand, the Jordanian government was alert enough not to let the Brotherhood's influence get out of control. On the other there were several occasions when the Brotherhood clashed with the Jordanian Government over domestic policy matters, particularly concerning alcohol consumption and some Muslim Brotherhood members were arrested by Jordanian authorities. However, the Brotherhood's support of King Hussein created a relative equilibrium in Jordanian-Brotherhood relations over the years. Both the King and Brotherhood members had shared interests: they had common enemies in the nationalists and the communists while the popularization of Nasser of Egypt as a pan-Arab leader also helped unify the forces of both sides.

This relationship between the Brotherhood and the Hashemites affected Palestinian society in several ways. The Brotherhood participated in Jordanian parliamentary elections consistently from the beginning of the 1950s, using their official presence as a means to advance their cause. Even when the nationalist Palestinian political parties boycotted Jordanian elections, as was the case in 1962, the Brotherhood participated. Although the power they managed to muster in the parliament was modest at best, the Brotherhood chose to maintain its presence in the Jordanian political process to counteract the influence of other political groups.

Throughout the period before 1967 and despite occasional friction, cordial relations were maintained with the Jordanian regime. While the Brotherhood appeared to be in opposition at times, they were nonetheless loyal to the King, at no point participating in no-confidence votes against him.

Following the 1967 war, the Muslim Brotherhood decided to remain on the sidelines as far as violent resistance activities were concerned. The atmosphere of relative calm with which the Brotherhood surrounded themselves in the aftermath of '67 helped them develop the strongest Islamic movement in Palestinian society; throughout the 1970s, no other Islamic group posed a credible challenge to the Muslim Brotherhood. Unlike the nationalist groups, they did not provoke either the occupation authorities or the Jordanian regime. Yet, while the nationalists enjoyed popular support owing to their participation in resisting the occupation, the Brotherhood worked diligently on building its infrastructure and organization in Palestinian society.

While the nationalist groups relied on underground organizational activities, the Muslim Brotherhood used open mass mobilization to recruit members. It chose locations such as universities, schools and mosques, where its most influential members would go to publicize its message by lecturing, preaching and distributing literature. The Brotherhood wanted to portray the image of a credible Islamic group, a group whose orientation is religious and whose agenda is meant to serve only the cause of Allah. In order to secure a smooth path for holding public

lectures on university campuses under occupation, it wisely remained silent as far as occupation practices were concerned.

The outbreak of the Palestinian uprising - the intifada, in the occupied territories in December 1987 presented the Muslim Brotherhood with a chance to connect itself to the Palestinian cause in a manner acceptable to the majority of the people. Previously, the Brotherhood's focus on the overall religious mission to proliferate the society with Islamic teachings and education, somewhat subsumed the underlying political concerns of the people. The "liberation of Palestine" in the mind of the Brotherhood was to be considered only after liberating the people socially, or only after returning them to the "right path" of Islam.

The intifada, gave the Brotherhood a badly needed opportunity to convince the people of the efficacy of their outlook on life, politically, socially and educationally. The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood had little choice but to adopt such a position at that critical juncture in Palestinian history when the younger generation of the Brotherhood were rather weary of political non-involvement. This fact is quite succinctly put by one widely respected religious notable and national activist who prefers to remain anonymous:

The young generation, those who were involved in Palestinian universities and colleges, felt that they were considerably behind in the struggle against the occupation when compared to nationalist groups, therefore they were insistent on forming Hamas without notifying their elderly leaders who, in return, had no choice but to go along with the young generations spirited resistance.

Some leaders in the Muslim Brotherhood felt that the [Islamic] Jihad movement, a splinter group from the brotherhood, was quite active in the resistance process against the Israeli occupation especially in Gaza. That feeling of envy led some of those leaders to consider the formation of a movement for the purpose of resisting the occupation. [\[5\]](#) Direct resistance activities to the Israeli occupation by members of the Islamic Jihad who held the same basic beliefs, made the position of the Muslim Brotherhood most complicated after the outbreak of the intifada. Continued political non-involvement would have meant a deterioration in the popular support of the Brotherhood and it is doubtful that the leadership could have reconciled itself to such an option.

The Muslim Brotherhood leadership thought that to create Hamas in this atmosphere at the beginning of the intifada, would conceal the link between it and the unrest. In other words, launching Hamas was meant to give the impression that the Brotherhood had nothing to do with the intifada, especially when the leadership was not sure that it would continue to the extent that it did. It is also important to note that there was clear disagreement among the Brotherhood leadership regarding the intifada, thus it was thought that launching Hamas might relieve the internal strife and satisfy competing positions within the movement. The idea to create a separate organization was that of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin [\[6\]](#) a man paralyzed by illness and a renowned authority on Islamic matters. Until the intifada Sheikh Yassin had been active in religious and cultural areas of Palestinian life but had not advocated violent activities against the occupation.

Disagreements and uncertainty within the Brotherhood ranks apparently led some Hamas members to try to conceal their links with the parent movement. The Brotherhood's seemingly aloof position towards the Palestinian cause on university campuses and in other institutions did not please Hamas activists and somewhat swayed them from taking pride in their connection with their parent organization. Thus in its early leaflets for several months after its launching, Hamas did not mention its connection with the Brotherhood and it was not until May 1988 that Hamas

declared itself to be the Brotherhood's military wing. As it became clear that the Intifada was a fact of life in Palestinian society, disagreements within the ranks of the Brotherhood were resolved since the uncertainty began to dissipate, helping Hamas's image and legitimizing its connection with the Brotherhood. [7] As pointed out by one interviewee in October 1993:

Hamas launched its activities in the same way as other factions in the context of the intifada. Once Hamas had proved its existence on the ground the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood then adopted and started to support the Hamas activists. [8]

When questioned further on the reasons that motivated the Muslim Brotherhood leadership to recognize Hamas the same interviewee made the following clarification:

The leadership pursued the least harmful option, if it had not recognized Hamas this could have led to all of the Brotherhood activists to join Hamas out of support and encouragement. The facts on the ground made the leadership recognize Hamas and in addition, recognition was a way of containment so that Hamas activists would remain under their observance and could have their activities monitored and so wouldn't be viewed as a splinter group. The Brotherhood had suffered several times from splits and at the very least, instead of considering Hamas a splinter group they adopted it and considered it their own. [9]

Jamil Hamameh [10] a renowned Palestinian Islamist outlined quite succinctly the connection of Hamas to the Muslim Brotherhood:

The Hamas movement is not a new movement but is the natural extension of a movement that is already large and great and which has its roots buried deep in the earth of Palestine. This is the movement of the Muslim Brothers. Hamas has unequivocally and formally announced in its leaflets and its covenant of July 1988 [sic] that it is the political [sic] wing of the Brotherhood, the strong wing of the Brotherhood. It is part and parcel of the Muslim Brotherhood which exists in the international arena and not just in the Palestinian and Arab arenas. It is a movement which has been in existence for more than 50 years and Hamas, therefore, was born naturally through this movement even if the name differed or the style differed.

The Muslim Brotherhood has never forgotten, even for a day, the Palestinian problem. The *mujaheddiin* [soldiers] of the Brotherhood before, during and after 1948 are testament to that. The concern of the teacher [Sheikh Hassan] al-Banna, the founder of the movement, was to form brigades from among the brothers to defend the soil of Palestine after it was subjugated by the British Mandate and too many things in Palestine became under the control of the Jews. [11]

The Brotherhood's work on university campuses and in other grass-roots settings strengthened its foundations and created a degree of dependency on its institutions. The intifada for its part gave a strong boost to the rise of the movement to no less an extent than did the movement to the intifada. In other words, for better or worse, the intifada and Hamas became intertwined in many different ways. Firstly, the intifada gave Hamas the forum it badly needed to articulate its message, not to mention the fact that without the intifada, the birth of Hamas would have been unlikely or untimely at best. Secondly, it was obvious from the beginning that Hamas was a strong force to fuel the intifada and to provide it with the kind of steam it needed to help keep it going. The power of seemingly religious convictions on the part of Hamas activists gave them the stimulus necessary to participate in and/or initiate intifada activities. The impact on Palestinian society of Hamas leaflets and communiques is a third important factor. In addition to shaping the thought processes of many individuals within the society, such writings affected the work of the

Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) and secularist groups. Not only did they need to address the concerns of the society in the context of Palestinian - occupation relationships, but also to deal with the impact of Hamas information and directives became a political imperative. The strength and/or weakness of the intifada undoubtedly became inseparable from the degree of support that Hamas enjoyed and though this is not to suggest that Hamas came to control the rise and fall of the intifada, it can be said with certainty that the magnitude of the intifada became intricately linked to Hamas's influence. While Hamas became an important power behind the intifada, the intifada itself became a reality on which Hamas could not turn its back. The future of Hamas may be said to have become dependent on the intifada though Hamas successfully used the intifada to solidify its presence and thereby carve out a path for itself even in a non-intifada future. As has been said, Hamas was not born in a vacuum and therefore cannot be expected to live in one. That is to say that since the historico-political platform upon which Hamas erected its foundations was embedded in its parent the Muslim Brotherhood, it is reasonable to assume that the ability of Hamas to endure could not have been sustained unparented. Hamas enjoyed the luxury of circumstances to aid in its birth from within - the intifada, its dynamics, evolution and effect - as well as from without - the network it had at hand to establish wide ranging relationships among sympathetic supporters.

Hamas seems to have been perspicacious enough not to link the nature of its future with that of the intifada, the latter is a phase, albeit an important one in Palestinian political, economical, social and psychological history which is also the case for Hamas. The intifada, while contributing to carving up the political path of the society for many years to come, will, in all likelihood, be superseded or even subsumed by newer, perhaps fresher phases. Hamas, on the other hand not only helped shape the course of the intifada and its consequent developments, but more importantly managed to permeate the fabric of Palestinian Society in a manner which qualifies it as a force whose effect could go far beyond the impact made by the intifada. With all that the intifada has generated - tens of hundreds of Palestinians killed, thousands wounded and imprisoned, economic and social infrastructure devastated and profound societal demoralization - the overall power that Hamas has been able to generate in and on that society will be much greater. In the following pages this issue will also be one which this study will attempt to address.

Socio-Economic Characteristics

As one would expect, the socio-economic characteristics of Hamas are very much like its parent organization, the Muslim Brotherhood. At its inception, the Muslim Brothers, by-and-large, came from small towns in Egypt, particularly from among the ranks of the lower middle class. Many of those who joined the brotherhood migrated to the cities and similarly, those who joined Islamic movements such as Hamas, outside of Egypt, were lower middle class members generally academically oriented towards the natural sciences. They also tend to come from villages and small towns.

Several reasons seem to explain this socio-economic makeup. Owing to the fact that many movement members grew up in villages and/or small towns, they tend to be most susceptible to the promise of a better life afforded by the processes of modernization in the city. The impoverishment by which they were surrounded in the village, combined with the secularization and continued socio-economic gaps they experience in their new environments, can cause considerable anger and bitterness.

This bitterness can be strengthened and deepened proportionately with the enhancement of education and the more educated members become, the more rejecting of the existing socio-economic order they tend to be. This is compounded by the fact that new migrants to a city, lacking the "sophistication" of city dwellers can often be subject to feelings of inferiority in their new surroundings.

This raises a related point which is that migration from villages to cities is often accompanied by social alienation in the new environment as well as by loss of identity. Since most of these particular migrants find themselves living in the impoverished outskirts of the cities, they are likely to resent excessive wealth, loss of identity and corruption. Hence they begin to organize under the rubric of religion as a safeguard against the unpredictable ills of their new environment.

Furthermore, many members are educated in the natural sciences and are familiar with the world of modern technology, but only as far as their academic training requires. Education is seen as being received in an academic vacuum which lacks any relation to the spiritual or humane. This in turn encourages a cold attitude towards modernity. The introduction to modernity through only technical means can also promote the view that modernity will lead to gradual "moral disintegration". A tendency has also been noted that members have rejected traditional religious organizations for being too passive or too subservient to the government and therefore too much a part of the existing social order to offer satisfactory refuge. [\[12\]](#)

The gap between people in such circumstances and the dominant social order in the city contributes to further psychological, social, economic and political distance. Exclusion from the prosperous strata who enjoy the benefits of modernity while they have to live in slums and pray in deteriorating mosques, increases the alienation which becomes the strong driving force for them to resent, reject and organize. Their objective is to preserve themselves as individuals, preserve their identity and their consciousness, even if this means coming into open clashes with those they perceive as their "alienators". Protection of themselves means fighting against

all that which is considered to contribute to the breakdown in society and in order to raise their own morale they reflect on a utopian past and reinstate this ideal as an offensive to the present.

They are however, a product of modernity; a modern people who see themselves as enlightened but alienated from enlightenment. Consequently, Islamic principles seem more precious than ever before as adoption of an Islamic way of life relieves the suffering encountered in their modern lives. In particular, if this suffering is perceived as part of a history of persecution, they can liken themselves to the Muslims at the beginning of their empire who, though numerically disadvantaged, managed to successfully battle the *Jahilites* or unenlightened ones. [13]

Although this is a scenario for the composition of Islamic movements in general, and particularly the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it provides an excellent illustration of the socio-economic characteristics which are evident within the Hamas movement.

Palestinian political leaders and spokespersons for the mainstream tend to come from cities or at least large towns and, more often than not, from the richer West Bank. Most would be considered members of the middle class and have a relatively comfortable family background. Members of the secular leftist groups although having a wider base of origin also tend to be members of the middle class. Hamas members on the other hand tend to be from either smaller towns or villages or from areas hit most heavily by occupation. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the spiritual head of Hamas, for example, was one of the many whose families were made refugees in 1948 and he grew up in Gaza. Dr. Ibrahim al-Yazuri, also among those considered the founding members of Hamas, was born in Beit Daraz village and, following the *al-Nakbah* (catastrophe) in 1948, moved to Gaza City and then to Khan Younis refugee camp. The conditions in the Palestinian camps, particularly in the Gaza Strip, are abysmal. They are densely populated with many families often having to share makeshift dwellings. Inadequate garbage disposal and open street sewers add to the incidence of disease and ill health.

In many cases, in the perception of many Palestinians at least, it can be said that the lives of a lot of Hamas members have been a microcosm of the collective suffering of the Palestinian people. Abdul Aziz Ali Rantisi, Lecturer in the Science faculty at the Islamic University in Gaza states the following about his personal history:

I was born in Jibna, which was a village between Ashdud and Jaffa. We were dismissed from our village and had to live in a tent in Khan Younis [Gaza Strip] in very miserable conditions. I left the tent and moved to the UNRWA camps where I still live. I am from a very poor family but before 1948 we were wealthy. Our home still exists and is occupied by Jews from Yemen. My family is religious. [14]

Educationally, Hamas members tend to fit the characterization outlined above and many engineers and doctors in the West Bank and Gaza, claim allegiance to the movement. Sheikh Hamad Bitawi a judge in the *sharia* court in Tulkarem was among those deported by the Israeli authorities to Marj al Zuhour in December 1992 following the killing, allegedly by Hamas, of Nissim Toledano, an Israeli police officer. (This measure which involved the deportation of 415 alleged Hamas and Islamic Jihad members will be considered in greater detail at a later point). In an interview conducted in November 1993, with Sheikh Bitawi after his return, the following was noted:

This crime [the deportation] was committed by the Israeli authorities to rid Palestine of her scientific talents. 415 of us were deported, tens of our number are holders of Doctorates, Masters and many are university graduates - doctors, engineers, judges, professors and faculty members from al-Azhar, an-Najah, Hebron and al-Quds Universities. [\[15\]](#)

Consistent with the socio-economic conditions outlined above, it is in Gaza in particular where the movement is at its strongest. Although the occupation obviously affects the whole region, Gaza is so impoverished and seemingly forgotten by the outside world that it is a million miles away from cities elsewhere in terms of wealth and lifestyle. The fact that the movement began under military occupation lends further support to claims of righteousness and the use of historical reference is evident in many Hamas leaflets. Frequent references are made to: the Battle of Yarmuk (634ce) the hero of which, Khalid Ibn al-Walid, was referred to as the sword of Allah by the prophet Mohammad; Salah al-Din who defeated the Crusaders in 1187; Bibars who fought the Crusaders in 1260; and Jaf'r Ibn abu Talib who fought against the Byzantines. Another popular reference used by Hamas is to the Khaybar which was a Jewish settlement on the Arabian Peninsula. In 628ce the inhabitants were accused of treachery by the prophet Mohammad and then conquered and massacred by the Muslims. Hamas leaflets have often been known to conclude with the words "Allah Akbar - the hour of Khaybar has come". [\[16\]](#)

In the Hamas covenant published in 1988, which will also be considered in detail in a later chapter, the historical reference is more recent although the notion of a continuing struggle is very clear:

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a link in {a long} chain of the *Jihad* against the Zionist occupation, which is connected and tied with the initiation {of the *Jihad*} of the martyr Izz al-Din al-Qassam [\[17\]](#) and his Mujahid [soldier] brothers in 1936. [\[18\]](#)

In conclusion it is clear that the Hamas members thus far considered do generally originate from small towns or villages. While not necessarily exposed to the excesses of wealth to provide a contrast to their poverty, the circumstances of Israeli occupation add an extra dimension to their alienation. This, of course, is alienation from their own land. In the Hamas covenant it is stated that expulsion is a kind of murder and seeing as the whole land of Palestine is considered by Hamas to be Islamic Waqf or trust land for Muslims until the day of resurrection, any loss of land particularly through occupation is a heinous wrongdoing. To quote Sheikh Bitawi on his experience of expulsion once more:

To be away from the homeland was the most difficult trial to endure. If there was a choice between death and the loss of ones homeland, one would choose death. [\[19\]](#)

The fact of displacement alone can therefore be sufficient reason for joining a movement which aims to redress this wrong. Even without the religious connotation of alienation from the homeland, there is a loss of livelihood, property and heritage which are sufficient in themselves to make the Hamas movement attractive to those who have suffered them.

It is these particular national determinants which led to the rise of the Hamas movement which will be next addressed.

[\[4\]](#) Israeli. Raphael, "A Special Report:-Islamic Fundamentalism Among The Palestinian Arabs." Survey of Arab Affairs-A periodic supplement to

Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints. 15 August 1989. pp 1. See also Abu-Amr. Ziad, " Hamas: A Historical and Political Background." Journal of Palestine Studies. Volume XXII. Number 4. Summer 1993.

[5] Interview conducted on September 1st 1993, with a widely respected religious notable and national activist and one of the most highly respected *imams* at al-Aqsa mosque who asked to remain anonymous. He is known to be a critic of the Hamas movement.

[6] The author attempted to secure an interview with Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. However, the military and security complications involved due to his imprisonment prevented such an interview from being conducted..

[7] Jaradat. Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." pp 7-11. News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992.

[8] Interview conducted by the author on October 4th 1993, with a widely respected religious notable and national activist and one of the most highly respected *imams* at al-Aqsa mosque who asked to remain anonymous.

[9] See footnote 5.

[10] Jamil Hamameh, interviewed by the author on September 1st 1993, was born in Ma`an city in Jordan, his family was originally from Nablus and at the time of the interview he had been living in Jerusalem for 40 years. He attended school in Jerusalem at the al-Aqsa religious school and gained a degree in Sharia Law from the al-Azhar university in Gaza in 1977. His career includes working with the Islamic Waqf department and then as preacher, on both occasions in the West Bank town of Ramallah. He taught at the al-Aqsa school in Jerusalem, was the principal of the *Dar al-Hadith al-Sharif* (House of the Honorable Hadith) which he helped to found. He became a director of the al-Aqsa mosque, director of the Waqf for the Bethlehem district and assistant director of the Islamic College of Science and Technology in Jerusalem. He currently works as the acting executive director of the Islamic Committee of Sciences as well as the secretary for the Jerusalem schools and clinics association. His other duties include working for an Islamic research center and as a member of the executive committee of the Higher Islamic Council. He was arrested at the beginning of the intifada accused of working for Hamas and of co-ordinating between Hamas and Fateh. He was imprisoned on two occasions accused of drafting an agreement between Hamas and Fateh. The first time was in the 8th month of the intifada when he was taken to the Gaza prison known as *maslakh* or slaughterhouse from where he was then transferred to the Moscabia prison in Jerusalem. He was sentenced in the Ramallah military court to

serve 18 months in Askalon (Ashqelon) prison. Jamil Hamameh is widely believed to be second-in-command of Hamas in the West Bank.

[11] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[12] Salame. Ghassan, "Islam and the West." Foreign Policy. No. 90 - Spring 1993. pp 24.

[13] Bishara. Dr. Azmi, "Islamic Movements and Arab Nationalism." News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992. pp 3-6.

[14] Partrick N. Ed., 'Palestinians in Profile-A Guide to Leading Palestinians in the Occupied Territories'. Panorama, Jerusalem 1993. pp 418-419.

[15] Taken from an interview conducted by the author on November 4th 1993 with Sheikh Hamad Bitawi at his home in Nablus. Sheikh Bitawi was born in the village of Beta and is now an *imam* at the al-Aqsa mosque, President of the League of '*Ulama* (religious notables) in Palestine, Judge of the *Sharia* (Islamic law) court in Tulkarem and Vice President of the *zakat* (charitable fund) committee in Nablus. He had been imprisoned for one year in an Israeli prison in the Negev and had been placed under house arrest on several occasions. He was among the 415 alleged Hamas and Islamic *Jihad* members deported to Marj-al Zuhour, South Lebanon in December 1992.

[16] Mishal. Shaul, "'Paper War' - Words Behind Stones: The Intifada Leaflets." The Jerusalem Quarterly. Number Fifty-One, Summer 1989. pp 78.

[17] Izz al-Din al Qassam, the first leader of armed resistance in the history of modern Palestine, was killed by the British in 1935 prior to the Palestinian Rebellion of 1936-39. Today's military wing of Hamas bears his name. Another inspirational figure to Palestinian Islamists is Sayyid Qutb who was executed in Egypt in 1966. See Sayyid Qutb, the Emergence of the Islamicist 1939-1950. Adnan Musallam. PASSIA, April 1990 .

[18] The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement August 18th 1988. Chapter One, Article Seven.

[19] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview. See footnote ⁴.

Chapter Two

Growth of the Movement

Domestic Determinants

To say that the occupation has been largely responsible for the development of any phenomenon in Palestinian society has become a cliché. This belief has some merits, however, as far as the evolution of Islamic movements in the society are concerned, particularly the formation of Hamas at the critical juncture in Palestinian history that was the Intifada. The Muslim Brothers, as much as nationalist groups, tried to manipulate the consequences of the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war to their advantage in Palestinian society but the secularists undoubtedly enjoyed greater success in the first few years after occupation in 1967 than did the Islamists. That success seemed to have been short-lived, however, for while the secularists were publicly mobilizing Palestinian masses against the occupation in the 1970s, the religious groups, particularly the Brothers, were setting the necessary groundwork for their programs and activities for the 1980s. In the words of a widely respected religious notable and Palestinian national activist:

Since 1967 the Muslim Brotherhood movement had been leaning toward peaceful means and methods and their activities concentrated on the issuance of publications, educational meetings and the celebration of religious occasions. Their situation remained as such until the year 1967. Between 1967 and 1987, some discussion and debates took place between the Muslim brotherhood group and other resistance groups regarding resistance activities and concrete acts against the occupation. The response of the Muslim Brotherhood youth was that the time had not yet arrived for that. Concentration, therefore, was on the socialization of the youth in religious Islamic terms and in moral and educational terms. [\[20\]](#)

The Islamists therefore, worked quietly on organizing their ranks at university campuses and in other institutions where, during the 1970s, they established the solid foundations needed to penetrate Palestinian society. While the widespread popularity the secularists achieved in the 1970s did not help the Islamist cause, in the 1980s the trend gradually started to reverse. The tremendous decline in the PLO standing following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 was accompanied by a gradual waning of the strength of secularist groups in the Occupied Territories. The increasing repression by Israeli authorities throughout the period preceding the intifada only helped weaken the secularists, in effect making it more possible for the religious groups to organize and further enhance their ability to spread their teachings. The worsening economic conditions in Palestinian society during that period also made the work of the religious groups easier. More people started turning to religion as a means of personal security. [\[21\]](#)

Even more instrumental in the formation of Hamas and the consolidation of its position in Palestinian society was the fact that the Israeli occupation in its attempt at the beginning of the Palestinian uprising to weaken the resolve of the secularist movement, had remained relatively quiet as far as the activities of Hamas were concerned. The occupation authorities acted on the premise that allowing Hamas to grow might lead to internalizing the conflict within Palestinian society, hence their relaxed attitude towards Hamas's role.

Indeed, Israeli strategy to weaken the secular forces by remaining somewhat silent on Hamas's activities bore fruit. Over the years, PLO institutions got weaker and weaker as did other secular forces in the Occupied Territories. The weaker the secularists got the stronger the Islamic movements, especially Hamas, became. Constant shifts in PLO positions also enabled Islamic

movements to grow by capitalizing on what they called the 'unprincipled representative of the Palestinian people'. Ironically, through its attempts at times to weaken the leftists on university campuses and in other unions, the mainstream movement in the PLO, Fatah, often entered into coalitions with the Islamists. This type of politicking, however, only assisted in the growth of such movements.

Any analysis of the domestic determinants shouldn't neglect the fact that the cultural orientation of Palestinian society in Islamic teachings provided the Islamists with a fertile ground from which to operate. The fact that most Palestinians are born Muslims made it easier for the Islamists, and henceforth, for Hamas to cultivate the benefits of such a social environment. Of course, cultural upbringing has its impact on the educational system of any society and in this regard, Islamic teachings become an integral part in the socialization process of many Palestinians.

The continuation of the intifada and the participation of a vast number of Palestinians in its activities helped resolve some disagreements within the Muslim Brotherhood. Hamas's involvement in the Uprising provided it with a successful way out of the isolation in Palestinian society which had afflicted the Brotherhood in earlier years. When asked about the link between the intifada and Hamas, Jamil Hamameh replied:

After the intifada proliferated and had completed a great part of its journey and made a great many sacrifices and after Hamas had contributed to these sacrifices all were convinced that Hamas was an authentic and original movement. I say with tremendous pride and with all due respect to all political trends who participated in the intifada that I am utterly convinced that the Hamas movement was the new blood which gave magnitude to the intifada. Hamas was the dynamism for the activation of the intifada with Allah's help. [\[22\]](#)

When asked whether the Hamas movement had been formed before the beginning of the intifada and had been preparing for it or whether they were simply simultaneous developments, he replied:

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) has had a program of preparation and guidance. The Muslim Brotherhood movement in Palestine is part of the international Islamic movement. It has many interests but its central preoccupation in Palestine is the Palestinian problem. The sons of the Islamic movement were undergoing a process of socialization and preparation and being brought up for the moment when they would have to exercise their legitimate rights over the soil of Palestine in resisting and ridding it of the occupier. We are not afraid to say that in spite of arrest and imprisonment we will not be deterred from resisting the occupation as much as our means permit. As I told you from the beginning, the Hamas movement was not an accidental event, not a marginal occurrence, not the result of a mere hour of work, spur of the moment result of a whim. It is an extension of roots buried deep in the belly of the earth and was always undergoing its preparation in universities, mosques, unions...all of this was the infrastructure of the Islamic resistance movement. [\[23\]](#)

As can be seen from the above the already existing structure of the Brotherhood organization was a tremendous asset to Hamas. Instead of expending much effort and considerable time on organizational matters, they found in the Brotherhood a convenient base, a benefit not enjoyed by other movements. In the same interview, in answer to a question about the particular determinants which assisted in the birth of Hamas, Hamameh said the following:

As I said, the Islamic Resistance Movement came naturally and a variety of factors helped facilitate this. These objective factors served as a preparation for the intifada. There are also factors accompanying the intifada - suppression practised by the occupation authorities, injustice

and oppression and loss of hope and despair as far as the political solutions that were proposed were concerned. The beginning of the weakness of the PLO and the surrender and betrayal made by the leading forces within the PLO and their departure from Beirut - all of this caused profound frustration for the people in the Occupied Territories. There was a phase for preparation, for guidance and socialization of the sons of the Islamic movement and when the right time arrived there was the Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] with its magnitude and strength, its existence in the arena, the evolution of its activities and its sound perspective all of which, I believe, were behind its formation. [\[24\]](#)

That the occupying power tolerated Hamas's activities until about May 1989 for the reasons discussed earlier, only made it easier for the new movement to solidify its standing both functionally and organizationally. It was in May of 1989 that the Israeli authorities began to arrest top leaders in Hamas such as Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and it was only in September of the same year that they declared the movement to be illegal.

In the first two years of the intifada, in particular, Hamas also worked diligently on building its financial standing in the occupied territories from mosques and other religious and social institutions. In addition, they made good use of the weak organizational structure of the secularist movements, particularly Fateh, by offering their newly-joined members concrete incentives, financially and spiritually. The prevalent traditionalism and poverty, especially in the Gaza Strip, made it easier for Hamas to rally a sizeable number of Palestinians around its program. Those who were previously uninvolved began to see in Hamas an outlet for expressing their religious-political views. [\[25\]](#)

There are, however, particular determinants behind the popularization of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Firstly, Gazans generally tend to be more conservative and traditionalistic in their outlook on life. Secondly, socio-economic hardship tends to be greater in the Gaza Strip than in other Palestinian locations. Muslim activists confirm that the defeat in 1967 brought the movement to life and indeed from then until the present day the number of mosques has doubled. Among the world's most densely populated areas, Gaza is basically a city surrounded on all sides by sprawling refugee camps. 40% of the land area of the Gaza Strip has been seized by Israel and the unemployment rate, which has always been high, has increased even further since March 1993 when Israel effectively sealed off the Strip and in doing so, the livelihood of many Palestinians working as laborers in Israel.

Thirdly, Gaza is closer geographically to Egypt than any other Palestinian region and the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt assigned a special status to Gaza as far as their activities were concerned, due to this geographic proximity. In the 1950s the Brotherhood made their presence in Gaza noticeable. After 1967, they used the defeat of the Arab nation in their attempt to transform Palestinian society, beginning with Gaza. Following the Iranian revolution, the Brotherhood made headway in Gaza through organizing and preaching and founded the Gaza branch of al-Azhar, the only functioning university in Gaza, as their base of operations. In the 1980s Muslim Brothers clashed with secularist groups, particularly leftists, on more than one occasion. The resulting violent and tense atmosphere helped the Brotherhood assert itself. In 1985, following the release of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, supporters were mobilized around his cause through the largest Islamic organization in Gaza, *al-Mujamma*, with a membership of over 2,000. Yassin publicly called for transforming the society to make it more in line with Islamic teachings. Before the intifada, the focus had been on reforming Palestinian society from within, in effect, by marginalizing secularist activities and presence. [\[26\]](#)

Also of particular relevance to the Gaza Strip was the noticeable increase in resistance activities by the Islamic Jihad movement in the late 1970s. Such activities, while directed at Israeli occupation forces, sent worrisome signals among Hamas's ranks when it was later formed. Those individuals who originally belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood felt that Islamic Jihad was pulling the rug from under their feet, since a group's popularity in Palestinian society, particularly then, was principally determined by the size and volume of resistance activities against the occupation.

When the intifada started, the Islamic Jihad movement were the first *muntafideen* [uprisers] in practical terms along with the Fateh movement. The Islamic Jihad movement contained few individuals but their work was strong, violent [powerful] and effective against the Israeli occupation. The Islamic Jihad was a part of the Muslim Brotherhood which split from the movement in Egypt and in Gaza. They had several reservations and criticisms of the Brotherhood leadership and their methods, thus they pursued a different path. Therefore, when the youth of the Muslim Brotherhood saw the Islamic Jihad movement performing this effective role they woke up and reacted by forming a new organization and called themselves the Islamic Resistance movement, *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*, the acronym of which is Hamas. [\[27\]](#)

So the increased activities of Islamic Jihad most certainly made Muslim Brotherhood activists feel that they had to do something about the situation; the founding of Hamas was an effective way to achieve this objective. It is certainly no surprise that the movement was formed and launched in the Gaza Strip and it is indeed unlikely that any other location would have contributed even half as much to its success. However, when asked about the actual launch of the movement Jamil Hamameh would give no more than the following guarded comment:

The movement emerged in the Gaza Strip and was founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, may Allah protect him and undo his troubles. The emergence and establishment of the movement was a sudden event, unexpected by anyone, therefore it caused shock and disbelief. I do not have the exact details of the formation in specific terms but know it was launched in Gaza and then moved to the West Bank where I had the honor to be selected to bridge the gap between Hamas and Fateh through the leaflets. Among the founders known are Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Ibrahim al-Yazuri, Abdul Aziz Ali Rantisi - this is all the information I have. [\[28\]](#)

Since this launch the popularity of the movement has obviously increased quite dramatically. Jamil Hamameh was asked to assess the reasons behind the distinct popularity which Hamas had acquired. His initial comment was the launch itself had come from the beliefs of the people rather than the leadership and that it was launched in an Islamic manner. He further said that:

The Hamas movement clarified for the Palestinian people the real nature of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. The [military] operations by the sons of the movement then bore testimony to its effectiveness. [\[29\]](#)

When asked if the popularity was perhaps due to the waning of belief in the nationalist movement Hamameh replied:

The movement becoming great [mighty] was not affected by the strength/weakness of the other movements. This movement has become strong because of its originality. However, when people lose hope in an ideology they would tend to seek one that is better. [\[30\]](#)

Hamameh's view of the strength of Hamas is not shared by Sheikh Khalil al-Alami, [\[31\]](#) who although very critical of, and dissatisfied with PLO political maneuvers, views the formation and

subsequent launching of Hamas with great skepticism. Hamas' role he suggested had been blown out of proportion by observers which has given a mistaken impression of its effectiveness.

The methods that Hamas used to promote itself were questioned and Hamameh was asked if Hamas had provided systematic services and activities or had undertaken any particular measures during the intifada to mobilize the population. He was further asked if there were particular institutions which facilitated this. Hamameh would not answer this question directly but instead gave a general answer incorporating all movements.

Every movement has its policy as much as it needs to enable it to achieve its goals. What is important is that the beliefs and the convictions of the people serve the movement. In my estimation all movements in the Palestinian arena would try to establish their own institutions and Hamas is no exception. I could not say which particular institutions are directed by those who would serve Hamas. [32]

Another factor adding to the popularity of Hamas in the Gaza Strip came in the form of the Gulf crisis in August 1990 when many Palestinians forced out of the Gulf region ended up in the Gaza Strip. With them they brought back not only harsh memories, but also the lifestyle and exposure to Islamic thought they had acquired in the Gulf over many years. In them, Hamas found a rich environment for espousing its teachings and for increasing its base of support. Following the Gulf crisis were two other events which helped define Hamas as a political voice in opposition to the PLO. Firstly, the Palestine National Council's Algiers declaration in 1988 recognizing Israel as a state and placing it within its 1967 borders, which as far as Hamas was concerned was an act of treason against the Palestinian people as, "the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [holy trust] upon all Muslims generations till the day of Resurrection." Secondly, the PLO's acceptance of the Baker Peace Plan was seen by Hamas as another departure from the Palestinian people's birthright as it was built on the premise of autonomy and not liberation and retrieval. Added to the Hamas criticism of these two events, which tapped a strong vein of common sentiment among the people, is the fact that Israel chose this time to arrest hundreds of Hamas supporters and sentence Ahmad Yassin to life imprisonment. [33]

The Gulf War itself was instrumental in the further political development of the Hamas movement in several ways as were many other regional events which both preceded it and came about as a result of the crisis. These regional factors will now be discussed.

Regional Determinants

The political, social and economic atmosphere in the Arab region following World War II was fertile ground for extremist tendencies. The Arab defeat in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war was viewed by Islamic movements as a natural result of the society's discarding of religion in its political life. The popularization of Nasserism in Egypt in the 1950s and Nasser's concerted crackdown on the Muslim Brothers led many Islamists to conclude that his proclaimed attempt at bringing modernization to Egypt in particular, and to the Arab region in general, was no more than a veiled effort to introduce westernization and/or socialism, both of which were considered contributors to the spread of corruption.

The catalyst for the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood was the Arab defeat in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. To the Muslim Brothers, that fiasco was inevitable given the wide gap between society and Islam and given the leaders' inability to mobilize the people on bases other than Islamic teachings. Of particular importance to the Brothers was the demise of Nasser's role as a result of the war, especially after he had captured the hearts and minds of the people with his slogans. His poor

planning and unpreparedness could not have been avoided, they argued, since his guiding principles were not Islamic. [34]

Following the '67 war the technological gap between the Arab World and the West widened. In some parts of the Arab region, many people were stricken with poverty. This, combined with the absence of political measures to protect the civil liberties of the Arab citizen, led many Arabs to turn to Islam as a refuge. The greater the state of political and economic despair in the Arab World, the more likely it was for a social shift towards religion. Certainly the main beneficiary was the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Being the oldest and most organized religious structure, it was relatively easy for it to appeal to Arab public opinion through its teachings.

The death of Nasser, the fear of a return of Nasserism and the release of many Muslim Brothers from Egyptian prisons by the new leadership gave a tremendous boost to the Movement. Those released influenced students at university campus's with their teachings, including many Palestinians studying in Egypt. Certainly, Palestinian students graduating from Egyptian universities transmitted the teachings they had acquired to Palestinian society, in effect serving as the leaders of various Islamic movements. [35]

The Arab region also affected the growth of Muslim movements in Palestinian society in several other ways. Palestinians working in the conservative Gulf countries undoubtedly were influenced by the religious lifestyle dominant in those countries. They too carried what they had learned to Palestinian society, either during annual visits or upon permanent return. Governments of some Gulf countries played a pivotal role in supporting the growth of Islamic movements in Palestinian society, including the growth of Hamas, through their financial assistance to the Islamic Waqf or through the Zakat (charitable fund) committee for the purpose of establishing and/or preserving mosques. [36]

Another factor contributing to the strength of Islamic movements in Palestinian society was the success of the Iranian Revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini against the Shah in 1979. The removal of the Shah from power in spite of Western support for his regime, combined with the institution of Islamic law in Iran, boosted the morale of Islamist groups and gave them a strong impetus to replicate the Iranian experience. Furthermore it has since become an Iranian cliché that Israel's success is due to the fact that it is a religious state and Arab defeat is therefore because they are insufficiently devoted to Islam. This argument is now used by Hamas against the secularism of the PLO. [37]

In Southern Lebanon, as Islamic resistance fighters carried out attacks against Israeli forces, Islamic movements in Palestinian society capitalized on such acts to enhance their popularity and to further widen the scope of their mission.

The impact of the region on the growth of Hamas in Palestinian society can also be seen in the Jordanian regime's attempt to keep its influence in the area through its support of the Muslim Brotherhood. Jordan's control of the Islamic Waqf institutions and the consequent funds necessary for its operations certainly helped to enhance the Islamic trend.

The Gulf War gave a tremendous boost to the fortunes of Hamas which was very careful about its stance at the time. They took great care with their pronouncements in an effort to remain in favor with all countries that were important to their finances and support. Kuwait was a country that had good ties with Hamas and it was therefore very much in Hamas's interests to criticize Iraq for the takeover. This they did, but in subtle pronouncements which they ensured were overshadowed by their criticism of Western, namely US, intervention. The criticism of Iraq

satisfied the Gulf governments while criticism of the US who, after all was the "real" enemy satisfied the demands of their own public and of the Iranian regime. This ensured that they maintained close contact with their supporters and funders in both the Gulf and Iran. This stance was very different from that taken by the PLO which expressed support of the takeover of Kuwait and support for the regime of Saddam Hussein. This worked even further in Hamas's favor as the Gulf countries began to see Hamas as an alternative force to the PLO in the region. The consequence of this was the realization that to weaken the PLO one must strengthen Hamas and following the Gulf war much of the funding which had been earmarked for the PLO was then transferred to the coffers of Hamas.

The loss of faith in Arab nationalism generally after '67 and the death of Nasser was compounded by the Gulf War. Iraq's ill-fated attempt to assert Arab Nationalist dominance and Arafat's ill-fated decision to support it did Arab nationalism generally, but in Palestinian society in particular, no favors whatsoever. Indeed, the PLO stance in the Gulf and Iraq's consequent defeat came to be seen by many Palestinians as symptomatic of the inability of the whole nationalist ethos to truly address any of their grievances.

In light of the above, it is obvious that several circumstantial, cultural and regional factors were brought to bear upon the evolution of Hamas. The movement worked diligently to capitalise on regional events and to reap the fruit of several developments, particularly conflicts. The fact that Hamas was in its infancy, did not sway it from widening its base and attracting supporters. Without a regional context which would make its local presence and effectiveness possible, Hamas would, with all certainty, have had greater difficulties. International events also assisted the movement as the ensuing pages will demonstrate.

International Determinants

The gradual collapse of the Socialist bloc in the mid - to late 1980s provided Islamic movements in general, and those in Palestinian society in particular, with a strong weapon in their march towards public recognition. The death of Communism not only meant the removal of the Soviet empire from the political map of the world, but was also interpreted by Islamists as signifying an exclusive viability of Islam as way of life. To them the Soviet Union was dissolved not because of a countervailing military power but because of its disavowal of Islam as the only "correct" way of life. [38] Before the mid-1980s the main power struggle was seen as that between communism and capitalism or Soviet Union and United States. The attention of the media and therefore the public generally was devoted to the configuration of power exemplified by the cold war. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union and the United States never came into direct confrontation, the closest being in the 1960s with the Cuban missile crisis, there are various examples where they fought through "client regimes".

In Afghanistan the power that eventually forced the Soviet Union out, and in a military manner, was the Islamist movement. Although the mujaheddiin, were not weapons manufacturers and their military action against the Soviet Union was heavily reliant on the United States for its equipment, the perception of this action and the power struggle involved that forced the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan was that it had been entirely a victory for the mujaheddiin, vanguards of Islam, and, therefore, Islam itself. The United States could not defeat the Soviets directly but under the rubric of the Islamic movement which it supplied, its national interest was served. Islam therefore came to be seen as an effective tool for bringing change.

The eventual Soviet withdrawal was therefore perceived as a great triumph for Islam and a sign of its potential, especially given the sheer size and might of the Soviet Union at the time. This served as an incredibly strong mobilizing impetus to other Islamic movements such as Hamas. The former government of Najibullah Khan had to ensure close links with its religious leadership in order to maintain and broaden its support. [39]

Since the Soviet Union has collapsed the Islamic movement has, almost by default, become more of a threat to the United States than the former Soviet Union. This perception and the psychological boost it gives to the Hamas movement cannot be underestimated.

As the Soviet Union was dissolving there was another power at work which would serve as a challenge to Western power: Iraq. In attempting to assert the vitality of Arab nationalism, Iraq took over Kuwait in August 1990. With the sanction of the Soviet Union via the UN security council the United States and the USSR were effectively united against a third party for the first time. The failure of Saddam Hussein's enterprise was interpreted by Hamas as a defeat for nationalism, leaving Palestine with Islam (and Hamas) as the only alternative.

Islamists generally do not differ too much between East and West insofar as the attitude of both to Islam is unfavorable. They consider there to be an inherent enmity between Islam and the way of life it entails and both the Western and Eastern ways of life, capitalism as is and Communism as was. The belief that the victory of the mujaheddiin in Afghanistan was a sign that if Islam can defeat one of these powers, there is no reason why it cannot defeat the other, undoubtedly gave a huge boost to the ability of Hamas to rally the Palestinian people around its cause. The collapse of the Soviet Union was taken as the collapse and diminution if not disappearance of the credibility of Marxism, leaving a huge vacuum in the political influence of the leftist groups in Palestinian society. Hamas capitalized on this vacuum, being able not only to cite the victory of Islam against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan but also to belittle the beliefs of the secular Palestinian left for adhering to what had become an ideology without credibility. This dual attack deeply affected the support of the secular left trend in Palestinian society which became even less able to meet the demands of the Palestinian people and Hamas took the stage like a long awaited Messiah.

Other international influences on or inspirations for Islamic movements are obviously Iran's Islamic revolution and subsequent financial support for Hamas, particularly after the start of the intifada. Other sources of material support for Hamas are various, notably, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf States, Sudan and Algeria. The subtle stand taken by Hamas over the Gulf crisis resulted in increased support from the Gulf and Iranian contributions also increased as did their provision of military training. [40]

An indirect consequence of any successful Islamic movement, and this was particularly the case following Afghanistan, is an increased incentive to give funds to other movements. Donations from individuals are received through Islamic organizations, and Hamas has been a direct beneficiary of the Afghan success. "Muslims throughout the world, including in Europe and the United States are now offering support to the mujaheddiin of Palestine." [41]

The sudden focus on Islam of the world media has been criticized as no more than the West finding a new enemy now that communism has surrendered. [42] The portrayal of Islamic trends or actions throughout the world though generally negative have nevertheless resulted in high international visibility which serves the aims of movements like Hamas. An event such as the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center can be seen as a success on the international stage as far as showing power is concerned and is a reminder not only of the seriousness with which Islamic movements demand to be taken but also of their increasing international spread. Such an

incident dispels any notion that may have been held that they are localized and do not come close enough to the West to seriously affect its societies.

Based on the above it can be seen that Hamas has capitalized on events in several parts of the world, it has tried to benefit from triumphs and losses. The influences brought to bear upon it are too many to enumerate here, in every corner of the globe, however, one incident here and another there, helped shape the meaning of the movement, the definition of its goals and the articulation of its message. Even where Hamas played no role it did not shy away from attempting to claim partnership and/or responsibility and further used events to emphasize the universality of the Islamic mission.

[20] Interview conducted by the author on October 4th 1993, with a widely respected religious notable and national activist and one of the most highly respected *imams* at al-Aqsa mosque who asked to remain anonymous.

[21] Rekhess. Elie, "The Iranian impact on the Islamic Jihad movement in the Gaza Strip." The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University, January 1988. pp 4.

[22] Jamil Hamameh interview. (See Historico-Political background, footnote 7.)

[23] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[24] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[25] Jaradat. Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." p. 7-11. News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992.

[26] Rekhess. Elie, Op. cit. p. 5.

[27] Interview conducted by the author on October 4th 1993, with a widely respected religious notable and national activist and one of the most highly respected *imams* at al-Aqsa mosque who asked to remain anonymous.

[28] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[29] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[30] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[31] Sheikh Khalil al-Alami, an *imam* at the al-Aqsa mosque, was interviewed at his office in Jerusalem in September 1993.

[32] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[33] Usher. Graham, "The rise of political Islam in the Occupied Territories." Middle East International. No. 453 - 25 June 1993. p 20.

[34] Jaradat. Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992. pp 7. (See also Rekhess. Elie, "The Iranian impact on the Islamic Jihad movement in the Gaza Strip." Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Tel Aviv University. Jan. 1988.)

[35] Jaradat. Muhammed, *Ibid* pp 7.

[36] See Shadid. Mohammed K. "The Muslim Brotherhood movement in the West Bank and Gaza." Third World Quarterly. Vol. 10. No. 2. April 1988. pp 667.

[37] Salame. Ghassan, "Islam and the West." Foreign Policy. No. 90 - Spring 1993. pp 29.

[38] Jaradat. Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." p. 7-11. News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992.

[39] Abu-Amr. Ziad, " Hamas: A Historical and Political Background." Journal of Palestine Studies. Volume XXII. Number 4. Summer 1993. pp 16-17.

[40] Ramati. Yohanan, "Islamic Fundamentalism Gaining." Midstream-A Monthly Jewish Review. Vol. 39 - No. 2 - 1993 pp 3.

[41] Abu-Amr. Ziad, *Op cit*. pp 17.

[42] Salame. Ghassan, "Islam and the West." Foreign Policy. No. 90 - Spring 1993. pp 23.

Chapter Three

A Political Program.

The intifada is generally believed to have been a spontaneous event unconnected to any leadership decision thus taking all political and religious groupings by surprise. An accident on December 8th, 1987 which involved the death of several Palestinian workers in vehicles hit by an Israeli truck began the riots that were the beginning of the intifada. The following day leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood met to discuss how the situation could be used to promote wider public demonstrations. This group consisted of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, founder of the Islamic Centre and other key figures in the Centre including Dr. Abdul Aziz Ali Rantisi, Dr. Ibrahim al-Yazuri, Sheikh Saleh Shehadeh, Issa al-Nashshar, Muhammed Shama and Abed al-Fattah Dukhan. On December the 14th this group issued a statement calling for resistance to the occupation which, retrospectively was the first official leaflet of Hamas, although the group did not actually go under that name until January 1988.

Between December 1987 and December 1988, Hamas issued around 33 leaflets. [\[43\]](#) (The number is not certain because they were not numbered until May 1988 when number 21 appeared.) The leaflets drew heavily on religious slogans and images unlike those distributed by the Unified Leadership of the Uprising (Fateh\Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and Palestine Communist Party (PCP) coalition) whose were longer, more detailed and succinctly presented political arguments. All the leaflets set out to dictate a routine for daily life but the Hamas leaflets addressed a broader range of issues covering work, health, transportation, education and religious instruction as well as declaring its own strike days.

Although the leaflets illustrate that both groups have the same overriding goal which is to establish a Palestinian state and remove Israel from the occupied lands, Hamas goes much further, aiming to establish an Islamic state in all of Palestine. Leaflet number 22 of June 1988 declares that "Our war is a holy war for Allah unto victory or death." As far as Hamas is concerned, the Muslims right to all of Palestine leaves no room for a political settlement with Israel: a Hamas leaflet of March 1988 states, "Let every hand be cut off that signs a relinquishment of a grain of the soil of Palestine to the enemies of Allah who have usurped the blessed soil." [\[44\]](#)

In August 1988 Hamas released its own covenant, (see Appendix I) a thirty-six article document clearly stating its objectives and covering an extraordinary range of issues. Contained in the introductory page, along with quotes from the Koran and martyrs to the cause, is the line, "Israel will be established and will stay established until Islam nullifies it as it nullified what was before it." The covenant goes on to introduce the Hamas movement and its birth saying that it "went forth to perform its role for the sake of its Lord."

The first chapter defines the movement, explaining its relationship to the Muslim Brotherhood and saying that it "works towards raising the banner of Allah on every inch of Palestine," and that it is "a link in {a long} chain of *Jihad* against the Zionist occupation." It defines itself thus:

The Islamic resistance movement...professes a comprehensive understanding and precise conceptualization of the Islamic precepts in all aspects of life: concept and beliefs, politics and economics, education and social service, jurisdiction and law, exhortation and training, communication and arts, the seen and the unseen and the rest of life's ways. (The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Article Two)

Chapter two rhetorically defines the general objectives of the movement with an evocative introduction which says that the movement:

...evolved in a time where the lack of the Islamic Spirit has brought about distorted judgement and absurd comprehension. Values have deteriorated, the plague of the evil folk and oppression and darkness have become rampant, cowards have become ferocious. Nations have been occupied, their people expelled and fallen on their faces {in humiliation} everywhere on earth. The nation of truth is absent and the nation 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, break its will and annihilate it so that truth may prevail, so that the country may return to its rightful place, and so that the call may be broadcast over the minarets proclaiming the Islamic state. (The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Article Nine.)

There is a strong social message in these ideas which appeal to a broader base than religion alone - rejecting the division of Palestine and claiming that the struggle must be for the whole land, gives hope to those refugees outside the land, hope that they will be able to realize their right of return to their own homes, fields and villages. No other Palestinian political movement can embrace such a promise. [\[45\]](#)

Owing to the belief of Hamas that all the land of Palestine is Islamic *Waqf* consecrated for future Muslim generations makes *Jihad* or holy war inevitable. Hamas believes itself to be the most recent link in the "chain of *Jihad*" which began with the revolt of Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam and his Muslim Brotherhood comrades in the 1930s.

Article thirteen of the covenant says:

There is no solution to the Palestinian question except by *Jihad*. The initiatives, options and international conferences are a waste of time and a kind of child's play. The Palestinian people are nobler than to be fiddling with their future, rights and destiny.

Article fifteen reiterates this more strongly by stating that:

When an enemy occupies some of the Muslim lands, *Jihad* becomes obligatory for every Muslim. In the struggle against the Jewish occupation of Palestine, the banner of *Jihad* must be raised.

This principle tenet of the Hamas program addressed every able member of society as illustrated in article twelve:

Fighting the enemy becomes the individual obligation of every Muslim man and woman. *The woman is allowed to go fight without the permission of her husband and the slave without the permission of his master.*

and in article fourteen:

The liberation of Palestine is obligatory for every Muslim no matter where he is; Despite its apparently Islamic call for Holy War against the Zionist entity and the establishment of what it envisions as an Islamic state, Hamas has, especially recently, appealed to an audience that does not necessarily share its political aims. Part of its grass-roots appeal comes from disillusion with the secular ranks of the PLO who are seen by many as being too weak in their resistance to the occupiers. Hamas, meanwhile, has claimed responsibility for what are seen by

many as successful military exploits including killings of Israeli secret agents. On the other hand, Hamas has been careful to present a 'moderate' face to those unhappy with lack of progress under PLO leadership yet reluctant to embrace an 'extremist' stance.

As Hamas has developed from being simply an arm of the Muslim Brotherhood to a major political organization, so it has shifted its actions to be increasingly seen as a primary source of resistance to the occupation and therefore a legitimate challenger to the hegemony of the PLO. Its decisions on how best to maintain this challenge during the current peace process and *vis-a-vis* the possibility of elections as part of that process are purely pragmatic.

While Hamas appeals to democratic principles in its efforts to challenge the PLO (claiming that the PLO leadership is not a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people because it has not been elected, and calling for elections inside and outside the Occupied Territories to determine the leadership), the fact remains that it seeks not democracy in Palestine but the establishment of *sharia* (Islamic law) as the only law, the interpretation of which will be determined not by an elected government but by the Supreme '*Ulama*':

The Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is its system. From Islam it reaches for its ideology, fundamental precepts and world view of life, the universe and humanity; and it judges all its actions according to Islam and is inspired by Islam to correct its errors. (The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Article One).

The claim of each fundamentalist movement, of whatever religion, is that it provides all the answers to all facets of life. Therefore, of course, everything else is wrong and, because the apparently correct path is founded on religious belief, somehow sinful, blasphemous and corrupt. Hamas seeks not democracy but theocracy. It demands not freedom but obedience, not equality but compliance, of women to men and of the poor to the (charitable) rich. Hamas stresses that "it is possible for all followers of different religions to live in peace and with security" However, it claims that this can only happen "in the shadow of Islam" in the absence of which, "discord takes form, oppression and destruction are rampant and wars and battles take place." (The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Article Six).

Fundamentalism is regressive; it harks back to some mythical Golden Age when (religious) law was properly observed and, therefore, society was better in every way. Hamas is no exception and proudly proclaims that, "The historical dimension of the Islamic Resistance Movement originates from its adoption of Islam as a system of life. It reaches far back to the birth of the Islamic Message" (The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Article Five).

The belief in a prescribed magic formula (religious or otherwise but especially in the case of fundamentalist religion) suitable for all is not only undemocratic but inherently conservative and in the interests of the patronizing classes. It is indeed ironic that Hamas, which relies so much on the support of those Palestinians who feel betrayed by the current patronizing leadership, seeks to impose another.

[43] All leaflets issued by Hamas are available in Arabic and French at The BirZeit University Research Centre in the West Bank town of BirZeit.

[44] See Mishal. Shaul, "Paper War' - Words Behind Stones: The Intifada Leaflets." The Jerusalem Quarterly. Number Fifty-One, Summer 1989.

[45] Hasan. Manar, "On Fundamentalism in our Land" News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 10/11 - Oct.Nov. 1992. pp 24

Chapter Four

Relationship with other bodies

Palestinian Nationalists and Secularists.

Throughout the years of its existence, Hamas's activities have been somewhat detrimental to the PLO. The strike days the movement has called for as well as the use of violent acts of resistance by its members not only deepened the rift between Palestinians and Israelis, but also contributed to the division of Palestinian society and to increasing the difficulty of bringing about cohesion and/or national consensus.

The albeit skeptical opinion that the PLO has offered them prospects for nation-building is, for many Palestinians, more than outweighed by Hamas's offer of individual and thus political salvation once they return to Allah. The emphasis in Hamas's political program on the causes and ways to get rid of despair in society, has only made its objective more realizable. The fact, however, that the movement has not been able to offer society more practical alternatives has led to the waning of its support from its earlier claimed 40%.

On the other hand, the PLO leadership being outside the Occupied Territories has given Hamas the advantage of closer connections and arguably a more realistic perception of people's needs. The secular left, the Palestine Communist Party (Formally PCP but now known as the Palestine Peoples Party - PPP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in particular, have fallen behind in the race for popular support. In what is an essentially conservative society very much rooted in Islamic teachings and in a state of despair under occupation, there has been a perceived need for spiritual solace as well as national liberation.

The Marxist orientation of the PFLP, DFLP and the PPP was in principle non-religious although this element has had to be played down. The growth in religious movements since the 1970s has caused further dilemmas for the left who have had to tread even more carefully around the subject of religion, especially in view of the fact that they could be accused of heresy by the Islamists. Rather than ignore the subject altogether which was open to negative interpretation, they too began expressing a positive attitude towards 'religious beliefs' as a "handmaiden to nationalism." [\[46\]](#)

Between 1984 and 1987 the left wing organizations within the PLO withdrew, leaving Fateh as the dominant force. Having previously had a positive approach to Islam generally, Fateh was in a good position to enhance this element in order to compete with Hamas. In their leaflets they began to refer more to religious themes and in the November convention of the Palestine National Council in 1984 a banner was hung bearing the Koranic verse from which Fateh derives its name. Also at this convention Sheikh Abd al-Hamid al-Sa'ih was elected chairman. [\[47\]](#)

In 1988 Hamas decided to come up with its own covenant which was a direct challenge to the PLO. In Chapter Four, articles 26 and 27 of the covenant, Hamas defines its attitude to nationalist movements in the Palestinian arena including the PLO. While careful to document understanding of the secular vision and articulate that all are united in a common aim it nevertheless states that Hamas will not be one with the PLO until the latter adopts Islam as its way of life. This charter set the framework for a very unsteady relationship and clashes between supporters of the respective

movements became more common. The attitude of the PLO towards the birth of Hamas was seen by Jamil Hamameh as follows:

I witnessed the behavior of Fateh and saw it adopt a very negative and unfortunate stand *vis-a-vis* Hamas. In the beginning it went as far as making accusations regarding the formation of the movement, but in the tradition of a movement which was raised in an Islamic way, it [Hamas] did not withdraw because of these responses but continued its work as a proof of its authenticity and originality. Fateh, because of its hegemony and because of its belief that it was the mother of the Palestinian people, adopted a critical stand as it did not accept any other claims of parentage. It does not respect others and Hamas finds this most regretful. We respect every perspective in the Palestinian arena and we respect the Palestinian people because we are a part of that people and we do not accept one party to be in control of the decision process to the detriment of others. Unfortunately the Fateh position was not a responsible position because of their fabrication of events and their attacks on the sons of the Islamic movement and the mosques. The unfortunate events that took place in the Gaza Strip led to inner fighting and what then happened in Jenin and Tulkarem [further clashes] is clear proof of that. Instead of joining hands and uniting forces this was their public response to the formation of the movement. [\[48\]](#)

The accusations to which Hamameh initially refers are that Hamas had been essentially unconcerned about the Palestinian struggle until it saw an opportunity for political power during the intifada. According to Hamameh, Fateh effectively "blackened out" the history of the movement and its links to the Muslim Brotherhood "in order to distance Islam from the battleground despite the fact that "since the beginning of the occupation in 1967 the movement [Muslim Brotherhood] had formed battalions to resist the occupation. These battalions were known as the Sheikh's battalions or *Kata'ib al-Shu'ukh*". Hamameh claimed that Fateh's "fabrication of events" had been aimed to remove the contribution of Islamic resistance in Palestine from history and in his words: "to un-educate, de-politicize and to make the people unaware of the role of the Islamic movement." The emergence of Hamas therefore revealed a strong current of sentiment which Fateh had glossed over if not actually ignored.

This is not strictly correct. Although Fateh did criticize Hamas for what it saw as provoking disunity among the Palestinians and thereby undermining the Palestinian cause, it did not see Hamas as an entirely new and historically opportunistic movement.

When asked if he saw the emergence of Hamas as revealing contradictions inherent in Fateh and other movements, Hamameh replied that it was not contradiction but merely an indication that there are differences of perspective.

I don't want to call them contradictions - they may be differences in perspective or differences in the understanding of the Arab - Israeli conflict. The way I understand it as a Muslim is that it is ideological, cultural - some might see it as a historical conflict, others as a power struggle so let us not call it an uncovering of contradictions but of perspectives. [\[49\]](#)

This is somewhat moderate and pragmatic response considering that counter-allegations of promoting disunity among the Palestinian people were made by Hamas against Fateh. Jamil Hamameh blamed Fateh entirely for all the clashes and inner fighting that took place at that time and emphasised that nothing could justify "what Fateh did."

I can find no justification for what happened and for what Fateh did, regardless of whether or not these elements were officially affiliated with Fateh or mavericks acting independently. What is

painful is that it happened at all, no matter how many reasons there were for or behind these events there can be no justification for inner fighting between the sons of one people who are facing the same dangers and feeling the same pains. They have one common enemy, what happens to any one, affects all, and nothing will justify inner fighting. No justification can be respected or believed, nor should be respected or believed by any rational person. [50]

When asked about the reaction of other political factions to the birth of Hamas, Jamil Hamameh said that it had come as a great shock to them. He went on to criticize the factions for their attitude to Hamas saying that they had "accused the movement of having no concern with the Palestinian problem and that it was a movement of dervishes whose sole interest is fasting and praying." However, he went on to illustrate his understanding of this attitude by saying that:

I do not blame anyone whose ignorance of the nature of Islam and the nature of the Islamic movement and the stages of socialization it undergoes and the way it raises its sons. Of course it was natural that the formation and establishment of Hamas would come as a shock to the Palestinian factions in the arena. Whether they be left or right leaning. [51]

Although seeming to find a justification for the factions attitude in a way he did not do for Fateh, he subtly damns the factions for their "ignorance" and therefore, for their irreligiosity, at the same time.

When asked about the relationship between Hamas and other Islamic movements, Hamameh neither confirmed or denied that there was co-ordination between them:

As far as I know, and this is not necessarily 100% accurate, Hamas tries to respect all Islamic trends and movements. I do not know if there is co-ordination but Hamas has declared its position in its covenant. [52]

Hamas increasingly mounted its own operations entirely independently of the PLO. It began to call strikes on days other than those designated by the PLO and took violent measures to ensure that these strikes were observed. Hamas became particularly hostile following the Algiers Declaration in 1988 which advocated political settlement and began increasingly to attack PLO policy as a betrayal of its own principles. Even prior to the declaration of Algiers, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin spoke out publicly in the media and even on Israeli television against the PLO's vision of a secular Palestinian state. [53]

This antagonistic relationship continued as Fateh struggled to maintain its support and decry the actions of Hamas as breaking ranks and diluting the overall strength of Palestinian nationalism. Hamas retaliated by insisting that the PLO was not representative. In 1992 elections at the chambers of commerce in Nablus and Qalqilya, Fateh issued small Korans as a reminder that their nationalism was not entirely devoid of religious sensibilities. As a rejoinder to this and to the increased use of Islamic slogans by Fateh, Hamas activists in Gaza then began to use graffiti to spread the message, "Hamas is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people," which was the long-standing slogan of the PLO itself. [54]

Hamas's open competition with the PLO grew more intense leading Arafat in October 1992 to compare the movement with the separatist Inkatha Freedom Party in South Africa which has very much complicated the work of the ANC. Arafat went as far as threatening to fight against Hamas militarily. [55] Arafat's stern warnings may have been provoked by the confrontations between hundreds of Hamas and Fateh supporters in July 1992 in the Gaza Strip. These clashes

during which knives and firearms were used leaving three dead and many more injured, were the product of each faction's attempt to assert itself and demonstrate its dominance in Palestinian political life. [56]

The expulsion of over 400 Hamas members to Southern Lebanon in late 1992, created several obstacles to the PLO's political line. Any policy measure the PLO undertook had to be sensitive to the plight of the expellees. The PLO involvement in the peace process through the Palestinian delegation was hampered, since on more than one occasion the participants in the peace talks found themselves compelled to announce their readiness to terminate their involvement in the negotiating process unless the expellees were returned. Even when the expellees declared their willingness to return on a phased basis during the summer of 1993, the PLO position was further complicated. With the talks leading nowhere and the PLO suffering serious economic, institutional and administrative hardships, the popularity of the PLO was perhaps at the lowest point in its history. Its problems were very much due to its stand during the Gulf War which had offended a large number of those who were supplying financial support which they subsequently withdrew. During that period the PLO was in such financial difficulties it could not pay families of the martyrs and/or any of its supporters. This, combined with the events surrounding the deportation, gave Hamas unprecedented standing. Many of those who used to get money from the PLO now turned to Hamas for financial support. The decision by the expellees to accept return on a phased basis gave a glimmer of hope to the Palestinian delegation since their participation in the talks was so often hampered by the expulsion issue. However, the difficulty of facing the expellees whom they had promised not to rejoin the talks until their release was considerably eased due to the unexpected breakthroughs in secret bilateral Israeli-PLO negotiations in late summer 1993. [57] For some time, one could expect the PLO popularity to increase owing to the atmosphere created as a result of the peace talks. However, Hamas, which considers the autonomy scheme as a betrayal of Islamic principles, is more likely to continue opposing and/or fighting against the peace process. In all likelihood Hamas will continue to compete with the PLO even if it means sitting at the negotiating table at some time. The least that Hamas can be expected to do is to influence Palestinian public opinion by alerting it to the "dangers" of the current political process. Undoubtedly, Hamas members will attempt to translate the sympathy gained as a result of the expulsions into lasting political power. [58]

While on Marj al Zuhour the expellees were provided with support, supplies, and an endless stream of visitors from every political grouping in Palestinian society. The contribution of the PLO, however, did not make much of an impression on them:

We observed all the honorable people from within and without the PLO, the Arab peoples who leapt to our aid. Walid Junblatt, [Socialist and Druze leader in Lebanon] sent bread and other necessities to us in the beginning. Supporters of Ahmad Jibril [Head of the PFLP general Command] provided us with much in terms of shelter, clothing and funds. Others, PFLP, Hizbullah, the Revolutionary Guard - everyone provided for us and empathized with us. Our brothers in Fateh, Abu Omar's [Arafat's] Fateh, I'm sure provided us with what they could but the least giving were our brothers in the Fateh organization. They provided something but very little. It was a lot less than we had expected. [59]

The actual experience of this expulsion added further fuel to Hamas's criticism of the mainstream or at least of secular trends. Comparing the behavior of the group deported on this particular occasion to groups from the mainstream expelled previously, Sheikh Hamad Bitawi had this to say:

They [secular expellees] saw comforts in their deportation and used it as path to enjoyment. They entrenched themselves in hotels while we entrench ourselves in trenches. They endured the struggle from hotels while we endure from trenches. Faced with the choice of comfort and hardship we chose hardship and stayed on the barren land to remain a thorn in the throat of Israel and to remain at the gates of our beloved homeland. Such hardship did not deter us as it deterred them. [\[60\]](#)

Bitawi goes on to stress that the deportation far from breaking Hamas actually made it stronger:

There is no doubt that this deportation had very positive effects on our Palestinian people...people started to have hope, our determination paid off. Imagine if we had succumbed to circumstances and roamed around the world leaving the deportation site in no mans land - our problem would have roamed with us as well and our `question' would have vanished. [\[61\]](#)

The PLO position on negotiations following the deportation was viewed extremely negatively by the expellees. As one of them stated on his return:

We valued the step by our brothers in the PLO, to suspend the talks and one of the reasons was no doubt that we had not returned, but after taking this step they betrayed us. In the beginning their deed can be remembered and therefore thanked but after this they left us hanging. They betrayed us. [\[62\]](#)

In April 1993, the expellees' spokesman, Abdul Aziz Ali Rantisi reprimanded members of the Palestinian delegation when they returned to the negotiating table, calling them "traitors" who should not escape the punishment of the people. To Rantisi, these delegates were not elected by the people and as such "they represent no one but themselves." To him, this makes "the whole [peace] process illegitimate and illegal."

While issuing his threatening statements, Rantisi kept the door open for Hamas's further political involvement by making statements in defence of the PLO:

The PLO is a national Palestinian achievement. It's true that the leadership has made mistakes and should return to the right path. This is what is needed to save the PLO. We need a comprehensive national dialogue in which all the factions and forces will participate from inside the territories and outside. The structure and shape of the PLO should be redefined on a democratic basis, to be achieved by electing a national Palestinian Parliament. [\[63\]](#)

However, although Hamas has expressed the intent to participate in municipal elections and will continue to participate in local student councils, chambers of commerce and other union oriented elections, it has ruled out the possibility of involvement in elections for the self-rule council. Despite this assertion several Hamas members applied for admission to the newly-formed Palestinian police force to ensure that they would not be completely isolated from the scene once the action began. [\[64\]](#)

Given the unease of the relationship between Hamas and the PLO, one other major worry that needs to be addressed is the possibility of the outbreak of full scale hostility between the two parties or in others words, the possibility of a Palestinian civil war. This may very much depend on the position Hamas decides to take in the future vis-a-vis elections for the autonomy council but it cannot be ruled out. Jamil Hamameh, when questioned on this matter, stated the following:

Hamas has declared that it will strongly oppose inner fighting although this does not mean that this opposition will not defend its rights. As Palestinians we reject inner fighting among our people but I believe the Palestinian people and the various political factions will not be at a loss when it comes to resisting the acquiescence that is now taking place. [\[65\]](#)

He was stronger in his invocation of non-violence when asked how Hamas would react were there to be restrictions placed upon it by a national authority established in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip:

I don't want to get ahead of events but the movement [Hamas] will not resort to violence and bloodshed in its resistance to a solution or authority that will come as an alternative to occupation. We as Palestinians will respect the struggles of our people and will continue to consider that the central enemy is the Jewish state and not the sons of our own people. [\[66\]](#)

The subject of a civil war was more openly raised during a discussion between Sheikh Hamad Bitawi and the Military Governor of Nablus who summoned the former for an interrogation session after his return from Marj al-Zuhour. The Military Governor suggested to Bitawi that there would be inner fighting among Palestinians and Bitawi replied:

We are not going to fight, the PLO and the Islamic movement are the sons of one people, one homeland, one religion and one family. [\[67\]](#)

Stressing that Hamas was a legitimate opposition, Bitawi continued by asking the Military Governor:

Don't you have an opposition? I saw 50,000 from the Likud and others demonstrating [against the accord] in Jerusalem....we are the same. Do you think that the Palestinian people are a savage people? An uncultured people? We are not a savage people, we are not an uncultured people. If we oppose, then our opposition will be positive....I will announce and so will all the rational ones in the country, that the party responsible for fighting is the Israeli government which wants to feed the trouble...one more time I am saying to you, and you can tell this to [Prime Minister] Rabin and [Foreign Minister] Peres - we will not fight. [\[68\]](#)

The assertions made by both Hamameh and Bitawi need to be evaluated in the overall context of Hamas relations with other Palestinian factions on the one hand and against the backdrop of Hamas discourse and performance on the other. While both confirm that they will not opt for inner fighting to resolve their disagreements with other groups, Rantisi nonetheless, in commentary on the stand taken by the PLO over the deportation issue called them "traitors who should not escape the punishment of the people".

The way in which the deportation was perceived and handled by various Palestinian groups seems to have created a great degree of division in Palestinian political attitudes. While sharply criticizing the PLO for its stand, Hamas used the deportation to reflect its own broad political orientation based on flexibility and pragmatism. It was not adverse to publicizing the deepening of the rift between it and the PLO particularly when the rhetoric of suspending the talks until all those deported were returned had proved to be just that.

Hamas, however, capitalised on its initial refusal and subsequent acceptance of the principle of phased return to generate further popular support. Providing a rationale for the apparent flexibility of Hamas policy Bitawi said:

Some asked us - why did you refuse to have a group of 100 deportees returned before the 2 year period while now you accept this? The answer was that there had been changes, firstly, when the names were first announced, there was no formal decision, we did not receive any official word from the Israelis saying that this was just the first group. However when they sent names and said some on the seventeenth of September and some on the seventeenth of December - the ceiling was known, the information was clear.

There is another thing, some of our people were getting sick and needed surgery or medical treatment. Another thing is that it had been important to people in Palestine in charge of institutions, that we remain here [on Marj al-Zuhour] but there were indeed changes in those circumstances too. Therefore we had to be flexible and could not be rigid giving the changing circumstances. [\[69\]](#)

It is this calculated flexibility that enables Hamas to accommodate various changes without necessarily losing its support or esteem. This flexibility will be the subject of further discussion at a later point.

Israel

The relationship between Hamas and Israel has undergone a radical change since the movement first began. Before the intifada Hamas busied itself with political and grass-roots activities centered mainly in universities and mosques and designed to offer alternative ideas to the predominance of secularism and nationalism offered by the PLO. Resistance to the Israeli occupation was a small part of their program at that time and they were not involved in armed resistance. Consequently, it functioned without interference from the Israeli authorities and was able to build a strong organizational structure with considerable influence among the people with whom it worked. [\[70\]](#) As one interviewee pointed out:

An observer of events at the beginning of the intifada when Hamas was launched would note that the occupation authorities did not chase or punish them. The focus of the occupation authorities was on the Islamic Jihad therefore, Hamas members were free to move around. [\[71\]](#)

As a result of this, the actual "intifada launch" of active military resistance is claimed by one leading Hamas member to have been completely unexpected by Israel:

Even the intelligence apparatus was shocked. It is a well known fact that the intelligence services usually monitor and gather information about all movement in Palestinian society but even they were left wondering what had happened. [\[72\]](#)

One school of thought that tries to analyze the dynamics behind the establishment of Hamas suggests that it is not unlikely that the Israeli Occupation was interested in making the establishment of a balancing force possible:

Some political analysts say that it is possible that the Israeli authorities tried to promote an equilibrium [in the Palestinian political structure] by finding a force to balance the PLO and effectively to weaken the PLO. The objective was to do away with the slogan, "The PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people." The goal of the authorities [Israel] did not spring out of love for Hamas or love for Islam, it was, their desire, as a tactical move to establish a sort of [political] balance. [\[73\]](#)

If this analysis is to be pursued to its logical conclusion one can suggest that the Israeli occupation calculated that a most effective way to get out of that critical phase, the launching of the intifada, was to busy Palestinian society with itself by internalizing the conflict between Palestinians.

Another point often rumored is that Israel made the rise of Hamas possible by supplying finances to areas that would have encouraged its growth. A suggestion of this was made in 1986 by General Segev who was the former military governor of the Gaza Strip:

We extend some financial aid to Islamic groups via mosques and religious schools in order to help create a force that would stand against the leftist forces which support the PLO. [74]

Although no hard evidence supporting the claim of direct assistance to Hamas itself is available, Israel can certainly be said to have contributed to the possibilities for Hamas to receive funding. Their efforts were directed at impeding the flow of funds to the PLO and due to their acceptance of Hamas activities during the first phase of the intifada they did not take measures to obstruct channels through which Hamas received its financial support thus indirectly aiding the movement.

On the regional level Israel sought to bring about a certain fragmentation in the Muslim world as a whole going as far as playing a role in the arms for hostages exchanges of the US Iran-Contra affair in which it facilitated the supply of arms to Khomeini's Iran. [75]

Despite publication of the Hamas Covenant in 1988 which called for the nullification of Israel by Islam, the relationship between Israel and Hamas was not to change until May 1989 when Israel, recognizing that Hamas was becoming a threat, arrested a large number of Hamas activists, among them the spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin. The movement was declared illegal by the Israeli authorities in September 1989. [76]

Since then Israel has maintained its policy of imprisonment and expulsion for those involved with Hamas particularly at the leadership level. The culmination of this policy came in December 1992 with the mass expulsion of 415 suspected members of Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Muslim Brotherhood. Among these were apparently not only most of the leaders of the movement but also second and third ranking officials and activists which seemed to leave the movement in the territories leaderless. [77] The speed at which the expulsion took place although a shock to many was inevitable for as one interviewee pointed out:

At the time when Hamas started to become a threat to Israel's real security the authorities were compelled to hit with its well known fist by deporting 400 of their members and leaders to Marj al Zuhour in South Lebanon. Its not a secret that the occupation authorities managed to arrest 400 Hamas members in 24 hours and no surprise because Hamas activists had been allowed to work publicly and were, therefore, already well exposed. [78]

In carrying out these expulsions Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin sought to paralyze the movement's main infrastructure by delivering it a strong retaliatory punishment for acts of violence it had committed. His attempt to "suffocate those in the `cellar' by "demolishing the `top floor'" [79] and so cripple the movement and lessen its support ironically had the opposite effect, particularly considering the fact that many of the deportees were not considered active or high ranking among the people within the territories themselves and to many the act was interpreted as no more than a show of strength by Israel. Among those deported were doctors, engineers judges university professors and officers of the *Waqf* and *Zakat* committees, one of whom observed:

The deportation was undoubtedly aimed to rid Palestine of its scientific talents... furthermore Israel and the West are worried by what they see as Islamic revivalism, they truly believe that among those deported were over 200 *imams* and that by this measure Islamic revivalism will die. Israel also wanted to absorb or curtail the Israeli anger following the killing of Toledano [\[80\]](#) but there is no relationship between the deportees and Toledano. [\[81\]](#)

The lack of justification for the deportation was also seen as part of a history of persecution:

Deportation is an ancient policy - the disbelievers and the unjust use it against the prophets and the followers of the prophet. [\[82\]](#)

The previous call for the obliteration of "The Jewish State" by Hamas was most certainly compounded by the deportation. Influenced by several psychological/motivational assumptions one leading Islamist who was among the deportees pointed out:

The Israeli state is not democratic, it is a state of injustice that commits this crime without investigation as to the responsibility of the accused, without trial before sentence and with harsh treatment. My house was besieged and I was taken, handcuffed, feet bound and blindfolded. Myself and the others were not given food or drink for over 40 hours and beating and cursing against my God was continuous. This was what worried us most, the physical pain of beating can be endured but the pain of having your beliefs and your God cursed by your abductors does not fade easily. [\[83\]](#)

Referring to the expulsion as "the crime" and giving the equation that deportation is equal to murder, the same deportee relayed a conversation he had with the Israeli Military Governor in Nablus, in which he had commented that the deportation would hurt the state of Israel. The Military Governor asked how this could be the case and was greeted with the following reply:

During the last 45 years you have managed to establish the facade of being a democratic state. This deportation has proved the opposite. You have deported us without trial and this has stripped the facade of Israel's democracy - there is no democracy - while we [the deportees] have given a portrait of the Palestinian people as an educated people, a civilized people and an understanding people. [\[84\]](#)

He gave a further example of the disadvantage to Israel by citing a comment from one of the visitors to the deportation site whose perception of the deportees integrity was concluded thus:

...were it not for the fact that you [deportees] were honest Israel would not have deported you. [\[85\]](#)

Criticism of Israel for its lack of justice and democratic processes is a recurrent theme and one which has been raised by many people arrested from the beginning of the intifada until the present day. Although the above illustrates the outrage of being sentenced without trial others have attacked the whole Israeli process of trial and sentencing itself.

What goes on in an Israeli court and between Israeli lawyers is not necessarily what is recorded on the charge sheet. In my estimation there is no honest judicial system in Israel. The general mood or character of the judge is what determines the outcome - the nature of the interrogation and the sentence. The charges directed against me at the court were not the charges that led to my sentencing. [\[86\]](#)

Many of those deported had been imprisoned at other times in their lives but the two things bore no comparison according to one deportee:

The sheer fact of uprooting a person from his land, home, family and job and to throw him in a no-mans-land is the worst a human being can face. Imprisonment compared to deportation can be considered a picnic. [\[87\]](#)

Given the location of the deportation site the conditions were exacerbated by the ongoing battles between the Israeli army and Hizbullah.

In one battle, rockets and bombs were launched over our heads. The marches we organized would be shot at by Israeli soldiers and we used to pray the prayer of need because we did not know if we would return or not. Machine guns and bombs were used, not to scare but to kill and several of the deportees were wounded. [\[88\]](#)

The whole purpose of Israel in carrying out the deportation which was to undermine the Hamas movement most certainly backfired. Rather than cripple the movement it added to its strength and the deportees themselves noted that despite the period of deportation being the harshest and most painful in their lives it could also be considered the most pleasant. The wider intention of undermining the Islamic movement as a whole had entirely the opposite effect giving what was used by the deportees as an uninterrupted period of study.

When you gather 400 well educated, scientifically minded people in one place - imagine - due to the grace of Allah we hardly missed any group prayers. Living for 9-10 months with each prayer in a group we created a mosque from our tent big enough to accommodate 500 worshippers. Every day I would awake an hour before dawn to pray or meditate or remember Allah. Prayers would be led in rotation and every day after the dawn prayer there was a religious lesson and then a lesson to interpret the Koran. I was one who was in charge of the interpretation. Many deportees would attend and we would interpret entire verses. The degree of scholarship we attained during that period we had never reached in our university studies. Some deportees succeeded in memorizing one part, five parts or thirty parts of the Koran and at least three succeeded in committing to memory the whole of the holy book. [\[89\]](#)

The period of time spent on Marj al-Zuhour and the amount of aid and supplies that were forthcoming enabled the deportees to build a fully functioning "micro-cosmic Islamic society."

We organized committees, for example there was a *fatwa* (juridical) committee which discussed several matters like our conduct during Ramadan in which it was decided that we would eat together before dawn and after sunset. This provided very pleasant moments and there was so much spirituality in these moments that I cannot describe them. We organized a disciplined method of work responsibilities - bringing water, guard duty to protect against wild animals, cleaning etc. In all we created 15 committees one of which was a medical committee which treat the sick of neighboring villages as well as those in need of medical treatment among us. There was an engineering committee which was in charge of installing electricity and water once the weather improved in May/June and was in charge of constructing the mosque and laying out the tents. There was an educational committee and a cultural and religious committee. [\[90\]](#)

With the expulsion, the popularity of Hamas received a considerable boost and the wisdom of Israel in carrying out the expulsions was strongly challenged by international human rights groups

and dissenting camps within Israel itself. Furthermore, coming at the stage of the peace process that it did further undermined the position of the PLO and popular support for the process.

The December 1992 edition of the Israeli magazine, *'New Outlook'* was devoted almost entirely to the question of the expulsions under the heading *Against Deportation*. As one contributor pointed out, "The expulsion transformed rather unknown Hamas ideological activists into international heroes, victimized by Israeli oppression." [\[91\]](#) Reactions from the Israeli press included "draconian measure"; "the Israeli government...awarded it [Hamas] a certificate of honor which will not be easily devalued"; and "a very stupid decision...illegal and immoral". [\[92\]](#)

Following the deportations, the relationship between Israel and Hamas went through and remains in a state of hostility. A year after the expulsions most of the expellees were allowed to return, although to avoid imprisonment a handful remained on Marj al-Zuhour.

The deportation measure undoubtedly had a spillover effect, not only on Islamic groups in the Middle East and international human rights organizations, but more importantly on Hamas members and activists who were not themselves deported. Many "lukewarm" supporters of the movement started to view it with renewed respect and take it seriously as a direct consequence of the deportation measure. Although its hierarchy was certainly affected, if not crippled, when over 400 of its leaders were deported, the grass-roots base of its structure was widened and solidified resulting in more attacks on Israelis as a clear expression of distaste and anger. Hamas was also hit on that level but was at the same time reaping the fruit of these further attacks on its ranks.

Following the signing of the Declaration of Principles on September 13th 1993, Hamas increased its opposition, vowing to resist the accord and continue fighting occupation by any means necessary.

The talks which followed the signing were also criticized and the manner in which all negotiation had been conducted was interpreted by Hamameh thus:

Israel, only appears to show any flexibility in order to get the PLO and Arafat out of their troubles. In the long run the Jews will not give in to Arafat because the mentality of Rabin is not the mentality Arafat negotiates with. Rabin does not have the courage to deviate from the will of his people or his government while Arafat has trampled over the will and the struggle of his people. [\[93\]](#) Due to its declared opposition to the occupation, to the PLO and the talks, Hamas will more likely continue to engage Israelis in confrontation. By doing so Hamas will firstly keep its name and cause alive. Secondly, as has so often been the case in Palestinian society, attacks on Israelis tend to increase a movements popularity. Thirdly, a most effective method to obliterate or complicate the peace talks is by heightening the level of tension between Palestinians and Israelis.

For its part, Israel will most likely continue in its attempts to weaken Hamas organizationally and functionally. Recent incidents of violence are a reminder of what the future relationship between the two parties may hold. [\[94\]](#)

Arab Countries

Hamas does not operate in a vacuum, it grew up in a region torn by conflicts and filled with contradictions. Each and every actor in the Middle East has vested interests that in part converge with other's and in part diverge from them. Even those countries who at times entered into blocs or alliance building to serve certain short or long term objectives often find themselves confronted with a multitude of circumstances external and internal which either enhance or disperse their schemes. Difficulties are quite abundant as far as national actors are concerned in the region and examples are too many to enumerate.

Sub-national actors, as is the case with Hamas, however, operate within a regional context that is more complex in structure and more complicated in scope. The religious message Hamas espouses and the political characteristics it exhibits and programs it performs, only add greater difficulties to the already existing ones. Its scope of activities is not as formal as a government like entity; its expectations of its performance are higher than a formal governmental institution would place upon itself and the demands placed upon it by its constituent supporters and activists are by far superior to those asked of a governmental office. By definition Hamas is a movement - a peoples movement, it evolved as a challenger to or at least as a disturber of the status quo in the region and one impetus behind its evolution was its rejection of what its adherents would term as the ineptness of formal governmental institutions.

Combining characteristics of a formal as well as an informal organizational structure Hamas' seeming intent from the outset was to operate delicately within quite a delicate regional environment.

Aspiring to achieve a most difficult two faceted objective of `rallying the masses' in the Middle East region around its cause while also convincing Middle Eastern governments that it would be in their interests to remain silent or at least non-adversarial to Hamas' mission the movement urged in its covenant that:

The Arab countries surrounding Israel are requested to open their borders for the *mujahediin* of the Arab and Islamic countries so they can take their role and join their efforts with their Muslim brothers of Palestine. As for the other Arab and Islamic countries, they are asked to ease the movement of *mujahediin* from it and to it - that is the least they could do. [\[95\]](#)

In the ensuing article of the covenant, nationalist and religious groupings, institutions, intellectuals and the whole Arab and Islamic world are addressed with the following:

The Islamic Resistance movement would like each and every one of these organizations to stand by its side, supporting it on all levels, taking up its position, pushing forth its activities and movements and working to gain support for the Islamic Resistance Movement so the Islamic people can be its support and its victors - a strategic dimension on all levels: human, material, media, historical and geographical. It works through holding supportive conferences, producing clarifying statements, supportive articles, purposeful pamphlets and keeping the public aware of the Palestinian situation and what is facing it and what is being plotted against it, through educating the Islamic people ideologically, morally and culturally in order to play its role in the battle for liberation, just as it played its role in defeating the Crusaders and pushing back the Tartars and saving human civilization and that is not hard for Allah. [\[96\]](#)

The theme of the universality and unity of the Islamic nations is a recurrent theme throughout the covenant. Article seven addresses this theme by warning of the folly of not supporting the movement:

Muslims throughout the world adopt the system of the Islamic Resistance Movement; they work towards aiding it, accepting its stands and amplifying its *Jihad*. Therefore, it is an international movement - it is prepared for this {task} because of the clarity of its ideology, its lofty goal and the sanctity of its objectives. Upon this basis it should be considered, given a fair evaluation and admission of its role. Whoever cheats it of its right, turns away from aiding it, or is blinded to hide its role, is a person who argues with fate. And whoever closes his eyes from seeing reality, unintentionally or intentionally, will one day awake to find that the world has left him behind and the justification will wear him down trying to defend his position. *The reward is for those who are early.*

The oppression of the close relations is more painful on the soul, than the assault of the sharp sword. [\[97\]](#)

The seemingly strong language in the Hamas covenant regarding Arab countries, however, should be considered in light of widely held attitudes towards Arab governments by some of Hamas leaders. To Jamil Hamameh, urging Arab governments "to open their borders for the *mujahediin* of the Arab and Islamic countries so they can take their role and join their efforts with their Muslim brothers of Palestine" does not necessarily mean intervention in those countries affairs.

The fact that it [Hamas] gives a perspective about what is happening at present does not amount to interference in the internal affairs of Arab States. [\[98\]](#)

He further stresses that:

It is not Hamas policy to interfere with the internal affairs of any Arab state or to enter into an alliance with any one [Arab] state against another. It respects all and the rights of all in facing the central historical problem of Palestine. It works towards combining all energies and uniting all efforts to serve in the interest of Palestine. It has announced this unequivocally in its covenant. [\[99\]](#)

Hamas takes this stance particularly bearing in mind what it sees as previous interference in the affairs of Arab states by the PLO and which it uses as a stick to further beat the PLO with:

When the PLO interfered in some Arab states, we saw the results -fighting - we reap the pains and the sufferings from this and even now we continue to suffer from their interference. [\[100\]](#)

This stance of non-interference can quite reasonably be termed a pragmatic policy on the part of Hamas in order to curry favor with Arab states and therefore put itself in a position whereby the Arab states themselves will show reciprocal understanding of Hamas. Jamil Hamameh, while denying that Arab states reciprocate in every case alludes that they and the wider Muslim community generally, most certainly should:

It is not the case that all that is asked for is given. It is not within our means to open borders, however, it is an appeal to Allah and our history implemented through our convictions but not necessarily the case that our demands be implemented one way or the other. We ask Allah to

avert trouble for the Palestinian people and ask that He grants wisdom. The people will be judged and not with mercy because the Palestinian problem is not the problem of the Palestinians only, not the problem of the Arabs only but is a historical, international Islamic problem. It is true that Allah has granted that we should be the tip of the spear but this does not mean that we have to compromise and depart with soil for we alone do not own it. It belongs to future generations - to the Islamic nation in its entirety. [\[101\]](#)

The Arab states received a much more positive endorsement from Sheikh Hamad Bitawi although this was due entirely to the reaction of certain states to the whole issue of the December 1992 expulsion. When talking about the conditions of living on Marj al-Zuhour he stated that the patience and steadfastness of the deportees had been one factor which had made conditions bearable but the second largest factor was the support shown by numerous visitors.

"The co-operation and help we got from the gracious people of Lebanon and Syria, from other Arab peoples and from the Islamic world...I recall we had a delegation representing the Nasserites. They were truly sympathetic to our plight. They said that they had come from Egypt, not the Egypt of Sadat, the Islamic empire or Camp David but the Egypt of the Arab people and the Egypt of Azhar and Islam to join hands in unity. They said 'We came to say that you have raised Arab heads high and we come to kiss the ground beneath your feet'. [\[102\]](#)

Another notable visitor from Egypt was "the son of the Imam, the son of Sheikh Hassan al-Banna, *saif al-Islam*, the sword of Islam".

The Egyptian media were very interested and sympathetic to the plight of the deportees and this very much impressed Sheikh Bitawi:

In Palestine I preach to 50,000 or 100,000 people at al-Aqsa mosque and to 4,000 or 5,000 in Nablus. However during my deportation I was given the opportunity to preach to 100s of millions of Arabs and Muslims. Just imagine, the Egyptian television, radio and print media broadcasting what we preached. [\[103\]](#)

This is a very good endorsement for Egypt considering the dilemmas regarding the Hamas movement which the Egypt of Mubarak is currently facing. While the greatest threat to Mubarak and the stability of Egypt is posed by the more radical Islamic movements such as the Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya, steady gains by the Muslim Brotherhood in professional and vocational spheres may actually make it the more difficult movement to deal with nationally. Mubarak cannot afford to clamp down on the Brotherhood as this will only cause greater support for the more radical movements within Egypt. The Muslim Brotherhood is of course highly supportive of Hamas but, from the point of view of the Egyptian regime, the interests of which tally more closely with those of Israel, the PLO and the United States, Hamas is an obstacle to the peace process. Because of the complexities of the Egyptian regime's relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, the only discouragement that it can give Hamas is to urge contributors such as Saudi Arabia to cease or at least lessen their support of the movement. [\[104\]](#)

As well as the Egyptians quoted above, Bitawi gives a whole list of much appreciated visitors from the Arab world:

From Jordan there came the media, doctors, engineers and members of the Jordanian parliament. From the Sudan, from Northern Iraq, from Syria, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the Emirates,

Tunisia, Yemen and from Libya came representatives sent by Qaddafi asking us what we needed. [\[105\]](#)

It is no surprise that there were so many visitors from Jordan, the relationship between Hamas and Jordan has historically always been good. It remains so at present with Jordanian support of Hamas being mainly financial while Hamas, for its part helps to maintain Jordanian influence in the Territories. A good relationship with Hamas is also beneficial to the Jordanian government in that it helps to maintain good relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan. Millions of Jordanian dinars are given annually by the Jordanian government to the Islamic *Waqf* and *Zakat* committees in the occupied territories. [\[106\]](#) The *Waqf* is responsible for a large part of the administrative duties in the West Bank which maintains mosques and provides salaries for *Waqf* employees. Since many employees are involved in either Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas activism, Jordan effectively supports them. [\[107\]](#) Support for Hamas has also been forthcoming as humanitarian aid. Jordan is cautious, however, as it does not want to be accused of undermining the PLO and is concerned that a growth in the support of Hamas could lead to instability in its own country owing to increased influence of the Muslim Brotherhood. Indeed, Jordanian security services have recently clamped down on Hamas and arrested several of its members. The main reason behind the Jordanian authorities' decision to restrict Hamas's activities is the latter's connection with the Brotherhood.

In general, however, Arab countries do remain strongly supportive of Hamas, particularly the Sudan which is currently allowing Hamas activists to be trained there. Some of these young trainees are from the territories but most were recruited from Jordanian refugee camps and their time in the Sudan is approved and given financial support from the Muslim Brotherhood headquarters in Khartoum. [\[108\]](#)

Links remain strong with Islamic groups in Algeria, it is there where Hamas receives a great deal of its empowerment due to the active role by Islamists in the Algerian political process. Hamas views the Islamists in Algeria as role models whose work energizes the movements supporters, the clash between the Islamists and the central government in Algeria is almost always used by Hamas as a justificatory tool in motivating its members to unite and to be more active. The crackdown on the Islamists by the Algerian government and isolating them from the Algerian electorate is what enabled Hamas to provide a rationale for its program in opposition to the status quo.

Another area of interest in the study of Hamas' relations to the Arab world can be found in the unfolding of the Gulf crisis in 1990. The position taken by the PLO in the Gulf crisis which limited its access to funds and resulted in the expulsion of many Palestinian workers from the Gulf States worked very much to the advantage of Hamas with funds previously allocated to the PLO being transferred to them. Its predecessor, the Muslim Brotherhood, always had good relations with the Saudi Arabian monarchy and received financial support from it, this relationship served to create an easy channel for Hamas' receipt of funds.

In the case of Syria however the picture is not as clear. Owing to its concern about its national interests the Syrian regime severely crushed the Muslim brotherhood in the city of Hama in the early 1980s. The Syrian government then believed that the Muslim Brotherhood were organizing and acting on behalf of an external foreign power. Its measure however, almost destroyed any bridges that Hamas might like to have established in Syria to enhance its position.

Hamas pursues relations that it views as advantageous either to its program or to its wellbeing. While the relationship between Hamas and the various Arab actors is not viewed as a strategic one by either side, both parties try to capitalise on the benefits they can reap from such a relationship. Hamas is in need of the support of Arab governments to help it advance its goals. Arab governments on the other hand, invariably needed Hamas to assist in the weakening of the PLO which did not always succumb to the dictates of Arab leaders.

It is wrong to assume, however, that Hamas' only preoccupation in the pursuance of its relations in the Arab world is limited to establishing bridges of contact with Arab governments. The Arab nation which is integral to the Islamic nation is about the most frequently used concept in Hamas' jargon. It is through their appeal to the Arab peoples that Hamas has been able to widen its influence on the Arab political map. Perhaps it is the concern of Arab governments that Hamas might attempt to penetrate the Arab conscience with its advocacies which will motivate them to play this role with Hamas.

An interesting component of Hamas relations with the Arab world can be found in the context of their ties with another sub-national actor, Hizbullah in South Lebanon. The latter is widely known to have established strong contacts with the Islamic Jihad movement. One would expect that some kind of dialogue at least was open between Hamas and Hizbullah particularly during the expulsion period which saw many Hamas supporters on Marj al-Zuhour in South Lebanon. The nature of the goals of such dialogue had it been pursued is not fully clear as there was little reference to Hizbullah in discussions with some of Hamas leaders.

The behavior of the deportees proved to be a very good exercise in changing the Lebanese attitude towards the Palestinians. Many of the deportees performed voluntary work in the surrounding Lebanese villages, helping with the olive harvest and one deportee who was in charge of the exercise program established an athletic team in one of the neighboring villages. Consequently when the time came for the deportees to return:

...old men of 70 or 80, women, children - there were many tears at our departure. They all said that they were happy for us to be returning to our homes but pained because of the tremendous vacuum we would leave behind us. [\[109\]](#)

The attitude of the Lebanese toward Palestinians had been negative, according to Bitawi, because their previous experience of Palestinians in the area around Marj Al-Zuhour was based on the presence of Hizbullah members whose behavior was implied by Bitawi when he compared the conduct of the deportees with Hizbullah members.

For us, to roam around unchecked in the [local] villages, drinking, running after women - this was something we would not do. Believe me, when people would come to pick olives, for example, they would run away the minute they saw a Palestinian. Fathers would assure their children `no, no darling they are not like the commandos who were here before, Fedayeen regrettably. [\[110\]](#) There was also a reciprocal change in attitude towards the Lebanese:

When Lebanon used to be mentioned to me, what would come to mind would be Beirut bars and nightclubs, but in fact we found the Lebanese people to be warm-hearted, giving, hospitable and polite. There is now a strong trend of Islamic revival in Lebanon and delegations from Beirut would call on us, among them Palestinians, religious leaders and legal scholars. [\[111\]](#)

The deportees also had an effect on Palestinians living in Lebanon and one example given by Bitawi was of a rich Palestinian who:

...did not pray, did not fast or perform religious duties but Allah showed him the right path. When he saw the deportees and saw that we were pleasant people he loved us and sent cars full of fruit and vegetables. He said to us that previously, 'we [Palestinians in Lebanon] felt ashamed to call ourselves Palestinian but now the deportees have raised our heads and we are proud of who we are'. This man continued to contact more entrepreneurs to deliver badly needed supplies to us. [112]

Another change in attitude was demonstrated by the United Arab Emirates as Bitawi takes pains to make clear:

We had people visiting from the United Arab Emirates and those who came would say '...before your deportation the people of the Emirates used to hate the Palestinians. The government and people hated the Palestinians especially after the Gulf Crisis but after your deportation the people of the Emirates did not hate the Palestinian people. They started to feel that there was a segment among Palestinians who were sincere in their effort to liberate their homeland, who were worshippers and who were solemn'. [113]

The deportation undoubtedly had the opposite effect from that which Israel had hoped and was perhaps one of the strongest events in recent years that actually went towards enhancing not only Arab unity but also the Islamic revivalist movement as a whole. In the mind of Hamad Bitawi there was no doubt that this had been the case:

Undoubtedly there was a strong positive consequence of the deportation, a strong and positive impact on Islamic revivalism. [114]

The whole issue served as an example to be followed by Muslims everywhere and was the perfect platform to emphasize that the Palestinian problem was the problem of "all Palestinians, then was the problem of all Arabs and then was the problem of all Muslims". [115]

Based on my experience on Marj al-Zuhour, and the open door showed us by the Arab States, especially the sons of Islamic revivalism and the Islamic way of life, I would say that the voice of opposition to the Peace process and the negotiations has not been silenced. During this deportation we addressed the Islamic world and as a result could sense the grace of the Arab peoples. [116]

In effect, Hamas has been able to leave its mark on a region littered with complexities. It has pursued at times, alliances and other relationships with national, sub-national and trans-national actors in order to give meaning to its existence. While difficulties were plentiful so were Hamas' means and methods to get around them. Even the deportation, as harsh an experience as it was, was utilized by Hamas and the benefits may have outweighed the cost in an arena where gains tend to be a scarce commodity.

The International Community.

Hamas views the international theater as divided between the world of Islam and the world of the "unbelievers" though it evolved for, or due to the intifada in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Hamas proscribes to itself the responsibility of guarding the word of Islam where Muslims live.

Through the building of mosques, the establishment of formal and informal contacts with individuals and groups around the world, Hamas has expended quite an effort to publicize its message and to portray an image of credibility and viability of its organisation even to non-Muslims.

In the world of "unbelievers" Hamas has tried to make quite significant inroads, in several European countries as well as in the United States, several Islamic organizations and mosques sprang up with alleged links to Hamas. While the exact nature of such links could not be fully determined the psychological dimension of the revival of Islam, even in the West deserves some attention. When the World Trade Center bombing took place in the United States for example, Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman was viewed as an Islamic hero by Hamas even after his arrest.

Having sprung into Palestinian society, Hamas gradually started to erect bridges of contact with other Islamic movements in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. In Afghanistan, for example, there are signs that Hamas leaders are trying to employ the services of ex-fighters in the Afghanistan *mujaheddiin* as trainers or volunteers for the Palestinian struggle.

Hamas did not withhold any opportunity from advancing its agenda wherever it could and the expulsion in December 1992 became an absolute coup for Hamas on the public relations level. The media interest in the expulsion was the perfect channel through which Hamas could legitimately attack Israel for the measure and have the media friendly deportees present themselves as models of peaceful resistance to victimization. Several points were raised in the interview with Bitawi which are very relevant to this. Firstly, the actual area or no-mans land to which the 415 were deported was uninhabited and extremely inhospitable, on arrival at Marj al-Zuhour it was bitterly cold, wet and snowing and as Bitawi pointed out:

We were all generally employees in the middle class sector of life, we were educated employees and not used to harsh conditions. We were accustomed to having easy access to water which we use to cleanse before prayer but now we had to walk very far just to bring water, we had to wash in the open and in bitterly cold conditions. Clothing was scarce and none of us could get more than two blankets when it was snowing. We had to walk very far to find wood for fires. [\[117\]](#)

This was the first image that the media portrayed which engendered sympathy among the liberal Western audience despite the fact that the group were, to all intents and purposes, alleged by Israel to be 'terrorists' or affiliated to acts of terror.

The effects of this image were quick to bring results:

We even had support from the West, a delegation from Italy arrived bringing financial and medical assistance - they organized demonstrations against the Israeli government for taking the deportation measure. There was also some kind of debate between our official spokesman Abdul Aziz Ali Rantisi and with an American senator on CNN. This debate gave us the opportunity to communicate our message.

I remember that whenever there was a conference in the United States they would ask for a statement to be transmitted by phone. There were people from conferences in Great Britain and students from the Soviet Union who would say that the purpose of their trip was to interview the deportees. [\[118\]](#)

As has been noted previously, the deportees managed to build a complete community with a very organized manner of functioning during their time on Marj al-Zuhour despite the unreality of the

situation and this was presented as a micro-cosmic Muslim society whose ideal could be attained in a wider society. This was an impressive sight to the stream of international visitors from whom Hamas achieved the publicity coup:

They [visitors] expected to find us crying and weeping but what they found were strong spirited men facing their exile with dignity and patience.

There was a German television team and they were stunned as we each introduced ourselves as holders of doctorates, or engineers with some of us graduates of German or British universities and others businessmen representing German companies in Palestine. They were shocked and said `..but you are the terrorists? The killers?' We replied that Israel was the terrorist and the visitors said that our only crime was that we were people of knowledge who hold their religious principles deeply.

From the British media came a man who was writing a report about the Islamic movement. The first time he stayed for 20 days. He then came back, stayed for longer and converted to Islam. He said that this had been the most beautiful time he had lived and what he liked was not so much the fact that he was among knowledgeable people but that the treatment each accorded the other was compassionate and cordial. [\[119\]](#)

The final part of the above quote may actually say more about conditions in Britain than on Marj al-Zuhour, however, it is an effective endorsement of the deportees and hence of Hamas.

Another media outlet which Bitawi paid particular attention to was that of Iran:

The television crew that used to come [to Marj al-Zuhour] most often was the Iranian television crew. They would record for half an hour and would then broadcast in its entirety everything they had filmed. I was told that 1,000s would cry when they heard us talk about the practices of Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people so this was indeed a good opportunity. [\[120\]](#)

Iran has recently taken a renewed interest in Hamas and is orchestrating closer alliances with Hizbullah in Lebanon and other Iranian backed groups. An unconfirmed Egyptian report stated that Iran was training 3,000 Hamas fighters, had allocated \$30million to Hamas and had approved the opening of a Hamas office in Tehran. [\[121\]](#) Whether true or not, considering the original stance of Ahmed Yassin was critical of the Ayatollah, there has been a significant change of attitude by the Iranian regime. Factors contributing to this are the change in attitude of Hamas itself which has refrained from criticizing the Iranian regime of late and the Iranian recognition of the potential influence of Hamas.

According to intelligence sources, the Revolutionary Guards, whose members include exiles of the Shah who sheltered in PLO camps in Lebanon, have been allocated the task of "nurturing" Hamas. That men who were once sheltered by the PLO are now patronizing Hamas is an interesting point in itself. From this source Hamas receives training and funds and is further linked to Iran via the Iranian Foreign Ministry department dealing with Jordan which also handles contacts with Hamas. [\[122\]](#)

The deportation while undoubtedly giving Hamas a world stage may not necessarily have had the far reaching or long standing impact that Bitawi would hope. It was a very newsworthy item in the International community at the time but well before the return, media interest from the West had somewhat declined. Bitawi claimed that the decline happened following Secretary of State, Warren Christopher's visit to the region.

When Christopher came the problem of the deportees already had quite a broad media dimension, he came and then prevented the Arab media from talking about the problem. There was a news blackout and as a result nobody mentioned the `problem', it was marginalized. [\[123\]](#)

Even if this is not the case, the deportation may have helped the PLO and the peace process as the extensive press coverage of the deportation sparked a general renewal of interest in Palestinian/Israeli affairs. The sympathy for the deportees, however, and the condemnation of Israel elicited by the deportation has since been forgotten and the Western press has returned to its more usual accounting of acts of `terrorism' which affect the more important subject of Middle East peace.

However, while the deportation was used as an effective tool to broaden the base of Hamas' international contacts at the time it occurred, after the return Hamas turned its attention to translating its international achievements into domestic accomplishments among its supporters. Here again domestic, regional and international support was consolidated to serve the objectives of this movement which is still only a few years old.

[\[46\]](#) Steinberg. Matti, "The PLO and Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalism."
The Jerusalem Quarterly. Number Fifty-Two / Fall 1989. pp 47.

[\[47\]](#) Steinberg. Matti, Ibid. pp 42.

[\[48\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[49\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[50\]](#) Jamil Hamameh, interview.

[\[51\]](#) Jamil Hamameh, interview.

[\[52\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[53\]](#) Taraki. Lisa, "The Islamic Resistance Movement in the Palestinian Uprising." Middle East Report. January-February 1989. No. 156. pp 30.

[\[54\]](#) Emerson. Steven, "The Palestinian Meltdown" The New Republic. November 23rd 1992. pp 28.

[\[55\]](#) Ya'ari Ehud "The Metamorphosis of Hamas." The Jerusalem Report. Vol. III - No. 18. January 14, 1993. 24-26.

[\[56\]](#) T.P. Editorial "Clashes between Hamas and Fatah." News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992. pp 2.

[\[57\]](#) Kershner. Isabel, "The Return." The Jerusalem Report. 23 September 1993 - Vol IV. No. 10. pp 36-37.

[\[58\]](#) Kershner. Isabel, Ibid.

[\[59\]](#) Sheikh Ahmad Bitawi interview.

[60] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[61] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[62] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[63] Abu Toameh. Khaled, "Watching His Words." The Jerusalem Report. 23 September 1993 - Vol IV. No. 10. pp 38.

[64] Interview conducted by the author with a Hamas supporter from the Gaza Strip who asked for his name to be kept anonymous. November 15, 1993.

[65] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[66] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[67] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi, interview.

[68] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[69] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[70] Abu-Amr. Ziad, "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background." Journal of Palestine Studies. Volume XXII. Number 4. Summer 1993. pp 7-8.

[71] Interview conducted by the author on October 4th with a widely respected religious notable and national activist and one of the most highly respected *imams* at al-Aqsa mosque who asked to remain anonymous.

[72] Jamil Hamameh interview.

[73] See footnote ².

[74] Usher. Graham, "The rise of political Islam in the Occupied Territories." Middle East International. No. 453 - 25 June 1993. pp 19.

[75] Salame. Ghassan, "Islam and the West." Foreign Policy. No. 90 - Spring 1993. pp 36.

[76] Jaradat. Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992. pp. 8.

[77] Abu-Amr. Ziad, Op cit. pp 14.

[78] See footnote ².

[79] Ya'ari Ehud "The Metamorphosis of Hamas." The Jerusalem Report. Vol. III - No. 18. January 14, 1993. pp 24-26.

[80] Nissim Toledano - Israeli police officer who was kidnapped in the second week of December 1992 and found dead several hours after his kidnapping.

[\[81\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[82\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[83\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[84\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[85\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[86\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[87\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[88\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[89\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[90\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[91\]](#) Cygielman. Victor, "The Expulsion." New Outlook. Middle East Magazine. December 1992. pp 8.

[\[92\]](#) New Outlook. Middle East Magazine. December 1992. pp 17.

[\[93\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[94\]](#) Israeli crackdowns on Hamas activists are exemplified by the siege and destruction of a house and killing of the four alleged Hamas members operating from it, on Wednesday March 23rd 1994 in the town of Hebron. A recent example of Hamas attacks against Israeli targets occurred on April 6th when a suicide car bomb attack on the Israeli town of Afula killed seven.

[\[95\]](#) The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement-August 1988, Article 28.

[\[96\]](#) The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement-August 1988 Article 29.

[\[97\]](#) The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement-August 1988 Article 7.

[\[98\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[99\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[100\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[101\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[102\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[103\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[104] Ramati. Yohanan, "Islamic Fundamentalism Gaining." Midstream-A Monthly Jewish Review. Vol. 39 - No. 2 - 1993 pp 2.

[105] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[106] Jaradat Muhammed, "Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in the territories occupied in 1967." p. 7-11. News From Within. Vol. VIII - No. 8. August 5th 1992.

[107] In September 1993 the author tried to conduct an interview with Mr. Abdel Azim Salhab, deputy under-secretary of the Jordanian ministry of Islamic Waqf affairs in Jerusalem, to get his views on Hamas. The latter refused to be interviewed stating that "myself and my office have absolutely nothing to do with Hamas and other Islamic movements in Palestine". It was obvious to the author that Salwab's refusal to be interviewed, in addition to posing a serious impediment to academic research in Arab society, is exemplary of the attitudes of many Waqf employees: sitting for an interview, they think, could cost them their jobs if they were to say something not fully consistent with their superiors.

[108] Yohanan Ramati, Op. Cit.

[109] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[110] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[111] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[112] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[113] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[114] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[115] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[116] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[117] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[118] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[119] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[120] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[121] Ramati. Yohanan, Op cit. pp 3.

[122] Ya'ari. Ehud, "The Metamorphosis of Hamas." The Jerusalem Report. Vol. III - No. 18. January 14, 1993. 24-26.

[123] Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

Chapter Five

Hamas and the Future

Hamas Approaches to Peace Initiatives.

At the time that Hamas was launched in December 1987 the Palestinian arena was afflicted by a certain degree of paralysis: Arab governments had demoted the Question of Palestine; the Palestinian movement was too weak to act on ridding the Palestinian people of their problems and the International community was silent as the ongoing victimization of Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip continued.

Though the intifada primarily came as a response to the oppressive measures by the occupation authorities. Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, by and large, were disenchanted with the inability of their representatives, their Arab brethren and the seeming indifference of the outside world in contributing to the resolution of their dilemma.

Hamas obviously evolved in the midst of such conflicting postures on the one hand to capture the momentum by addressing Palestinian grievances, and on the other to posit new modes of thinking for managing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The greater the level of tensions between the two main protagonists, Palestinians and Israelis, during the intifada the more interested the outside world became in introducing schemes for resolving the conflict, particularly the United States. The more determined Palestinians in the Occupied Territories seemed to be in counteracting Israeli measures, the more concerned the United States became about the spillover effect of the intifada to the Arab region, hence peace proposals and initiatives were lodged in an attempt to neutralize the levels of tension and with the hope of providing an atmosphere of stability in an area where it was badly lacking.

Almost one year after the intifada broke out, the PLO issued a Declaration of Independence for the state of Palestine in November 1988 while none of Palestine was free from the grip of occupation. Feelings of exhilaration proliferated throughout the Occupied Territories in response to the Declaration of Independence, accompanied, however, by vibrant underpinnings of dissatisfaction and disbelief. The people were in need of any glimpse of hope that the conditions of their lives would change thus were inspired by that far reaching measure by the PLO. The newly evolving movement Hamas, however, took the PLO's tendency towards peaceful co-existence with Israel as the very ingredient which would help advance its cause. Through its intifada leaflets and other pronouncements, Hamas urged Palestinian public opinion to be armed with caution so that its hopes and expectations would not be dashed when it became clear that the Declaration of Independence was incapable of changing facts on the ground.

While the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising was in concert with the policies of the PLO, Hamas exploited every opportunity to highlight the deficiencies of any path for resolving the conflict other than its path, the path of Islam. Hamas opposition to PLO policies was centered on the assumption that no peace, therefore no co-existence can be hoped for with "the enemy" Israel.

The Declaration of Independence for the state of Palestine continued to remain no more than a historical document and the hope of Palestinians for change due to its issuance continued to be gradually shattered; no state was established and no tendency towards co-existence materialized as the intifada continued in full force with more Palestinians getting killed and injured.

The Gulf crisis and hence the Gulf war broke out, serving as yet another reminder that the Palestinian problem was not the highest item on the agenda of the International community, the more paralysis, the more despair and the wider the distance between hope and reality the easier it became for Hamas to formulate its ideology in opposition to any proposed political settlement. Hamas' formula was that no honorable and just peace could be established from a position of weakness with "the enemy". As a result of the Gulf war rampant tensions began to spread once again throughout the Arab world especially as Iraq was defeated.

To contain the new wave of tensions in the region the US called for the convening of the Madrid conference in October 1991, just a few months after it achieved its victory over Iraq. Palestinians and Israelis were invited to participate and as a result a new phase of expectation building in Palestinian Society emerged. Hamas had already, and in no uncertain terms, outlined its attitude to such conferences in its covenant of 1988 part of which read:

The initiatives conflict, what are called "Peaceful Solutions" and "International Conferences" to solve the Palestinian problem. As far as the ideology of the Islamic Resistance Movement is concerned, giving up any part of Palestine is like giving up part of its religion.

From time to time the invitation is made for an international conference to look into solving the problem. Some accept and some reject the idea, for one reason or another, asking for some condition or conditions to be fulfilled in order to agree to attend and participate in the conference. Due to the Islamic Resistance Movement's knowledge of the participating parties of the conference and the participants' past and present opinions and stands on Muslim interests, the Islamic Resistance Movement does not perceive that the conferences are able to deliver the demands, provide the rights, nor do justice to the oppressed. Those conferences are nothing but a form of enforcing the rule of the unbelievers in the land of Muslims. And when have the unbelievers justly treated the believers? [\[124\]](#)

There too, however, Hamas tried make itself a beneficiary: after numerous rounds of talks their opposition to the negotiations was validated by the average Palestinian, as the conflict continued unabated and seemingly irresolvable. There too, however, Hamas tried make itself a beneficiary: after numerous rounds of talks their opposition to the negotiations was validated by the average Palestinian, as the conflict continued unabated and seemingly irresolvable.

The more complicated the mission before Palestinian participants in the talks seemed to be the wider the base of Hamas opposition. After the PLO and Israel signed the September 1993 Declaration of Principles in Washington DC, following the secret Oslo talks, another wave of shattered expectations characterized Palestinian society. For Hamas the Declaration of Principles was the climax of the launch of its opposition to evolving peace initiatives and arrangements.

The cornerstone of Hamas' existence is its declared discontent with the status quo. In articulating its message, its opposition to peace initiatives can be pinpointed in three different yet related dimensions: first, it inherently opposes any agreements with Israel which would allow the latter to live on the soil of historic Palestine.

"In the circle of struggle with world Zionism, the Islamic Resistance Movement considers itself the spearhead, or a step on the path;" [\[125\]](#)

Therefore, any peace with Israel is unacceptable since in Hamas' view, "The Zionist invasion is a vicious attack that does not have piety not to use all methods low and despicable to fulfill its obligations;" [\[126\]](#)

According to Hamas which "works towards raising the banner of Allah on every inch of Palestine." [\[127\]](#) there is little point in pursuing peace with Israel.

This line of thinking suggests that any agreement with Israel is wrong for it is unachievable and harmful.

The second dimension of Hamas' opposition to peace initiatives can be found in its conception of the United States as the power championing such arrangements. The US is a strong ally of Israel, it is the leader of the Western world and it is there were the "imperialistic powers in the Capitalist West..support the enemy with all their might - material and human" [\[128\]](#)

Thirdly, Hamas opposes the peace talks as a function of its intrinsic competition with the PLO. To Hamas, the PLO is inept and too weak to pursue a peace process which would generate a positive result for the people. Sheikh Hamad Bitawi expressed his distaste for the Peace process in the following terms:

Some people might think that the Peace Process will lead to an improvement of the economic situation, which is possible, but overall this process will do more harm than good. ^[129]

Bitawi understands the rationale for PLO participation in the talks:

The PLO is now going through a difficult phase, a torn Arab world and a Western world against it. [\[130\]](#)

Yet, his understanding does not sufficiently justify the PLO involvement in the current peace process:

We understand their position but this cannot be justification, this means that if I cannot liberate the whole homeland I must not sign or give up any part of it. [\[131\]](#)

To give credence to Hamas opposition to the peace talks Bitawi goes on to stress that:

...not only the Islamic movement opposes this accord but even from within Fateh, in the PNC and other places there is opposition. Even in Israel today more than 45% of the people don't support the accord. [\[132\]](#)

Bitawi further tries to legitimize Hamas' opposition to the PLO by stating that:

The brothers in the PLO should not be anxious because of this opposition as it has been evidenced to them not only in words but in practical terms that this opposition has been positive. Had there been no opposition it would have been the duty of the PLO to found one in order to help boost its position. [\[133\]](#)

Hamas opposition to the peace talks notwithstanding, Hamad Bitawi, at the time of his expulsion had this to say on the nature and conduct of the talks:

It is not that we are against peace; the peace we want is a just and honorable one. We don't feel that the process unfolding now is in favor of the Palestinian people. It means to Zionize the Palestinian problem and the Arab nation as well as the Islamic world. This process will not bring Palestine back to us. The expulsion [of alleged Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists] was meant to silence the voice of opposition to the current peace process. [\[134\]](#)

In September 1993 the position of Jamil Hamameh regarding the peace process and the future in general after the Declaration of Principles was elucidated thus:

Hamas has defined its position without ambiguity, it strongly opposes the talks that are going on in Washington. It also opposes secret as well as public agreements that are taking place with the Jewish state especially what has come to be known as the Gaza - Jericho first option. This is the type of decision that we consider to be the straw that broke the camel's back. It is the straw which has revealed the true picture of [leadership] acquiescence to what is called a solution. We consider this to be a great historic act of treason and a dangerous one which will begin the dissolution of this leadership which has sold the struggle, sold the blood and sold the rights of the Palestinian people. [\[135\]](#)

When questioned more specifically on the PLO and Arafat himself and the whole dynamics of the process, Hamameh was again critical of Arafat saying that what had happened was no more than "an attempt by the leadership in the PLO to get out of its trouble." He went on to talk about the divisions within all Palestinian factions and among the people, which, to him signified that there was "no national decision, no political decision."

Bitawi also replied in more detail when questioned on his views about the Declaration of Principles and what would be the result of it:

The accord with all its negative features means that the peace process is an extension of the occupation and is meant to further serve the occupation. The Israeli army will not withdraw from the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. The talks are about redeployment or redefinition of their control of our homeland. The other thing which is central is the problem of Jerusalem. and of al-Aksa mosque which is absent from the whole process. [\[136\]](#)

He went on to discuss Jerusalem more specifically as he said he had done with the Israeli Military Governor of Nablus:

We will never accept for Jerusalem to be under your [Israeli] control and if the Palestinian people were to accept that it will then this problem will remain of great concern to the whole Islamic nation. I will never accept that if I want to pray at al-Aqsa then I need to get a permit. If there is one individual believer who remains alive, to have Jerusalem and al-Aqsa remain under occupation will never be allowed. [\[137\]](#)

The concern that 'weakness' will cause concession from the Palestinians is of major importance to Bitawi and a theme which recurred throughout the interview. Indeed he seems to imply that it is weakness alone and no other reason for the PLO to be taking its current course. During the same conversation with the Israeli Military Governor, Bitawi recounted that he said the following:

Now you are the stronger and we are the weak but the strong do not remain strong and the weak do not remain weak. There have been great powers like the Soviet Union which collapse. The United States is ready to collapse within less than ten years. What will become of Israel when the

United States collapses? What will become of the Arab regimes who are in line with Western interests including the submissive PLO? We are utterly confident that there will be changes. [\[138\]](#)

Although Bitawi does accept that the peace process will continue on its course of "normalization, then recognition of and peace with Israel" he raises his concern that the PLO would conspire against the Islamic trend:

We know that Palestine will become a bridge for Israel to penetrate the Arab world economically, politically and culturally and we worry that one of the secret provisions [of the talks] is that the PLO have accepted to be a tool of oppression against the Islamic current as is now the case in Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt and throughout the world. We don't rule that out unfortunately, but we continue to hope that they will be wise enough to avert a crisis among the people. [\[139\]](#)

Hamas' stand vis-a-vis the peace process led one critic to question whether Hamas is actually against the talks or whether its goal is to primarily establish a solid popular base for itself:

Hamas is not against the talks *per se*; it aims to muster support on the feelings prevalent in the Palestinian Society. Now Hamas is willing to ally itself with non-Islamic forces such as the PFLP. Hamas used to have misgivings because Fateh would ally itself with the Popular Front previously whereas now Hamas is doing that itself...but how could there be closeness between Hamas and the PFLP?...There are two possibilities -- the possibility of them entering the ring of the self rule and autonomy through elections by claiming that non-participation would leave the door open for others. This is what was understood from the meeting of the ten factions in Damascus -- it was leaning towards elections. This is one possibility and in fact for any faction to participate in elections practically means a recognition of the talks because elections are one episode in the series of the talks and agreements. This means that if I accept elections then I practically accept the negotiations. The other possibility is that they won't participate in the elections and would remain as an effective opposition. In practical terms this means that the conflict will continue between the opposition particularly Hamas and the existing authority. The conflict might be "cold" and peaceful through elections, celebration and issuing leaflets but it also might be "hot" through confrontation...The first one is more probable because all opponents are looking for chairs (authority). They would like to have a say in what's going on but now they prefer to be in the opposition, screaming from a distance, but if there was a one percent success, they would find a justification to participate. [\[140\]](#)

According to Sheikh Mohammed al-Jimal who is general inspector of the Islamic Sharia courts in the West Bank, Hamas contains some positive and some negative elements and the behavior of some members of the movement is counter-productive because they do not co-ordinate with the national leaders. Nevertheless, the Sheikh believes that some Hamas members will be aligned in the future with the nationalist group, once they witness the accomplishments of the current peace process: "after all they are Palestinians like the rest of us" he emphasised. [\[141\]](#)

Hamas currently solidifies its foundations on the ground in declaring its opposition to the peace talks. Even some of those who are not Hamas advocates seem to find some solace in the articulation of oppositional statements. The unchanged realities in Palestinian society increase levels of anxiety among the people while at the same time helping to deepen the justification for Hamas' opposition.

In broad terms, Hamas's approach to the peace process can be characterized as deliberately ambiguous. In its publications, Hamas tends to be adamant in its opposition to the peace process.

However, in public discourse, its leaders tend to leave the door open for political involvement. They appear to be pragmatic in their handling of questions put to them by observers. This seeming contradiction in Hamas's attitude stems from the fact that the movement's ideology equates Jewishness with enmity. To them, all of Palestine belongs to Allah. No human being can decide the destiny of that which belongs to Allah and henceforth to all Muslims. One cannot miss such precepts in Hamas's ideology as contained in its leaflets and other publications. The nature of the movements leaders pronouncements, however, point in another direction. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and other leaders, seem to emphasize the importance of elections for deciding the desires of the people.

It is clear that Hamas is torn between its ideological stand towards the peace process, on the one hand, and the constraints of the current situation on the other. Hamas preaches opposition to the current peace negotiations in its writings, but when its leaders are confronted with questions of practicality, their responses tend to be more conciliatory and flexible.

Given the fact that Hamas is reluctant to reveal much information about its future intentions it is impossible to pinpoint the exact direction that the movement will take. What is to be expected, however, is that Hamas will continue to adapt itself to changing conditions and circumstances in order to enhance its position by capitalizing on the deficiencies of others. Even if it were to participate in the upcoming autonomy elections Hamas will find the rationale to convince its constituency that it is in their best interests to do so. At the same time Hamas will continue to be in the opposition for the foreseeable future at least, for it is through being in the opposition that Hamas can thrive on the inadequacies of mainstream political measures.

[\[124\]](#) Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, article 13.

[\[125\]](#) Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, article 32.

[\[126\]](#) Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, article 28.

[\[127\]](#) Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, article 6.

[\[128\]](#) Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, article 22.

[\[129\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[130\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[131\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[132\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[133\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[134\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[135\]](#) Jamil Hamameh interview.

[\[136\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[137\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[138\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[139\]](#) Sheikh Hamad Bitawi interview.

[\[140\]](#) Interview with highly respected religious notable and national activist who prefers to remain anonymous.

[\[141\]](#) This interview was conducted at the Sheikh's office in Jerusalem in September 1993. It is not surprising to note that Sheikh al-Jimal publicly identifies himself with the mainstream Palestinian leadership.

Conclusion.

As has often been stressed in this study Hamas was not born in a vacuum, it evolved as a by-product of events, circumstances and thoughts. As a movement it has played a pivotal role in creating those events, circumstances and thoughts.

Dynamics behind the launching of the movement and the consequences its ideology and performance have created became intertwined, in the process influencing domestic, regional and international political life.

Were it not for the fact that Hamas leaders are perspicacious strategists it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to organize a movement with such convincing appeal to a wide spectrum in Palestinian society in particular and Arab/Islamic society in general.

The complexity of the conditions which triggered the formation of the movement obviously led Hamas founders to create an equally complex strategy based on pragmatism and realism. Pragmatism appears in their painstaking efforts to provide rationality for their view of the world, religious ideology is effectively used to construct a political program and social and economic conditions are employed to generate public support. Realism on the other hand is unmistakably clear in Hamas official pronouncements - in the covenant as well as in its various leaflets. Conflict is essential to the realization of the goals of the movement and power is the tool to bring about the desired change - military power, economic power and the power of articulation.

Because of the complexity of the conditions in the midst of which Hamas found itself evolving and because of the complexity of the strategy it had designed, the movement seems to be adaptable to circumstances. It is quite easy to dismiss its leaders and activists as crazed zealots. The fact of the matter is, however, that the leaders and the activists of the movement are to a great extent a group of articulate, learned and highly organized individuals with a clear vision of life.

Their appeal cannot be underestimated. When confronted with questions they present both sides of any argument and express understanding for the other side. Furthermore, they take pains to express rationality and fairness and don't give a word of condemnation without a counterbalancing word of praise. They have been and remain far reaching in their effort to publicize their teaching and do not miss any opportunity that can be used in some way to put them in a good or rational light.

However moderate and reasonable they project themselves to be, their declared objective of establishing an Islamic state in Palestine cannot be dismissed simply as rhetoric.

If their influence is to be viewed with sincerity and clarity then a countervailing and more effective strategy than theirs is needed. Unless the current political process bears some fruit their presence will be more widely felt.

Paralysis and frustration negatively impact Palestinian society. For Hamas a worsening state of affairs arms it with more power to advance its cause.

This author cannot help but recall what one interviewee from the Gaza Strip, who also requested to remain anonymous, said in December 1993:[\[142\]](#)

Hamas, is in some ways, like any other movement. Its support can decline and increase, its role can be momentous or unnoticeable. In some other ways however, Hamas is different from all other movements. Not all who join it are necessarily strictly observant Muslims or fully believe in all of its goals. Many people, particularly those who represent the young generation, decide to join the movement because they feel that it is the only forum which now offers them some hope which they badly need in order to keep their psyche intact. More and more average individuals express support for Hamas with many of them previously identified with what is commonly known as the Nationalist bloc.

He went on to say:

I have always personally identified myself with Fateh but many like me in Gaza find it more appealing to join the ranks of a movement which somewhat speaks and acts on their behalf.

Another pertinent quote was given by a Palestinian woman:

When it comes to the killing of children, the blowing up of homes, the transfer of our nation, we are all Hamas. [\[143\]](#)

Finally, the question of Jerusalem, as exemplified by Bitawi previously, is one over which Hamas will always have a very strong argument. It is their stand on this matter which is very likely to gain support from those who are ostensibly 'moderate' in their other political views.

[\[142\]](#) Interview conducted with a young man from the Gaza Strip in December 1993. The interviewee was a university graduate who was working in a field far removed from his specialization.

[\[143\]](#) Usher. Graham, "The Human cost of "flushing out" Hamas." Middle East International. No. 445 - 5 March 1993. pp 20.

Epilogue

The Hebron Massacre.

On the Friday morning of the 15th of the holy month of Ramadan, February 25th 1994, Palestinian society awoke to be engulfed by shock and to have any remaining hopes shattered as it listened to the news of the brutal killing of tens of Palestinian and the wounding of hundreds while kneeling in supplication in the sacred dawn prayer, on a sacred Friday, in one of Islam's most sacred mosques. The circumstances surrounding the massacre notwithstanding, (news reports conflicted as to the identity and motives of the killer/s) [\[144\]](#) the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in their entirety, as well as Palestinian communities inside Israel and Bedouin communities, went into a period of painful mourning for several days.

The peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, which Hamas had already publicly rejected, likewise went into mourning and hope died along with the victims of the massacre. The talks had to be suspended and both parties found themselves confronting not only the ramifications of the massacre on the level of local, regional and international public opinion, but also on the structural and functional level of conducting the talks. The talks almost collapsed while Hamas' position was inflated. Publicly, at least, Hamas had been criticizing the talks, not only for the fact that in their view they would lead nowhere, but because they would also allow the Israelis to exploit that phase to institute harsher measures against the very society Hamas launched its movement to serve. On every street corner and in every mosque Hamas' position grew louder and clearer; their message had to be heeded or else this society in its entirety would disappear into oblivion. The fact that Palestinian leaders went back to the talks after relative calm ensued after the massacre only gave Hamas a further instrument to underline that the current leadership is not by, for or of the people and it is only they who can represent the hopes and ambitions of a scattered society - scattered physically, psychologically and also politically.

The massacre at Ibrahimi Mosque came at a time when it could be particularly used by Hamas to benefit its cause considering that at the time of the massacre Hamas had already had two weeks to pursue its public relations and mobilization campaign. There are several factors that have some bearing on this assumption.

Firstly, the talks between Israel and the PLO had been somewhat slow, producing few if any concrete results that the general public could feel or reap the benefits of. Even Israeli and Palestinian participants in the talks expressed frustration and dismay with the prolongation of the talks on several occasions and from both sides the message was that time was passing and with it might pass the opportunity for peace. The more frustrated the talks appeared to be the stronger the appeal of Hamas became.

Secondly, Israeli measures on the ground against Palestinians after the talks, showed no sign of abating as had been hoped, but actually became even harsher. Fewer people from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were allowed to travel to Jerusalem, killing and injuries did not stop, curfews continued and the extent of despair was getting profounder by the day.

Not surprisingly, the month of Ramadan is a time of golden opportunity for Hamas to articulate its message by reaching the widest possible Muslim audience ever, and not only in mosques. During this Muslim holy month loudspeakers in streets are also used as platforms to arouse the sentiments of the people. The purpose being to highlight the deficiencies of the PLO and more importantly to advocate the position Hamas espouses especially during and after the Friday prayers.

In spite of the blockade imposed around Jerusalem to prevent the hundreds of thousands of worshippers from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip crowding to al-Aqsa mosque, Hamas took certain risks to ensure as large an attendance as possible.

So keen was Hamas to achieve results, it shuttled West Bank and Gaza Hamas sympathizers to Jerusalem in yellow license plated cars [\[145\]](#) in spite of the risks involved, particularly for the evening and night prayers. As one interviewee from a Palestinian refugee camp on the West Bank revealed to the author during the first week of Ramadan:

We are fully aware of the fact that we can be easily arrested if caught travelling to Jerusalem to perform the evening and the night prayers at al-Aqsa mosque. We also know that God will accept our prayers wherever we perform them, given the extraordinary nature of the circumstances in which we live, but our goal is more far reaching and our vision goes beyond the risks we take today. The youth, the young generation especially, must know what it means to endure pain if their convictions are to become strong. Their belief in God and the practice of that belief means that they must be ready to make calculated sacrifices if our presence and influence are to be more widely felt. No time is more appropriate to raise the morale of the people than during Ramadan, even if it entails risking travel to Jerusalem in yellow license plated cars. Prayer at the al-Aqsa mosque has a special meaning, a different impact and a profounder message than anywhere else. We [Hamas] understand that and we have no qualms planning for our future, the future of all Muslims, in the complicated circumstances in which we live. The youth, the young generation are our primary target because, after upholding the word of God, they are our most sacred responsibility. [\[146\]](#)

The words of this man who spoke like a teacher addressing his students, represents a clear testimony to the determination Hamas was willing to expend to enhance its position during the month of Ramadan. The message from him was put in unmistakable terms and his voice was loud and clear that Hamas will continue to plan and organize despite difficult odds. No more effective results can be achieved than during Ramadan, it is the month where even non-practicing Muslims revere the solace and the holiness it brings with it.

Endless lines of people praying, preaching and gathering all over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was a common scene during Ramadan. This was the time Hamas was anxiously awaiting to fill in any gaps as far as the transmission of its message to the public was concerned.

In essence, the massacre at Hebron and the ensuing devastating consequences came as the very event that Hamas would ordinarily use to conduct its mobilization, as was the case when the Palestinian workers in the Gaza Strip were killed which served as the catalyst for the intifada. Hamas used that event to help rally support around its cause until the intifada, the 'super-event' really took hold.

Ramadan was a perfect month to engender support and the massacre was an event only to enhance it. The next super-event is yet to come when once again Hamas will attempt to transform its existence, its agenda and its message from the minimum to the maximum arena of politics. It is therefore no surprise that Hamas did not respond to the massacre with a reactive measure against the occupation. The immediate imposition of a curfew in Hebron for an extended period and the proliferation of Israeli troops and checkpoints all over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, may have been thought an effective measure to help prevent the launching of military activities by Hamas against Israelis. However, it is equally true that, if based on previous experiences, the very wide presence of Israelis in areas known to be heavily infiltrated by Hamas activists is

expected to help the latter more easily target or conduct military activities. The heavy presence of Israelis, as far as Hamas's strategizing is concerned, will only make them an easier target to reach.

The fact that Hamas chose not to respond reactively certainly evokes some assumptions. Foremost among these is that Hamas chose to "reap the fruit" of the actual event of the massacre to achieve public relations objectives and support, exactly as it did at the outset of the intifada. Rather than responding with a countervailing military act to the massacre Hamas apparently chose to take its chances and await the eruption of a super-event while continuing to perform its campaign in Ramadan.

If and when the super-event occurs, which is not unlikely given the seeming intractability of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, Hamas can be expected to work diligently towards transforming its opposition to the talks from the deliberately passive and minimum arena into the intentional and active maximum arena of Palestinian politics. Hamas was patient enough to wait for 20 years after the 1967 Arab/Israeli war before launching its activities. It was content socializing its supporters, as its mentors publicly took pride in doing. Therefore, it is logical to assume that it would not necessarily meet the public expectations of a quick military strike against Israeli following the massacre. Rather it is more likely that it will continue its preparations for launching large and strategic operations at an unexpected time and place. Noteworthy here is the fact that only a few days after the massacre Hamas gave public notice that it will retaliate against several Israeli settlements.

While learning the lessons of the past of not "going along" with public expectations and demands, as was the case in the twenty year inter-war intifada period, Hamas managed to have the cake and eat it too by rallying support and issuing threats against Israeli targets.

Waiting for the super-event to come about, however, does not only represent an important pillar in Hamas' strategy, but also has potential ramifications for Palestinian society itself, in addition to its consequences for Israeli society. In order to keep its cause alive Hamas itself will have to survive. This entails among other things, further mobilization and further clashes with Israelis, whether initiated by the former or by the latter. One recent example is the car bomb suicide attack on April 6th, in the Israeli town of Afula which killed seven. [\[147\]](#)

Hamas will continue to be in a state of anticipation of the super-event, in essence awaiting its occurrence and capitalizing on its results. One way or another, Hamas will survive and will not feel disappointed if the gap between it and the PLO grows wider. On the contrary, more public criticism of the PLO by Hamas will be the tool used to punctuate this gap in addition to highlighting the mishaps of Palestinian leaders.

Though unlikely, if the super-event does not arise, will Hamas opt for a change in strategy or will it help a super-event to occur? Of course this question will have to remain open-ended for the time being, but the more underlying reality is that the longer it may take for the super-event to erupt, the more effective mobilization would have become. Furthermore, if the super-event does not materialize in the very near future it is possible that Hamas will intensify its disagreements with the PLO, in essence converting its position to the arena of politics. Disturbing as this may be, this question too will have to be kept open-ended, for the time being at least. The more compelling fact to be kept in mind, however, is that an exacerbation of tensions between Hamas and the PLO might serve as the precursor for a Palestinian civil war. Needless to say if this were to occur not only will Palestinian society be impacted but the Israelis too will have quite a convincing rationale

for dragging their feet on the peace talks, suggesting that it is too dangerous to strike an agreement with a society broken upon itself.

Whatever path Hamas desires or aspires to walk it would undoubtedly be a delicate one with limitless effects on Palestinian society, on its Israeli counterpart, on the region and certainly on the world as a whole.

Harsh Israeli crackdowns on Hamas activists, as exemplified by the siege and destruction of houses where alleged Hamas members were operating in the towns of Abu Dis and Hebron, is bound to have its effects on Hamas' structure and functions. The systematic pursuit of Hamas operatives by Israeli soldiers can be expected to weaken the movement but it should also be expected to serve as an impetus for the movement to go deeper underground. In either case Hamas will continue to wait for the super-event and thus will prepare itself for the climax when its agenda is publicly inculcated in every facet of Palestinian life.

Whether the super-event and/or the transformation process will occur is not really the question. The question is, however, where, when, how and under what circumstances will it occur and in the absence of such a super-event what will then be the face of political life in Palestinian society?

[144] The most widely reported version was that the massacre was the work of one man, Dr. Baruch Goldstein, other reports suggested that there was more than one perpetrator and that there was assistance or at least non-intervention in Goldstein's act by the Israeli army. Reports also vary as to the number of people killed and these place the toll at between 30 and 50.

[145] Cars from the West Bank carry blue license plates and those from the Gaza Strip carry white plates. This measure taken by the Israeli authorities, is meant to differentiate Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from those living in Jerusalem and behind the green line. Cars owned by Palestinians living in Jerusalem carry yellow license plates, ID cards also have different colors in order to further aid with the identification process.

[146] This interview was conducted during the first week of Ramadan. The interviewee is a middle aged man working in the private sector who also requested anonymity.

[147] A leaflet was issued by Hamas on the day after the Afula attack (April 7th) entitled "You turned the Id al-Fitr holiday into a black day, so we vowed to turn your Independence Day into hell", the Izz a-Din al Qassam units said that four more attacks were planned, including rocket attacks. The leaflet urged merchants and citizens to stock up on food supplies "because an atmosphere of real war will take over the Zionist soldiers and the enemy leadership in the near future". The leaflet further urged Arafat to stop negotiating with Israel for one year and at the end of that year, after the Izz a-Din al Qassam units "with the help of God, will force the leaders of Israel to evacuate their soldiers and settlers from Gaza without any conditions" then Arafat will be appointed President. The leaflet further asserted "So as not to be accused of killing civilians, we demand all settlers to quickly leave the West Bank and the Gaza Strip because the Qassam units will barrage their homes with rockets that God sent us recently".

