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Source: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Summer, 1993), pp. 5-19

Published by: [University of California Press](#) on behalf of the [Institute for Palestine Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2538077>

Accessed: 19/01/2015 04:44

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HAMAS: A HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

ZIAD ABU-AMR

Hamas—the Islamic Resistance Movement—was born of the intifada, which marked the beginning of the true political revival of the Islamic forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the face of Israeli occupation on the one hand, and the national secular forces led by the PLO on the other. Up until that time, the most important Islamic movement in the occupied territories, the Muslim Brotherhood, had shied away from active resistance against the Israeli occupation, a decision that stood in the way of its full development as a popular force. This situation was suddenly to change with the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, which led the Muslim Brotherhood to play an active role in the resistance for the first time. This it did through Hamas, the organization it created from its own ranks expressly for that purpose. It was thus that the Islamic movement, after many years in existence, was able to emerge as the first true challenge ever posed in the occupied territories to the dominant nationalist trend.

The new force—for Hamas soon overshadowed its parent organization—now prevails in a number of localities, especially the Gaza Strip, with a magnitude that parallels that of Fateh, the largest of the PLO factions. Its emergence has brought about a state of imbalance in the political forces that had held sway for decades. Moreover, the developing rivalry between the Islamic

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Journal of Palestine Studies XXII, no. 4 (Summer 1993), pp. 5-19.

trend led by Hamas and the national secular trend under the PLO may not cease in the event that the Israeli occupation ends, since what is at stake in this rivalry is nothing less than the leadership, the identity, and the future direction of the Palestinian people.

The Rise of the Islamic Groups in the Occupied Territories

Since Hamas was the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, to understand it one must begin with the history of the parent organization in the occupied territories.

The Muslim Brotherhood

Up until the 1980s, when the radical Islamic Jihad broke away from the Muslim Brotherhood Society, the history of the Islamic movements in Palestine can be reduced to the history of the Brotherhood. The Brotherhood had been founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, and soon spread to other parts of the Arab world. In his attempt to revitalize the Islamic call, al-Banna stressed three elements: revival, organization, and upbringing. Basically, the goal of al-Banna's movement, like other Islamic revival groups, was to transform society to approximate as closely as possible that established by the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions. This would entail the establishment of an Islamic state, with no distinction being made between religion and government, and with the Quran and the *sunna* serving as the basis for all aspects of life.

The Brotherhood's connection with Palestine dates back to 1935, when Hasan al-Banna sent his brother, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, to establish contacts there. In 1945, the group inaugurated its first branch in Jerusalem. With the assistance of the mother group in Egypt, more branches were established in other Palestinian towns, reaching twenty-five by the year 1947. The branches had memberships ranging from 12,000 to 20,000, and were attached to the command of the Muslim Brotherhood in Cairo.¹ Al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini, preeminent Palestinian nationalist leader, was named a local leader of the Brotherhood, which helped spread its influence in the country.²

It should be noted that the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, while embracing the same ideology as the Society across the Arab world, does give a special place to two figures, aside from the founder, Hasan al-Banna. One important model for Palestinian Islamists is Sayyid Qutb, who was executed in Egypt in 1966 and is considered a true symbol of revolutionary Islam. In contrast to Hasan al-Banna, known for his moderation, Qutb embodies the concept of active opposition to, and noncooperation with, the existing order. The other source of inspiration for Palestinian Islamists is 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, the first leader of armed resistance in the history of modern Palestine, who was killed by the British in 1935 in the events leading up to the Great Palestinian Rebellion of 1936-39. The military branch of Hamas today bears his name.

After the creation of Israel in 1948, relations between the Brotherhood and the Hashemite leadership in Jordan, which had annexed the West Bank in 1950, were generally smooth and cordial, despite periodic tensions. The activity of the Brotherhood in the West Bank was not political in the main, but social and religious. In the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, administered by Egypt until 1967, the Brotherhood's relations with the administration were problematic most of the time, and the Brothers were persecuted and outlawed.

In the years following the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, the Brotherhood continued to concentrate mainly on what it described as "the upbringing of an Islamic generation" through the establishment of religious schools, charity associations, social clubs, and so on. But the Brotherhood's emphasis on the Islamic restructuring of society and religious education seemed to have little relevance for a population that was seeking liberation from foreign occupation. The emerging Palestinian nationalist resistance movement had far greater appeal, and the failure of the Brothers to participate in this resistance cost them many potential adherents.

Several factors, both organizational and objective, contributed to strengthening the Brotherhood. In 1973, *al-Mujamma' al-Islami* (the Islamic Center) was established in Gaza by Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, a dynamic preacher and 1948 refugee who was later to become the primary force behind Hamas. Within a relatively short period of time, virtually all religious organizations and institutions dominated by the Brotherhood—including the Islamic University in Gaza—were controlled through the Center. Then, in the 1970s, the centralizing effect of *al-Mujamma'* was reinforced by a reorganization within the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood: the societies in the Gaza Strip, West Bank, and Jordan were now merged into a single organization called "The Muslim Brotherhood Society in Jordan and Palestine."³ This reorganization affected the position and policies of the Brotherhood in the occupied territories by bringing guidance, instruction, and support from the Society and its leadership based in Jordan.

The organizational changes laid the groundwork for the Brotherhood's growth. Then, in the late 1970s, a certain disillusionment had begun to spread with regard to the Palestinian resistance movement, making the population more amenable to alternative political or ideological approaches. The Islamic revolution in Iran also had a galvanizing effect, capturing people's imaginations. These factors gave a boost to the Brotherhood, which stepped up its political activities, especially within Palestinian universities. Initially, most of these activities were aimed at countering the secularist ideas and influence of the nationalist factions of the PLO, with only part of the group's efforts being directed against the Israeli occupation. Moreover, while the occupation authorities were expending considerable energies on dismantling and repressing the resistance organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was not involved in armed resistance, was able to build its organizational

structure and pursue its work among the masses with little Israeli interference.

The Muslim Brotherhood had a number of means at its disposal in spreading religious ideas and rallying support for the Islamic movement. Aside from the various associations it had established throughout the territories such as libraries and sports and social clubs, the organization used *zakat* (alms giving, one of the five pillars of Islam) to help thousands of needy families. Thousands of children were enrolled in nursery schools, kindergartens, and schools run by the Islamic movement. Loans were extended to students in Palestinian and Arab universities.

The Brotherhood was also able to gain significant access to the population through its increasing control over the religious institution of the *waqf* (religious endowments), which controls an extensive network of property that it leases to the local inhabitants. In the Gaza Strip, *waqf* constitutes 10 percent of all real estate: "Hundreds of shops, apartments, garages, public buildings, and about 2,000 acres of agricultural land belonged to its trusts, and the *waqf* employed scores of people, from preachers and other clerics to grave diggers."⁴

But the Muslim Brotherhood's most effective tool in spreading its influence was the mosques, especially given their proliferation following the Israeli occupation. Thus, in the period from 1967 to 1987, the number of mosques in the West Bank rose from 400 to 750, in the Gaza Strip from 200 to 600.⁵ After daily afternoon and sunset prayers, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to use mosques—as sanctuaries generally not subject to interference from the Israeli authorities—for political work and for recruiting followers.

Still, despite the Brotherhood's growth and effectiveness in gathering support through its social services and activities, a certain amount of dissatisfaction continued because of its failure to engage in fighting the occupation. This dissatisfaction led to the creation of the Islamic Jihad movement, which broke away from the Brotherhood in the early 1980s.

The Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Jihad

While Islamic Jihad has remained small and never commanded anywhere near the following of the Brotherhood, it is important to dwell briefly on the movement and its positions, because these positions encompass criticisms leveled at the Brotherhood and which in fact were later addressed in the creation of Hamas—that is, the Brotherhood's lack of commitment to an all-out struggle against Israel.

Islamic Jihad was founded by two 1948 refugees who grew up in camps in the Gaza Strip, Fathi al-Shaqiqi and 'Abd al-'Aziz Auda. As university students in Cairo, both were strongly influenced by trends within the Muslim Brotherhood Society in Egypt, and notably by the militant Islamic groups that had emerged from the ranks of the Egyptian Brotherhood in the mid-1970s, *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* (The Atonement and Holy Flight), and *Tandhim al-Jihad* (the Jihad Organization).

Ideologically, the Islamic Jihad shares with the Muslim Brotherhood the same basic precepts concerning the need for the establishment of an Islamic state and for the application of Islamic principles in an Islamic society. The chief difference between the two groups lies in the place of Palestine in their priorities and their means of action.

All Islamic groups, not only in Palestine but throughout the Muslim world, consider Palestine in its entirety as Muslim land, no part of which can be ceded under any circumstances. The establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza is therefore seen as sinful if it entails conceding the rest of Palestine to Israel, an illegitimate entity. For the Islamic groups, Palestine is not merely a Palestinian or an Arab problem, but an Islamic problem of concern to the entire Islamic nation; true Muslims are called upon to sacrifice lives and money to liberate every inch of the holy land.

Where the Islamic groups differ is on the centrality of the Palestine issue and the proper timing for liberating the country. For the Muslim Brotherhood, the first priority is the Islamic transformation of society, which it sees as a prerequisite to the liberation of Palestine. According to the Brotherhood, armed struggle (*jihad*) cannot be undertaken until the society is reformed, until secular ideas are abandoned and Islam adopted. The Islamic Jihad, on the other hand, considers Palestine its central issue, and advocates armed struggle as its strategy for political action without waiting for the Islamization of society.⁶ The Islamic Jihad was all the more critical of the Brotherhood's failure to engage in armed struggle in that *jihad* is one of the five pillars of Islamic doctrine. The new organization further rejected the Brotherhood's reformist approach and traditionalist ideas and practices in favor of revolutionary action by an Islamic vanguard; for the Islamic Jihad, the problems of Arab society can not be solved by gradual measures or "truce, patching, and reform," but by "decisiveness and revolution."⁷

In a similar vein, Islamic Jihad objected to the Muslim Brotherhood's position of coexistence with the Arab regimes, especially those having strong ties with the West such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. These it regarded as an "actual security belt for Israel," considering the Arab regimes and Israel as "two faces of the same coin; they are both the fruit of the Western invasion of the Arab world."⁸ Given these views, it is not surprising that another source of disagreement between the two groups was the attitude toward the Islamic revolution in Iran, which the Brotherhood began to criticize after the Iran-Iraq war broke out. The Jihad movement, on the other hand, considered the Ayatollah Khomeini as an important source of ideological inspiration.

Because of its focus on Palestine as a central issue, the Islamic Jihad shares a common objective with the PLO factions. Despite its Islamic approach to the achievement of this objective and its disapproval of the PLO's political program and diplomatic conduct as being incompatible with the "Islamic view of history," the Islamic Jihad does not see itself as a rival or alternative to the PLO. The Brotherhood, for its part, has accused the Jihad of being

part of the Fateh movement, the “Islamic Fateh,” and for concentrating on political matters at the expense of Islamic education.

Despite the challenge by the more radical Islamic Jihad and the nationalist forces—a challenge made stronger by the Islamic Jihad’s launching of military operations in the mid-1980s and even participation in certain joint actions with Fateh against Israeli targets in the occupied territories⁹—the Brotherhood held firm in its refusal to engage in outward resistance to the occupation. Soon, however, the intifada was abruptly to change all the givens of the situation and move the organization to an unprecedented change of course, involving it for the first time in organized resistance against the occupation.

The Formation of Hamas

Despite claims to the contrary, the intifada erupted spontaneously without any political decision by any organized group, and caught the Brotherhood, like the PLO, by surprise. On 8 December 1987, a motor accident in the Gaza Strip involving an Israeli truck and small vehicles transporting Palestinian workers, several of whom were killed, triggered the riots that spread and evolved into what became known as the intifada. The very next day, leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza met to discuss ways of utilizing the event to stir up religious and nationalist sentiments and assure the spread of wide public demonstrations. The meeting was held at the house of Ahmad Yasin, the founder of the Islamic Center, and was attended by other prominent leaders of the Center: Dr. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rantisi (age 40), a physician residing in Khan Yunis; Dr. Ibrahim al-Yazuri (age 45), a pharmacist residing in Gaza city; Shaykh Salih Shihada (age 40), an instructor at the Islamic University residing in the town of Bayt Hanun; ‘Isa al-Nashshar (age 35), an engineer in Rafah; Muhammad Sham’a (age 50), a teacher in al-Shati refugee camp; and ‘Abd al-Fattah Dukhan (age 50), a school principal at al-Nusayrat camp.¹⁰ The group was soon meeting regularly to develop contingency plans to deal with the fast-developing situation.

On 14 December, the Brotherhood leaders issued a statement calling on the people to stand up to the Israeli occupation. Hamas retrospectively considered this its first serialized leaflet, though the new organization did not identify itself as such until January 1988 when it issued leaflets under the name “Hamas.”¹¹ Meanwhile Shaykh Yasin and his colleagues were in contact with their counterparts in the West Bank. That same month, January 1988, Shaykh Yasin assigned Shaykh Jamil Hamami, a Brotherhood activist in the West Bank and one of the young preachers at Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque, to establish with his colleagues a branch of Hamas there. Hamami thus became the liaison between Shaykh Yasin on the one hand and the Hamas command in the West Bank and the Brotherhood command in Jordan on the other. It should be noted that this last provided financial support for the intifada.¹²

The establishment of Hamas, which means “zeal” in Arabic and is the acronym for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Resistance Movement), was not a clear-cut and immediately conscious decision, but evolved over time. Indeed, the Brotherhood’s response to the uprising was the subject of tensions within the organization. In the West Bank, especially, the younger strata of the Brotherhood were eager to participate in the uprising against the occupation, while the traditional leaders initially had a reserved, wait-and-see attitude. It was only when the intifada was in full swing and Hamas had become an active participant that the discrepancy between the young activists and the traditional leaders came to an end.

But the question of participation in the intifada was not merely one of young versus old; the new situation confronted the Brotherhood with a real ideological dilemma. On the one hand, given the unprecedented events taking place in Palestine and the internal pressures within the movement, it would have been politically impossible for Yasin and the other leaders to allow the Brotherhood to remain on the sidelines, especially in the light of the Brotherhood’s ongoing and bitter rivalry with PLO factions. On the other hand, it was not easy for the group to justify suddenly joining the intifada when its previous positions were well known; until the very eve of the uprising, Yasin and the other leaders had been arguing that the time had not yet come for the actual *jihad*. According to their oft-stated views, the Brotherhood was still in the phase of educating the Muslim generation in preparation for the restructuring of the Muslim community; this in turn would be the prelude to the declaration of *jihad* against Israel. Similarly, Yasin and his close associates in the Brotherhood had to find a way to join the intifada without compromising the future of the movement they had built up with such painstaking efforts and personal sacrifice (Yasin and a number of others having already served prison sentences).

It was Shaykh Yasin’s idea, as a way out of these dilemmas, to create an ostensibly separate organization out of the Muslim Brotherhood to take responsibility for its participation in the intifada. The calculation was probably that if the intifada failed the Brotherhood could disclaim Hamas and escape Israeli retribution for its participation, whereas if the intifada continued, the Brotherhood could derive benefit by claiming Hamas as its own. This is precisely what happened when the Hamas charter was issued in August 1988 proclaiming Hamas as a wing of the Brotherhood.¹³ In a sense, the establishment of Hamas by the Brotherhood in the occupied territories was parallel to the founding of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) by the PLO factions, with both serving to channel their respective bodies’ resistance activities.

Hamas’s active role in the intifada and the growing awareness of its relationship to the Brotherhood gave this last a credibility much needed because of the PLO campaigns criticizing it for its nonparticipation in the armed struggle. Indeed, the Brotherhood began deliberately to equate the two organizations, and Yasin and his colleagues became more vocal and less circum-

spect in terms of their political visibility: Hamas had soon become a credible and convenient name for a rehabilitated Muslim Brotherhood Society, enabling the “new” organization to attract followers and supporters who had not been members of the Brotherhood. Before long, in fact, Hamas had become a force that could not be ignored and even a serious challenge to the secular forces led by the PLO.

Ideology, Aims, and Strategies

Hamas’s aims and strategies are spelled out in the charter it issued on 18 August 1988, which contains the philosophy of the Movement, its rationale, and its positions not only on such central issues as the Palestine problem but also on social welfare, the role of women, other Islamic movements, nationalist movements and the PLO, the Arab countries, and so on.* One might note that recent rumors to the effect that Hamas is considering far-reaching changes in its charter¹⁴ have been vigorously denied, notably by Hamas leader Dr. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rantisi.¹⁵

The content of the charter does not differ from positions taken by the Muslim Brotherhood on the same issues; as stated in article 2 of the charter, Hamas is only a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood Society. There is no doubt, however, that the charter pays little attention to the Brotherhood’s core goal of transforming society, placing far greater emphasis on the Palestine problem and *jihad*.

Concerning Palestine, the charter states that “the land of Palestine is an Islamic trust (*‘waqf’*) upon all Muslim generations until the Day of Resurrection. It is not right to give it up nor any part of it” (article 11). In the opinion of Hamas, the solution of the Palestine problem rests in the uprooting of the State of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state in its place. The charter also mentions three spheres connected with the Palestinian cause. These are the Palestinian, the Arab, and the Islamic, each of which has its role in the struggle against Israel (article 14).

Concerning peace negotiations and initiatives, the charter states: “What are called ‘peaceful solutions’ and ‘international conferences’ to solve the Palestine question all conflict with the doctrine of the Islamic Resistance Movement, for giving up any part of the homeland is like giving up part of the religious faith itself” (article 13). According to the charter, there is no solution to the Palestine problem except *jihad*: “When an enemy occupies some of the Muslim lands, *jihad* becomes obligatory on every Muslim” (article 15). Thus, all peace initiatives are a “waste of time and acts of absurdity” (article 13). In keeping with this, Hamas protested against the peace conference that was held in Madrid in October 1991, and continues to oppose Palestinian participation in the current Arab-Israeli negotiations, calling for immediate withdrawal from these negotiations.

* See special document.

Although it is still premature to determine how far Hamas would go in its opposition to the Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, it is evident that Hamas's opposition is tempered by the realization of the hardships facing the Palestinians in the occupied territories. Despite vocal opposition, the organization does not wish to project itself as an obstructive force when there may be a chance, however slim, of finding a solution. Hamas's opposition to the talks is further tempered by lack of available alternatives and awareness that the internal Palestinian balance of power still favors the PLO. More important is the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, its patron, whose opposition to Jordanian government policies can not be allowed to reach the point of alienating the king.

As for Hamas's relations with the nationalist movement, the charter refers to the PLO as a "father, brother, relative, or friend" of the Islamic movement and stresses the fact that the two movements have a common plight and common destiny and face the same enemy (article 27). At the same time, Hamas sharply criticizes the PLO's secular course and its leadership, as well as its political program calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state that would coexist with the State of Israel. Hamas had already condemned the PLO's recognition of the State of Israel and its acceptance of UN Security Resolutions 242 and 338.

Although Hamas does not openly question the PLO's status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, in fact it objects to the organization's widespread acceptance as the people's frame of reference and definer of their identity and national goals. Hamas makes no explicit claims to being an alternative to the PLO, but its repeated references to Islam as the alternative to the failed nationalist and secular ideologies would seem to imply a certain projection of itself as an alternative to an organization embracing such failed ideologies. Hamas's rejection of the PLO's political program and its call for the establishment of an Islamic society in Palestine and for the establishment of an Islamic leadership to spearhead the popular struggle are all manifestations of its rivalry with the PLO for leadership.

Organization and Leadership

Although the Muslim Brotherhood has in theory maintained its internal organizational structure, and although Hamas, as a "wing" of the organization, is in theory separate, in practice the two have become increasingly intertwined. It is thus that the division of labor within the leadership and rank-and-file levels is considered an "internal" affair.

The initial leadership of Hamas consisted of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin and the other six founding members. Later, as the movement developed, leadership wings and committees were set up to take charge of political matters, security, military operations, and the media. Even so, Hamas has remained relatively simple and lacks the complex bureaucracy of the PLO. Overall leadership of the movement is entrusted to a *majlis shura* (consultative council) whose members live inside and outside the occupied territories.

From the beginning, the leadership has been plagued by repeated losses in its ranks through deportations and imprisonment, necessitating periodic reorganizations both at the central leadership and committee or branch levels and obliging Hamas to graduate successive leadership echelons. After Shaykh Yasin was arrested in May 1989 and sentenced to fifteen years in prison, Dr. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rantisi took command of Hamas in the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, the better known leaders included Husayn Abu Kuwik, a prominent unionist, Fadil Salih, an imam, and Hasan Yusuf, a school teacher and imam. All these were deported by Israel in December 1992. The Hamas connection of the renowned advocate Shaykh Bassam Jarar, also deported by Israel, is not confirmed. Among the well-known leaders of Hamas outside Palestine are Musa Abu Marzuq, head of the Movement's political bureau, Muhammad Nazzal, representative in Jordan, and 'Imad al-Alami, representative in Tehran. The identity of a number of Hamas leaders, both inside and outside the occupied territories, remains unknown.

The mass deportations of December 1992 aimed mainly at Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood removed not only most of the front-line leaders, but also large numbers of second- and third-tier leaders and other activists, leaving the occupied territories seemingly bereft of major leaders. Nonetheless, the devastating effect of the deportations is somewhat mitigated by the fact that the leadership inside the territories has always relied for its strategic decisions on guidance from its extended leadership abroad, including leaders of the Muslim Brothers in Jordan and Egypt. In addition, the armed actions performed by the "Martyr 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Battalions" may not be affected, as the Israeli authorities do not appear to have succeeded in arresting any of their leaders.

Most probably, the leadership vacuum resulting from the mass deportations will pave the way for the appearance of a new militant leadership giving less weight to political considerations than most of the deported Muslim leaders, whose positions had been tempered by the moderation arising from involvement in practical politics.

Activities and Popularity

As a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and indeed inextricably intertwined with it, Hamas has been able to build on the mother organization's extensive infrastructure in expanding its public base of operations. It is thus that nursery schools, kindergartens, social and sports clubs, libraries, and other such associations fall under its auspices, and the Islamic University continues under its control. These various institutions—to say nothing of the network of mosques—are useful vehicles for spreading Hamas's ideas and influence and enlisting supporters. Following the example of the Brotherhood, Hamas also organizes trips, particularly among university students, as well as visits to the Dome of the Rock.

In the political realm, Hamas sponsors forums, political gatherings, and Islamic exhibitions, particularly on university campuses, that serve as vehicles for its influence. It issues statements, brochures, and pamphlets, and commemorates martyrs and Islamic events. It organizes demonstrations and strikes and other expressions of protest. Its success in calling for comprehensive strikes is testimony to its influence; it is doubtful that any PLO faction, except for Fateh, could alone find a similar response to its strike calls.

The movement now participates in the intifada on an equal footing with the PLO groups. At present it is larger than any single faction except for Fateh, and, like Fateh, has a strong presence throughout the occupied territories. There is no doubt that Hamas's actions, including the use of arms against Israeli military targets, have been a major factor in the continuation of the uprising because of the movement's wide following and quick mobility. Moreover, its nonparticipation in the political process has led it to concentrate its efforts on intifada activity: Hamas has become the party most engaged in armed actions against Israeli targets and is estimated to have more members under detention than any other group except Fateh. It should be noted that Hamas's military activities are intended not only to strike at the occupation, but also to embarrass the negotiating factions and to bolster its own position as a major Palestinian force that cannot be ignored and without which no agreement can be reached.

In the absence of free and direct democratic elections, it is impossible to determine with any certainty the size of Hamas's following. However, some idea can be obtained from the sectoral elections held in professional associations, trade unions, student councils, chambers of commerce, and so on, where results point to the movement's increasing popularity. An analysis of the results of the elections that Hamas did not win indicate that it obtained more votes than any individual faction except Fateh, scoring anywhere from 35 to 45 percent of the total popular vote. In some elections, where Fateh ran on a joint ballot with other factions (as was the case in the 1992 elections for the Ramallah Chamber of Commerce and the student councils at the universities in Gaza and Hebron), Hamas actually won over Fateh, although in general more institutions are dominated by PLO supporters than by Hamas supporters. It should nonetheless be noted that under the elections system followed in the occupied territories, the percentages of the popular vote do not translate into an equivalent ratio of seats in the elected councils. For instance, the pro-Hamas Islamic Bloc won 45 percent of the total votes in the elections for the Nablus Chamber of Commerce in 1992, but obtained only three out of twelve seats. Similarly, the Bloc won more than 40 percent of the votes in the student council elections of al-Najah University (Nablus) in 1992, but did not obtain a single council seat.

It was in keeping with the popular percentages that Hamas, in response to an invitation to join the PLO, demanded 40 to 50 percent of the seats in the Palestine National Council (PNC) as a precondition to joining that body. But given Hamas's rejection of the PLO program, it is possible that this demand,

clearly impossible for the PLO to meet, was intended to relieve Hamas of public criticism for rejecting unity and cooperation with the nationalist movement.

External Relations

From the outset, Hamas has been closely interconnected with the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, which has provided it with a wide range of doctrinal, political, moral, and material support. Hamas has also enjoyed the support of Islamic movements in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Sudan, Algeria, and Tunisia, not to mention of Islamic communities and organizations in the United States and Europe.

The organization further had good relations with official elements in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, but these deteriorated as a result of the Gulf war, when Hamas took a position not much different from that of the PLO, opposing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait but strongly opposing the massive foreign military intervention in the region. Meanwhile, relations with Iran, which had begun to improve as a result of Hamas's participation in the intifada and especially following the improvement of relations between Iran and the Brotherhood in Jordan, improved even more as a result of the Gulf war; Hamas was keen on finding new allies after the deterioration of its relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states as well as the Islamic movements in these countries. It is thus that Hamas opened an office in Tehran, and Iran is said to be providing military training to Hamas activists both in Iran and at pro-Iranian Hizballah bases in Lebanon. It should be noted that Hamas (along with Islamic Jihad) participated in a conference held in Tehran to protest the convening of the Madrid peace conference of October 1991.

Financial Needs and Funding

Hamas does not until now possess a complex bureaucracy like the PLO, and the leadership and cadres are characterized by modesty in expenditure and absence of financial corruption. Infrastructural expenditures are therefore still quite limited. Its resources in no way compare with the financial potential of the PLO, restricting its ability to engage in comparable patronage activities. It should also be mentioned that the responsibilities of Hamas are not as diversified as those of the PLO, and while the PLO assumes financial burdens in the Palestinian diaspora as well as in the occupied territories, Hamas's expenditures are limited to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Nonetheless, the movement has financial responsibilities that are increasing day by day to keep pace with the parallel growth of its activities and the size of its organization.

Hamas depends for its finances on a number of sources, especially local contributions, donations from individuals and Islamic movements abroad, and certain governments.

For the local sources in the occupied territories, individuals contribute either directly to the movement or to the *zakat* committees or other founda-

tions supervised by Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood. Money from the *zakat* is used for Hamas's activities in helping the poor, building mosques and schools, and other charitable works.

As for individual foreign contributions, just as financial support was given to the *mujahidin* of Afghanistan, Muslims throughout the world, including in the United States and Europe, are now offering support to the "*mujahidin* of Palestine." These individual donations are collected on Hamas's behalf both by individual supporters and Islamic organizations in various countries. Financial support to resist the Israeli occupation and reinforce the Islamic trend against secular forces in the occupied territories is also received from the international Islamic movement in various countries, particularly Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Sudan, Iran, and others.

Despite assertions by the Hamas leadership that it does not receive donations from governmental sources,¹⁶ reference has been made to financial support from some governments, notably Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. This was the case particularly before the Gulf war, although some support has reportedly continued even afterwards as a way of penalizing the PLO for its positions concerning Iraq. Iran is also reported to have contributed millions of dollars, above and beyond its military and other assistance.

Other sources of financial support have included the PLO, at least once and at the instruction of Yasir Arafat,¹⁷ and possibly the movement's own investment projects, although the movement has denied ownership of profit-making projects.

Future Prospects

While Hamas (and the Islamic movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in general) have made great gains, becoming a major political force in Palestinian society, it continues to face important challenges.

There is no question that Hamas has benefited immensely from being in the "opposition." It has no responsibility for the painful concessions that those in authority—meaning the PLO—have had to make without thus far receiving any tangible results in return. The PLO's abandonment of revolutionary slogans and shift to political pragmatism enabled Hamas to fill the resulting ideological and doctrinal vacuum at a time of increasing disillusionment in the nationalist program. But while the maximalist stands of the Islamic groups may sound appealing in the light of growing doubts about the PLO's ability to deliver on its goals, there is no evidence that Hamas is any better able to achieve either its transitional objective (ending the occupation) or its strategic objective (establishing an Islamic state in Palestine). It is true that Hamas has the advantage of being able to revert to the Brotherhood's earlier stance of deferring the liberation of Palestine and *jihād* until more propitious circumstances. The PLO, on the other hand, cannot suggest that its more limited goals of self-determination and statehood on some 20 percent of Palestine are no longer feasible and must be postponed *sine die*; these

objectives, after all, are the *raison d'être* of the PLO. Nonetheless, Hamas cannot rely indefinitely on the failures of others as a means of gaining lasting influence. In the longer term, it will itself have to "deliver."

Hamas has also benefited from a trend toward conservatism that has been growing in the territories since the outbreak of the intifada. The atmosphere of oppression, deprivation, and hopelessness has moreover contributed to the spread of an Islamic climate. That the PLO factions themselves are sensitive to this shift is clear from the increased use of religious expressions and Quranic verses in the statements issued by the UNLU. It is also significant that the pro-PLO nationalist groups ran in the May 1992 elections for the Nablus Chamber of Commerce under the name "The National Muslim Trend."¹⁸

Nonetheless, it is far from clear whether Hamas can ever make Islam a political frame of reference for the Palestinian people. The Islamic movement's social outlook creates anxiety among large segments of the population; Palestinian society has a strong secular tradition, perpetuated in a large number of secular institutions. Palestine also has an active and influential Christian minority.

Hamas has thus far failed to take a clear stance on a number of important issues. Democracy and pluralism are among these. From a theoretical and doctrinal standpoint, Palestinian Islamists, including Hamas, dismiss democracy as a Western concept with no place in a Muslim society. They argue that Islamic doctrine provides principles that have greater justice and comprehensiveness. In an Islamic order, political parties whose frame of reference is not Islam would be banned, but before the establishment of Islamic rule, democracy is preferred to dictatorship as more hospitable to the flourishing of Islam.¹⁹ For the time being, Islamists can argue that national liberation takes precedence over the debate over democracy and pluralism. In the long run, however, failure to articulate acceptable positions on these issues may alienate significant segments of Palestinian society and undermine the movement's influence.

Finally, for all the current disappointment in the peace process and the pro-PLO negotiators, the PLO has a legitimacy acquired through more than twenty-five years of nationalist resistance to Israeli occupation. It is credited with reviving and crystallizing Palestinian national identity and with defining the national rights of the Palestinian people. As long as Hamas does not espouse a defined nationalist program responding to the aspirations of the Palestinian people, it can not become an alternative to the PLO or even a serious contender for the legitimate representation of the Palestinians.

The future of Hamas (and the Muslim Brotherhood) will be influenced by local, regional, and international developments that will either reinforce or weaken its position. Crucial will be its ability to sustain its activism against the Israeli occupation, as well as the PLO's ability to safeguard and advance the fixed national rights of the Palestinian people—self-determination, statehood, and the right of return. Any PLO failure will probably translate into

gains for the Hamas movement. In preserving its position, Hamas will need to contain tough Israeli measures against it. There is no doubt that the December 1992 deportations of large numbers of its leaders and activists, even while reinforcing its political and moral position among the Palestinians, has negatively affected its organizational strength.

To meet the many challenges that face it, the movement must safeguard its unity inside and outside the occupied territories. It must also solidify to the maximum its relations with the other Islamic movements inside Palestine; in this regard, considerable progress has already been made in improving relations with the Islamic Jihad. Discussions have taken place between the two groups to explore the possibility of closer cooperation and even unity. Iran and Sudan, traditional supporters of Islamic Jihad, may be playing a mediating role, or even pushing for closer coordination between the two groups.²⁰

Hamas should also try to ensure the highest level of support from other Islamic movements abroad. In the words of a noted leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, an Islamic solution to the Palestine problem requires the "mobilization of the Islamic nation."²¹ In the last analysis, Hamas's success will depend on its ability, or lack thereof, to mobilize its reserve support outside Palestine as represented by the other Islamic movements and forces, and to convince them to engage in the confrontation against Israel.

NOTES

1. Ziad Abu-Amr, *al-Harakat al-Islamiyya fi al-diffa al-gharbiyya wa qita' Gaza: Jama'at al-Ikhwān al-Muslimin wa Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami* (The Islamic Movement in the West Bank and Gaza: The Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Jihad) (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1989), p. 21.

2. 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Nakba: nakbat bayt al-muqaddas wa al-firdaws al-mafqud, 1947-1955*, vol. II (The Catastrophe: The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise) (Tyre and Beirut: Manshurat al-Maktaba al-Asriyya, 1956), p. 103.

3. Interview with Yusef al-'Azam, a Muslim Brotherhood leader and member of parliament in Jordan, Amman, 30 May 1989.

4. Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), p. 224.

5. Fahmi Huwaydi, "Hawl al-'usuliyun fi al-ard al-muhtalla" (About the Fundamentalists in the Occupied Territories), *al-Ahram*, 8 December 1987.

6. Hala Mustafa, "al-Jihad al-Islami fi al-ard al-muhtalla" (The Islamic Jihad in the Occupied Territories), *Qadaya Fikriyya*, no. 6 (April 1987), p. 179.

7. Interview with Shaykh 'Abd al-'Aziz Auda, the spiritual leader of the Islamic Jihad Movement, Gaza, 24 March 1987.

8. *al-Fajr*, 28 August 1987, p. 9.

9. Abu-Amr, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*, p. 36.

10. From a personal interview with Dr. Ibrahim al-Yazuri, executive director of the Islamic Center in Gaza and one of the founders of Hamas, 9 July 1991. It is worth noting that these founders, except for Shaykh Yasin and Dr. Yazuri, were among those deported in December 1992.

11. Abu-Amr, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*, p. 101.

12. This information was part of Shaykh Yasin's confessions to the Israeli investigators after his arrest in May 1989; *al-Bayareq*, 25 December 1992, p. 12.

13. *Mithaq Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya (Hamas)* (The Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas), 18 August 1988, article 2, p. 5.

14. *al-Hayat*, as quoted in *Mideast Mirror*, 7 April 1993, p. 25.

15. *Sawt al-Haq wa al-Hurriyya*, no. 152/3, 7 May 1993, pp. 1, 23.

16. *al-Bayareq*, 25 December 1992, p. 13.

17. The author was able to review the minutes of the meeting of the PLO Central Council held in Baghdad in 1990.

18. *al-Quds*, 18 May 1992.

19. Interview with Dr. Mahmud al-Zahhar, an Islamic leader in the Gaza Strip, 4 December 1991.

20. Interview with Ibrahim Ghawshah, official spokesman of Hamas, and with an Islamic Jihad leader who requested anonymity, Amman, January 1992.

21. Interview with Ma'mur al-Hudaybi, a leader of the "Muslim Brother Group" in Egypt, Cairo, 3 May 1992.