

Academic Study

The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas)

**An Overview of Its Experience
& History 1987–2005**

Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh



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Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh¹

Introduction

This short study seeks to review Hamas's track record between 1987 and 2005, the period that preceded its victory in the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). The study focuses on political developments and Hamas's resistance-related activities. The study also explains how the Islamic Resistance Movement positioned itself to be a major actor in the Palestinian arena and cannot be ignored in any political equation.

First: Background and Inception

The name of the Islamic Resistance Movement came to the limelight with the start of the first *Intifadah* in December 1987. From the outset, Hamas defined itself as "a wing of the Muslim Brothers (MB) movement in Palestine." Hamas is one of the forms of resistance that the Palestinian MB movement adopted as part of its long-standing history in Palestine.

Thus, Hamas did not emerge out from a vacuum. It represents a continuation of the work of the MB movement that began in the form of popular advocacy through a network of branches and offices beginning in 1945. Before the war of 1948, the MB movement had 25 branches in Palestine.

The MB movement in Palestine, since its inception, has been active in the areas of preaching, education, and Islamic advocacy, while raising awareness regarding the Zionist threat, the plans of outside powers for Palestine, and mobilizing resistance. The resolutions issued by their general assembly sessions (e.g., Jaffa, October 1946 and Jaffa, October 1947) were indicative of the groups

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strength, familiarity with political developments and the implications of developments for jihad/resistance.²

The MB movement in Palestine took part in the resistance during the war of 1947/1948. However, as they came from a recently-established organization that was not yet sufficiently strong and stable meant that their participation was limited and reflected their modest capabilities. Nevertheless, the Palestinian MB movement established paramilitary units that operated in the areas of its presence in northern and central Palestine, under the command of local Arab leaders there—affiliated to *Jaysh al-Inqath* (Army of Salvation) or *al-Jihad al-Muqaddas* (the Holy Jihad Army). These units successfully raided Zionist settlements, despite their extremely poor training and equipment.³ In the southern areas like Gaza and Beersheba, many of the Palestinian MB movement members joined the Free Egyptian MB forces led by Kamel al-Sharif.

One of the most active branches of the MB movement in resistance was the one based in Jaffa.⁴ A national committee was formed in Jaffa when the war broke out and a representative from the MB movement joined its leadership. He was Zafer Ragheb al-Dajani, the head of the MB movement chapter in the city, and he was tasked with managing the economic division of the committee, as he was also the chairman of the city's Chamber of Commerce.⁵ Yusuf 'Umairah, a member of the MB movement in Jaffa and later Fatah co-founder and leader, says that during the war the MB movement was in charge of defending areas like al-Bassah, Tal al-Rish, al-'Ajmi, and al-Nuzha in Jaffa, in addition to maintaining order within the city.⁶

In the Jerusalem region, the Palestinian MB participated in the fighting alongside their comrades from Arab countries and the *al-Jihad al-Muqaddas* forces. Interestingly, when the National Committee was formed in Jerusalem on 26/1/1948, to manage the city and protect it during the 1948 war, it consisted of 14 members, including five MB in Jerusalem: Sharif Sabbouh, As'ad al-Imam,

² Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, *al-Tayyar al-Islami fi Filastin wa Atharuhu fi Harakat al-Jihad 1917–1948* (The Islamic Movement in Palestine and its Influence on the Jihad Movement 1917–1948), 2nd edition (Kuwait: Maktabat Al-Falah, 1989), pp. 447–450; and Bayan al-Hout, *al-Qiyadat wa al-Mu'assasat al-Siyasiyyah fi Filastin 1917–1948* (Political Leaders and Institutions in Palestine 1917–1948) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1981), p. 503.

³ Kamel al-Sharif, *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun fi Harb Filastin* (The Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestine War) (Zarqaa, Jordan: al-Manar Library, 1984), p. 464.

⁴ Interview by the author with Yusuf 'Umairah, Kuwait, 6/11/1985.

⁵ 'Aref al-'Aref, *al-Nakbah: Nakbat Beit al-Maqdis wa al-Firdaws al-Mafqud 1947–1952* (The Catastrophe in Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise 1947–1952) (Sidon-Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyyah, 1954), part 1, pp. 227–229 and 234.

⁶ Interview by the author with Yusuf 'Umairah, Kuwait, 6/11/1985.



Taher Barakat, Jamil Wehbeh, and ‘Eid Abdine.⁷ This is a strong indication of the influence the MB movement and its members had, as well as the respect they commanded in Jerusalem, especially if we take into account the large number of movements, parties, and associations, and the confessional diversity in Jerusalem.

After the disastrous war of 1948, the MB movement became one of the most popular groups among the Palestinians, between 1949 and 1954, both in the West Bank (WB) and Gaza Strip (GS), thanks to their acclaimed role in the war of 1948, and their Islamic-national programs. The Brothers enjoyed relative freedom in Egypt until 1954, and favorable conditions in Jordan. Other movements were not able to rival the Islamists, until Nasser dealt a harsh blow to the MB movement, and began a crackdown on them, utilizing his powerful media apparatus to distort their image.

As a result, the MB and the Islamists in general were now on the defensive, biding their time until better circumstances emerged. One of the models of the power of the Islamists was the Palestinian Students League in Egypt, the elections to which Islamists or the candidates they backed won every year until 1957. This included Yasir ‘Arafat, who was close to the MB movement.

In GS, the MB movement established a secret military organization,⁸ which carried out a number of operations in collaboration with Bedouins in the Negev. They benefited from the presence of the MB-affiliated officer in the Egyptian army ‘Abdul Mun‘im ‘Abdul Ra’uf in GS following the success of the Egyptian revolution, as ‘Abdul Ra’uf facilitated military training for them. The “Bus” attack of 17/3/1954 was one of the most famous incidents, with evidence existing that the Bedouins had carried it out in coordination with the MB, killing 11 Israelis near Beersheba, close to the Ma‘ale Akrabim settlement.⁹

In that period, restrictions on, and persecution of, the Islamic movement, especially in Egypt and GS, raised questions among the enthusiastic young members of the Palestinian MB movement, about the possible modes of action for the liberation of Palestine. The general trend in their ranks was to seek to be prudent, and focus on educational and faith-related aspects, but another trend was to seek organized militant action, which does not take open Islamic forms, but adopts national frameworks that can appeal to a wider range of young people, protecting it from hostility and crackdowns on the part of the regimes. The

⁷ See Mohsen Moh’d Saleh, “Factual Lights on the Muslim Brotherhood in Jerusalem in 1946,” in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, vol. 15, Issue 58, p. 71 (in Arabic); and see the names of the members of the National Committee in Jerusalem in: Bayan al-Hout, *op. cit.*, p. 906.

⁸ The researcher (Mohsen Moh’d Saleh) conducted an English-language study on this organization, and was accepted for publication by the *Journal of Palestine Studies* under the title “The Military Activities of The Palestinian’s Muslim Brothers In Gaza Strip 1949–1954.”

⁹ See Public Record Office (The National Archives), Kew Gardens, London, Files: Foreign Office (F.O.) 371/111077, 111098–111100.

experience of the Algerian revolution in that period was one of the important motivations for this mode of action. These were the first seeds of the Fatah movement (the Liberation of Palestine Movement, and later the Palestinian National Liberation movement) in 1957 in Kuwait, led by Yasir ‘Arafat, which originated from the MB movement and, more specifically, the inhabitants of the GS.

Khalil al-Wazir (aka Abu Jihad), who was a member of the MB, and who became the number two man in Fatah for 30 years, had suggested the move to the MB leadership in GS, but to no avail. However, this did not stop a considerable number of prominent and respected members of the MB from joining Fatah upon its foundation, such as Sa‘id al-Muzayyan, Ghalib al-Wazir, Salim al-Za‘nun, Salah Khalaf, As‘ad al-Saftawi, Muhammad Yusuf al-Najjar, Kamal ‘Adwan, Rafiq al-Natshah, ‘Abdul Fatah Hammoud, and Yusuf ‘Umairah. They all assumed senior leadership positions in the movement. In addition, Yasir ‘Arafat himself was close to the MB movement. However, Fatah, which focused its recruitment efforts on MB members until 1962, opened up to various movements and segments of the population, especially after the leadership of the MB in GS compelled members to choose between membership of Fatah or the MB movement.¹⁰ Fatah began to take on a nationalist-secular form that went on to shape its identity to this day.

The MB movement would be exaggerating if it claimed Fatah as an offshoot of their movement, but Fatah must also not deny its roots and early beginnings. If the MB movement is the incubator that inspired the idea and its early beginnings, Fatah was not created by its decision or according to its plan, in addition, Fatah’s project did not carry the MB ideology nor its guidelines (that guaranteed it would serve the MB movements goals).

When Jordan annexed the WB after the 1948 war, the MB movement there united with the movement in Jordan. For their part, those in GS had their own administrative office, led by Sheikh ‘Umar Sawwan until 1954. After that, they continued their work in secret in light of the Gamal ‘Abdul Nasser regime’s crackdown and persecution of the MB. However, the Brothers soon regrouped and formed the Palestinian Organization, to which the Palestinian MB in the Arab Gulf countries was affiliated, electing Hani Bsiso as their Comptroller General in the summer of 1962.¹¹

¹⁰ See ‘Abd Allah Abu ‘Azzah, *Ma’ al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Duwal al-‘Arabiyyah* (With the Islamic Movement in Arab Countries) (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1986), pp. 71–96; also see letter from Suleiman Hamad, Kuwait, to the author, 17/7/1994. Note: Suleiman Hamad examined a draft of what the author wrote about the inception of Fatah and its relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood, and added information and amendments in the letter in question.

¹¹ Based on a number of interviews conducted by the researcher, noting that some said that this happened in 1963 rather than 1962.



After the disastrous war of 1967 and the Israeli capture of the rest of Palestine as well as the Sinai and the Golan Heights, the Islamic movement began to regain its vitality among Palestinians. There was a growing Islamic revival, after the masses saw the failure of nationalist, secularist, and leftist ideologies in resolving the Palestinian question.

The participation of the MB in Palestinian resistance, 1968–1970, through what was known as the “Sheikhs’ Camps” in Jordan in collaboration with Fatah, was one of the early indications of this revival. Fatah provided cover to these camps, and committed to providing supplies, arms, and ammunition, in addition to the expenses of the volunteers. The commando operations took place in coordination with Fatah, while the MB retained their full freedom in managing their training and recruitment, and their internal affairs.¹² Around 300 men were trained and posted to seven commando bases.

Despite their limited resources and participation, the MB gave exceptional examples in strong operations like the Green Belt Operation on 31/8/1969 and Deir Yasin on 14/9/1969, where 13 of them were killed.¹³ It should be noted that while the MB in Jordan and MB branches in the Arab countries endorsed the idea of the “Sheikhs’ Camps,” the leadership of the Palestinian chapter did not, believing that the time had not yet come for military action. Nevertheless, it backed it financially, and did not prevent its members from participating of their own personal initiative.¹⁴

In general, the MB, who began to regain their popularity (with the Islamic awakening) in the second half of the 1970s, had armed resistance in mind, but they decided to wait until they had completed their preparations and created a military formation that was impossible to uproot. Hamas thus emerged in a mature form as a natural result of long-term efforts, and a calculated shift for an organization that is deeply rooted in Palestinian society.

The MB (and then Hamas) benefited in its rapid ascent from the long-standing history of the Palestinian MB movement. Indeed, it is the oldest Palestinian activist movement that has retained its presence in the arena. The MB also benefited from the impressive global intellectual, religious, and educational legacy of the MB movement produced by the Hassan al-Banna School and its thinkers throughout the world since the 1930s, and from the support of MB branches around the world.

¹² Interview by the author with ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ‘Ali, Kuwait, 27/9/1985; and see ‘Abd Allah Abu ‘Azzah, *op. cit.*, pp. 127–144.

¹³ Mohammad al-Hassan, *Mawqif al-Islamiyyin min Qadiyyat Filastin* (The Islamists’ Stance on the Question of Palestine) (Qatar: al-Fateh Library and al-Ghazali Library, 1995), p. 139.

¹⁴ Interview by the author with ‘Abd Allah Abu ‘Azzah, Abu Dhabi, 29/6/1998; and interview by the author with Suleiman Hamad, Kuwait, 28/11/1999.

The MB did not focus exclusively on the project for armed resistance, but also formed an advocacy movement for reform, an educational edifice, and a social-charitable organization. Through their activities, they penetrated the population and recruited members, making any attempt to uproot the organization nearly impossible. In addition to this, the MB movement was proud of its resistance-jihad past, part of its identity since 1948.

Just like Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and other organizations which established civilian, educational, healthcare, social, and economic institutions, the MB too established similar institutions. They built mosques in Palestine, in which they used to spread their calling, with the number of such mosques rising from 200 in 1967 to 600 in 1987. The MB movement built many charitable and social institutions, led by the Islamic Complex and the Islamic Association in GS, and a number of Zakat (alms) committees and charities in the WB. Frameworks and institutions that support the Palestinian people were established inside Palestine and abroad, in addition to several Islamic-oriented student groupings in Kuwait, Britain, Germany, and North America. The Islamic Justice List was the strongest alliance in the elections for the General Union of Palestinian Students at the University of Kuwait in the academic years 1977/1978 and 1978/1979, led in its first year by Khalid Mish'al, who would later on become the head of Hamas's political bureau. For this reason, Hamas did not start out from the bottom of the long list of Palestinian resistance factions, but leapt directly to become the archrival of Fatah, the backbone of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), in university and trade union elections.¹⁵

In 1978, the Palestinian MB movement merged with the MB in Jordan in one organization called the *Bilad al-Sham* organization, following which a subordinate body was formed, "Palestine Division." In 1983, an internal conference was held stressing that working for the Palestinian issue and liberation did not conflict with the establishment of the Islamic state. This resolved the debate that had lasted for many years regarding the dialectic of the Islamic state and resistance; that is, whether the MB should wait for the establishment of the Islamic state before beginning the project for liberation or not. The resolution was that the projects of the Islamic state and resistance against the Zionist enemy were two parallel, complementary lines that should proceed without conflicting with one another. The later emergence of Hamas is the practical application of this understanding.

¹⁵ See Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, *Dirasat Manhajiyyah fi al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah* (Methodical Studies on the Palestinian Issue) (Cairo: Markaz al-I'lam al-'Arabi, 2003), pp. 408–409.

The first precursors of the establishment of the military wing appeared in 1980 when the leadership sent some of its cadres abroad for military training. Sheikh Ahmad Yasin established the military wing in GS, led in the beginning by ‘Abdul-Rahman Tamraz and then Salah Shehadeh. However, the military wing was exposed by a suspicious arms dealer, leading to a crackdown against it between 25/2–1/7/1984. The Israeli authorities arrested Sheikh Ahmad Yasin for belonging to an organization hostile to Israel and possession of arms, and sentenced him to 13 years in prison. Yasin was released in a prisoner swap between Palestinian resistance forces and Israel on 20/5/1985.¹⁶

The military wing was rebuilt and re-launched in 1986 under the name “Palestinian Mujahidun,” beginning operations before the 1987 *Intifadah*, especially in gathering arms and training fighters. The MB’s security apparatus in GS (MAJD) was founded in 1981, as part of resistance activities, and was rebuilt and expanded in 1985.

In the summer of 1985, two years before the start of the *Intifadah*, the MB leadership decided to take advantage of any incident to launch its confrontation with the occupation. Two members of the MB were killed in clashes at Birzeit University in 1986. It seems that the leadership based abroad gave the cadres at home the authority to select the right time to operate.¹⁷

Second: The Stage of the Blessed Intifadah 1987–1993

The first *Intifadah* was known as the “Blessed *Intifadah*” and the uprising of the “Children of the Stones.” Although this was not quite the first uprising, it was a landmark event in Palestinian history. For it is through this uprising that the focus of resistance shifted from outside Palestine to inside Palestine. The *Intifadah* was comprehensive as broad segments, factions, and age groups of the Palestinian people participated. It was also characterized by the emergence of the religious factor and the role of the Islamic movement in mobilizing the resistance.

The administrative bureau of the MB movement in the WB and GS had resolved to launch its role in fighting the occupation, in parallel with the launch of the Islamic Resistance Movement— Hamas at a meeting held in the home of the late Hassan al-Qiq in Dora in the Hebron district, on 23/10/1987. The meeting

¹⁶ Rub‘i al-Madhun, “The Islamic Movement in Palestine 1928–1987,” in *Shu‘un Filastiniyyah* magazine, Markaz al-Abhath, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Issue 187, October 1988, p. 27. (in Arabic)

¹⁷ See Mohsen Moh’d Saleh, *Dirasat Manhajiyyah fi al-Qadiyyah al-Filastiniyyah*, pp. 408–409. See also Muhib al-Nawati, *Hamas min al-Dakhil* (Hamas from Within) (GS-Palestine: Dar al-Shorok, 2002), pp. 49–57 and 67–72; and see on the background of the emergence of Hamas: Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters* (London: Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd., 2007), pp. 10–51.

was attended, in addition to Qiq, by ‘Abdul Fattah Dukhan, Hammad al-Hasanat, Ibrahim al-Yazouri, ‘Adnan Maswady, M.M., and F.S. Absent from the meeting was the late Sa‘id Bilal. The attendees decided to give each city the choice to take action in the manner it deemed appropriate.¹⁸

When four Palestinian workers were crushed to death on 8/12/1987, the MB leadership in GS met that night (in the presence of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, Ibrahim al-Yazouri, ‘Abdul-‘Aziz al-Rantisi, ‘Abdul-Fattah Dukhan, Muhammad Sham‘ah, Salah Shehadeh, and ‘Issa al-Nashar), to discuss the developments, and decided to escalate the confrontations in various parts of GS. This indeed happened following the dawn prayer on 9/12/1987, with the protests emerging from the Jabalia refugee camp. Two members of the MB, Hatim Abu Sis and Ra‘ed Shehadeh, were the first killed and whose deaths signaled the beginning of the *Intifadah* in Palestine.¹⁹ On 14/12/1987, Hamas issued its first communiqué, giving an overview of its policies and attitudes.²⁰

For the MB movement, what was new about Hamas was that:

1. It resolved the “intermittency” in the military efforts of the MB movement, turning them into a permanent continual effort.
2. It provided a resistance framework for the MB movement, characterized by administrative, political, and military institutions, with a public political leadership.
3. There was a quantum leap in the internal status of the Palestinian MB movement, where organizational, educational, and tactical work served jihad-related efforts and the resistance strategy.

Hamas believed that it was the one to carry the burden of launching this *Intifadah* in its early days, as its decision to get on the ground and step up all events took place in parallel with the first moments of the *Intifadah*. Meanwhile, the PLO and its factions did not participate clearly until after two weeks, when they called to a general strike on 21/12/1987. The factions that form part of the PLO then created the United Leadership of the Intifadah, “*Qawim*” (Resist), issuing its first statement on 8/1/1988.

¹⁸ Bilal Mohammad (ed.), *Ila al-Muwajahah... Dhikrayat Dr. ‘Adnan Maswady ‘an al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi al-Daffah al-Gharbiyyah wa Ta’sis Hamas* (Towards Confrontation: Memoirs of Dr. Adnan Maswady Regarding the Muslim Brotherhood in the West Bank & the Founding of Hamas) (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2013), p. 98.

¹⁹ See Ghassan Hamdan, *al-Intifadah al-Mubarakah: Waqa’i’ wa Ab‘ad* (The Blessed Intifadah: Facts and Dimensions) (Kuwait: Maktabat Al-Falah, 1989), pp. 36–38.

²⁰ See the text of the statement in: *Watha’iq Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah* (Documents of the Islamic Resistance Movement), the Movement’s statements collection (n.p.: Hamas’s Press Office, n.d.), pp. 17–18. See document no. 1 in the appendix of the book: Mohsen Moh’d Saleh (ed.), *Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (Hamas): Dirasat fi al-Fikr wa al-Tajrubah* (Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas): Studies of Thought and Experience), p. 559.

After the meeting of the MB's administrative bureau in the WB and GS, on 10/1/1988 in Jerusalem, at the home of Hassan al-Qiq in the Industrial School at the Arab Orphan's Home, a decision was made to sustain the *Intifadah*, and expand action into all parts of the WB, using the same methods and tactics seen in GS. As for the decision to abbreviate the Islamic Resistance Movement as Hamas, this was agreed by the administrative bureau at the home of Hassan al-Qiq, who had made the proposal. He would put, in the groups first statements, the letters H, M, S [*Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah*], to which the letter A was added later, becoming Hamas (lit. Enthusiasm).²¹

Hamas was not a known faction in the Palestinian arena. For many months, the media ignored its statements and activities. Furthermore, Hamas had not yet produced political or media figures that could speak in its name, helping the PLO and its factions to come to the limelight during the *Intifadah* instead. However, Hamas's ability to organize broad-based events on the ground, lead protests, and stage wide-ranging strikes gave it a lot of credibility, sparking curiosity about the movement and its leaders.

Hamas-organized events spread rapidly into the WB. Many leaders soon emerged from the ranks of Hamas, such as Sheikh Hamed al-Bitawi, Muhammad al-Hajj, Bassam Jarrar, Jamal Salim, Jamal Mansur, Hassan Yusuf, and Jamal al-Natshah. Younger leaders assumed the secret management of Hamas's activities, such as Muhammad Sawalha. Hamas in the WB was subjected to many campaigns of liquidation, arrest, and harassment.

Two different factions competed over leadership of the *Intifadah*, the Islamist camp (Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine—PIJ), and the PLO, which had different strategies and goals, but pursued similar resistance activities and tactics, with the Palestinian masses responding positively to both. This division infuriated the PLO leadership, which found in the rise of the Islamic movement a major challenge.

Indeed, the Islamists did not want to accede to the PLO, and had fundamental objections to its political program and the conduct of its leaders and institutions, as well as the domination of Fatah on the PLO. The Islamic movement believed that the PLO did not represent the size and range of political and popular forces on the ground.

Since that time, divisions over politics and resistance have marked Palestinian national action. To be sure, Hamas was unwilling to commit to the PLO program, decisions, and commitments, nor was the leadership of the PLO prepared to carry out structural reform to become more democratic, more able to accommodate the various Palestinian segments and factions, and more expressive of a comprehensive national vision that all parties would adhere to.

²¹ Bilal Mohammad, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

1. The Hamas Charter

Hamas published its charter on 17/8/1988. According to ‘Adnan Maswady, it was ‘Abdul Fattah Dukhan (Abu Usama) who drafted the charter, before it was endorsed by the general administrative bureau of the MB in the WB and GS, and after reading it twice at the home of Hassan al-Qiq.²² The charter was distributed before the movement’s Shura councils at home and abroad officially endorsed it. However, everyone dealt with it practically as the movement’s charter. It was distributed widely in the same year in Kuwait and Jordan, in addition to Palestine.

In the charter, Hamas declared itself to be a wing of the MB movement in Palestine and one of its extensions, stating that “The Movement’s program is Islam. From it, it draws its ideas, ways of thinking and understanding of the universe, life and man. It resorts to it for judgement in all its conduct, and it is inspired by it for guidance of its steps.”²³ Hamas’s objectives were described as: “fighting against the false, defeating it and vanquishing it so that justice could prevail, homelands be retrieved and from its mosques would the voice of the mu’azen emerge declaring the establishment of the state of Islam, so that people and things would return each to their right places.”²⁴ Further the charter states: “The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgement Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up.” Hamas believes that “there is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad,” and that the “liberation of Palestine is then an individual duty for every Muslim wherever he may be.”²⁵

In its charter, Hamas expressed its keenness on educating Muslim generations, and gave Muslim women a role no less important than that of men in the battle for liberation.²⁶ Hamas “views other Islamic movements with respect and appreciation” and respects Palestinian nationalist movements including the PLO; however, Hamas at the same time rejected the idea of secularism, declaring that it cannot lead to liberation.²⁷ Hamas emphasized itself as a humanistic movement. “It takes care of human rights and is guided by Islamic tolerance when dealing with the followers of other religions. It does not antagonize anyone of them except if it is antagonized by it or stands in its way to hamper its moves and waste its efforts.”²⁸

²² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

²³ The researcher referred to the original Arabic text of the covenant. However, for the English text see: The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, 18/8/1988, the Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School, Article 1, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 9.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Articles 11 and 13–14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, Article 16–17.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Articles 23 and 25–27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Article 31.

Significantly, Hamas dealt with the charter as being an historical document that expressed the vision of broad segments of the MB at that time, and not necessarily as a binding and governing constitution-like reference. There were internal criticisms concerning some terms and political phrases used in the charter, especially those related to Jews. At the same time, Hamas leaders were keen on using a political discourse that kept away from the possibility of being accused of anti-Semitism, or of fighting Jews for being Jews.

It should be noted that the opponents of Hamas quote the charter much more than Hamas members and leaders themselves do. So much so that it appeared within Hamas's ranks as though the group's members have forgotten the charter. However, Hamas's increased global presence, and increasing accusations of anti-Semitism and inflexibility against Hamas, by quoting items of the charter, reinforced the sentiment within Hamas during *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, especially between 2003 and 2005, that it was time to reformulate the charter. However, Hamas's victory in the general election on 25/1/2006, and subsequent blockade and pressure, put the project on hold, lest it be thought that Hamas had amended its charter in response to external pressures.²⁹

2. Hamas and Military Action³⁰

Hamas's *Intifadah*-focused activities evolved from strikes, demonstrations, and throwing stones, to a progressive development of military activities, such as knife attacks, gun attacks, kidnapping of soldiers, execution of collaborators, and then car bombs and what is called by Hamas "martyrdom operations."³¹

The military wing became an integral part of the structure of Hamas. Despite the crackdown against this wing in 1988, 1989, and 1990, due to its military activities, Hamas would rebuild it anew. Despite the ups and downs, the military wing remained present, active, and crucial.

On 21/3/1988, Group 101 in Hamas's military arm, "the Palestinian Mujahidun" led by Sheikh Salah Shehahdeh, attempted to kidnap an Israeli

²⁹ See Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, pp. 150–156.

³⁰ Regarding Hamas's operations between 1989 and 1993, see: Mohsen Moh'd Saleh, *al-Tariq ila al-Quds* (The Road to Jerusalem) (Cairo: Markaz al-I'lam al-'Arabi, 2003), pp. 189–205; Ghassan Duuar, *Maw'ad ma' al-Shabak: Dirasah fi al-Nashat al-'Askari li Harakat Hamas wa Kata'ib Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Khilal 'Am 1993* (A Date With the Shabak: A Study on the Military Activities of Hamas and the Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades in 1993) (London: Filastin al-Muslimah, 1995); Ghassan Duuar, *'Imad 'Aql* (Imad Aql) (Amman: Filastin al-Muslimah, 1995); Ghassan Duuar, *Harb al-Ayyam al-Sab'ah: 'Usud Hamas* (The Seven Day War: The Lions of Hamas) (Amman: Filastin al-Muslimah, 1993); and Muhib al-Nawati, *op. cit.*, pp. 71–90.

³¹ The overwhelming majority of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims considered these operations as "martyrdom operations," while most Israelis and western writers and media are considering them as "terrorist attacks." We used the word "self-immolation" to be as neutral as possible. However, such terms may need more discussions.

engineer and contractor in the Sheikh Radwan district of GS. However, the operation faced hurdles, and the group ultimately shot and wounded the man in question instead. This was followed by the detonation of explosive devices in Beit Hanoun in May 1988; on ‘Eid al-Adha on 25/7/1988; and Hijra anniversary 14/8/1988. The group killed an Israeli settler on 18/8/1988 near Beit Lahia in northern GS. The group also succeeded in kidnapping and killing Israeli Sergeant Avi Sasportas on 3/2/1989, and kidnapping and killing Corporal Ilan Saadon on 3/5/1989. But Hamas’s military wing soon came under attack in May 1989, following a fierce campaign led by the Israeli occupation authorities.

The beginnings of the formation of Hamas’s current military wing, Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades, can be traced back to May 1990, replacing “the Palestinian Mujahidun.” The first one killed in the Brigades was Muhammad Abu Nqeira, on 14/12/1990, in a clash with Israeli soldiers in the town of Rafah.

Operations by al-Qassam Brigades intensified after that. According to Ghassan Duuar, an expert on Hamas, a total of 138 attacks were carried out in 1993 against Israel, killing 79 and injuring 220 Israelis according to Israeli figures.³² On 24/11/1993, one of Hamas’s leading military leaders, ‘Imad ‘Aql was killed.

Hamas was able to overcome difficulties thanks to the willingness of its men to sacrifice themselves. One expert stated that Hamas had proved to be the most difficult number in the Palestinian equation.³³

The Jerusalem Post, an Israeli newspaper, quoted Ifrah Zilberman of the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace of the Hebrew University, an expert on Hamas, as saying that Hamas displays dynamism, which is an important part of the secret of its strength.³⁴ The strong performance of Hamas prompted the then Israeli Minister of Construction and Housing Brigadier General Binyamin Ben-Eliezer to declare, in late March 1993, that Israel had two options, either to succumb or to continue the fight until the end. He added that Israel had chosen the second option, and it must decide who rules the area: Hamas or the Israeli government.³⁵

The majority of Hamas’s losses were in the ranks of its cadres and civilian members during the *Intifadah*. With the gradual shift in the *Intifadah* into military action, the number of those killed among Hamas militants began to rise. According to al-Qassam Brigades, 44 were killed during 1988–1993, (see table below).³⁶

³² See Ghassan Duuar, *Maw‘ad ma‘ al-Shabak*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 168–169.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³⁶ See “Al-Qassam: Facts and Figures,” *Qassamiyyun* magazine, the Resistance Media Unit – Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades, Special Issue No. 5, December 2007, p. 10. (in Arabic)

Table (1): Members of Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades Killed in the WB and GS 1988–1993

Year	Killed in a military operation			Killed in a resistance missions	Other		Total
	Self-immolation	Armed combat	Raid on settlement		Assassinated by Israel	Assassinated by collaborators	
1988	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
1989	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
1990	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
1991	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
1992	-	4	-	2	2	-	8
1993	6	9	-	11	6	-	32
Total	6	14	-	16	8	-	44
	20			16	8		

Hamas suffered several harsh blows and broad campaigns of arrest, most notably in August 1988, after its resistance operations in Beit Hanoun and Jabalia. A large part of Hamas's central leadership in GS was arrested.

In May 1989, Israeli forces arrested more than one thousand cadres and members of Hamas. Hundreds of them were interrogated brutally, exposing the organizational structure of the movement for the first time, and Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was arrested on 18/5/1989. On the third anniversary of Hamas, on 14/12/1990, Hamas killed three Israelis, sparking the most comprehensive crackdown yet on Hamas and its various wings.

One of the most significant consequences of this crackdown was the exposure of Hamas's relations with the Diaspora and its role in the Palestinian interior. Hamas's organization in the Diaspora sent a leader to the interior to finance and rebuild the organization. He was able to reform the leadership and organize the intricacies of their relations. The crackdown was also accompanied by the first mass deportation of Hamas members on 8/1/1991, who were: 'Imad al-'Alami (Abu Hammam), Mustafa al-Qanou' (Abu Sa'id), Mustafa Leddawi, and Fadl al-Zahhar.

On 13/12/1992, Hamas kidnapped the soldier Nissim Toledano, calling for the release of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin in return for his release. After the slain Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin refused to comply with Hamas's demands, Hamas executed the soldier, prompting Rabin to declare a full war on Hamas in the Knesset. Up to 1,300 members of Hamas were arrested, and the Israeli authorities embarked on the largest deportation operation since the war of 1967, forcibly expelling 415 Palestinians, of whom the overwhelming majority (380 people) were civilian Islamist leaders affiliated to Hamas. However, their rejection of their expulsion by Israel and their steadfastness in Marj al-Zuhur, on the border with Lebanon, won them international media attention, broadened international interest in Hamas, and increased its popularity. This forced the Israeli authorities

to approve the gradual return of the deported, which was completed one year after deportation.³⁷

3. Hamas in the Diaspora³⁸

Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait threw Hamas into temporary disarray. In addition to the tragedy of the 430 thousand Palestinians there, and the decline in the interest in the *Intifadah* with the international preoccupation with the Gulf War of 1990/1991, the engine room of Hamas's work based abroad was Kuwait, where many of Hamas leaders lived (e.g., Khalid Mish'al, Muhammad Nazzal, 'Izzat al-Rishq, Sami Khater and so on).

However, Hamas in the Diaspora was soon able to put its house back in order, shifting the bulk of its operations to Jordan, taking advantage of the broad popular sympathy with Hamas there and the MB movement's influence in Jordan. This helped effect a quantum leap in the movement's presence abroad. With the arrival of Musa Abu Marzuq and 'Imad al-'Alami to Jordan, Hamas was largely able to reunite its scattered leaders and members of its political bureau outside Palestine.

Hamas in the Diaspora started gradually putting forward a number of its cadres. For instance, Ibrahim Ghushah participated in the delegation of popular Arab and Islamic mediation that tried to convince Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait in 1990. Ghushah also represented Hamas in a visit to Libya, to establish the World Islamic Popular Leadership in the same year.

In late 1991, Hamas appointed Ghushah as its official spokesperson. Ghushah remained in this post until the end of 1999. Also in 1991, 'Imad al-'Alami was appointed as Hamas's representative in Tehran, Muhammad Nazzal in the same capacity in Jordan, Munir Sa'id in Sudan, and Musa Abu Marzuq as the head of Hamas's political bureau.

Contacts between Hamas and Western countries began when the former's leadership decided to initiate contact with European countries, and the United States of America (US) if possible, to ask these countries to take action at the UN Security Council to return the deportees from Marj al-Zuhur. Their argument was based on the fact that the deportation contravened the Fourth Geneva Convention. Ibrahim Ghushah, in his capacity as Hamas's official spokesperson, was asked to handle these contacts. In early 1993 in Amman, he met with the

³⁷ See the issues of *Filastin al-Muslimah* magazine, London, which covered the deportees and their news in detail throughout 1993.

³⁸ Interview by the author with Ibrahim Ghushah, Amman, 16/8/1998; interview by the author with Musa Abu Marzuq, Amman, 12/8/1998; and see Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, pp. 66–78.

political advisor at the US embassy, as well as the British, German, and Norwegian ambassadors. At the end of March 1993, the US State Department issued a decision banning any contact with Hamas, blacklisting the movement.

4. The Relationship with the PLO and Other Palestinian Factions

Hamas was able to impose itself as a major actor in this *Intifadah*, becoming a force equal to Fatah in terms of activities, but it was not able to impose itself politically. The PLO leadership and Fatah exploited the *Intifadah* for political gain, declaring the Palestinian state and recognizing UN resolutions, including UN Security Council resolution 242, at the 19th Palestinian National Congress on 15/11/1988, and then entered negotiations with the Americans.

The US and Israel then took advantage of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fragmentation and weakness of Arab and Muslim countries, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, and the subsequent war that weakened Iraq and perpetuated US hegemony over the region. They pushed for the Madrid Conference in October 1991, and then the Oslo Accords were signed on 13/9/1993.

The PLO leadership, specifically its dominant faction Fatah led by Yasir 'Arafat, sought to contain Hamas, so that Fatah could effectively become able to speak on behalf of all Palestinian factions, without showing any serious desire for structural reform of the PLO or for a policy review. Commenting on the experience of dialogue with the PLO, Ibrahim Ghushah said that its leadership resorts to dialogue only when in crisis or when it wants something.³⁹

The PLO offered to Hamas some seats in the Palestinian National Council (PNC) in 1988, but Hamas refused. In April 1990, Hamas asked for 40% of the council seats, as well as fundamental amendments to the PLO's policy as a prerequisite to their joining. In the period 10–12/8/1990, a week after the invasion of Kuwait, the first meeting was held between Hamas and Fatah over three days in Yemen. Hamas's delegation was headed by Ibrahim Ghushah, while Fatah's delegation was led by Akram Haniyyah, 'Arafat's former advisor. On 21/9/1990, a "gentleman's agreement" was reached between Fatah and Hamas to coordinate efforts in the face of the enemy and promote national unity.⁴⁰

In August 1991, a meeting was held between Hamas and Fatah in Khartoum, Sudan, at the invitation of President 'Umar al-Bashir. Hamas's delegation was led by Ibrahim Ghushah, and Fatah's delegation was led by Yasir 'Arafat. 'Arafat wanted Hamas to agree to join the PNC, which was planning to agree to go to

³⁹ *Al-Aswaq* newspaper, Amman, 8–9/3/1995.

⁴⁰ See Ibrahim Ghushah, *The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghushah (Ex-spokesman of Hamas)* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2013), p. 147.

Madrid. He was keen on having Islamists represented in the council. In late 1992, another meeting took place in Tunisia. A delegation led by Musa Abu Marzuq met with Yasir ‘Arafat to coordinate over the deportees at Marj al-Zuhur. On 2/1/1993, talks were held in Khartoum between a Fatah delegation led by Yasir ‘Arafat and a Hamas delegation led by Musa Abu Marzuq. These meetings helped thaw aspects of the relations between the two sides, but they were unable to bridge the wide gap between them.⁴¹

Hamas was able to strengthen its presence on the Palestinian political arena, by forming the first broad-based political front to resist the path of political settlement with Israel, prior to the Madrid Conference in October 1991. The front comprised Hamas, PFLP, DFLP, PIJ, Fatah al-Intifadah, the PFLP-General Command (GC), the Fatah Revolutionary Council, Al-Sa‘iqah, the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), and the Revolutionary Palestinian Communist Party (RPCP).

The official announcement of forming the Ten Faction Formula did not come about until 29/9/1992, which admitted the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) instead of the Fatah Revolutionary Council. After the Oslo Accords were signed, Hamas proposed a project for developing the formula into the “Alliance of the Ten Factions.”

Hamas waived its demand to apply a quota system in sharing representation based on the actual size of each faction, as this was a sensitive issue for other factions. The Alliance of the Ten Factions was officially declared in early 1994 in Damascus. This put Hamas in a strong political position, leading a broad alliance of Islamists, nationalists, and leftists against the peace process led by Fatah.

Third: The “Oslo Stage” 1993–2000

The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established after the Oslo Accords, which were initialed on 19/8/1993 in Oslo, Norway, before being officially signed on 13/9/1993 in Washington D.C. The agreement established a self-government authority in GS and Jericho first, while other Palestinian areas in the WB and GS were to receive self-rule later. The most important issues, namely Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, borders, and sovereignty were not tackled, and deferred to the stage of final negotiations.

The PA considered the Oslo Accords a prelude to the Palestinian state. It sought to be the only authority in the areas it covered, and to that end it established a powerful security apparatus. According to the Oslo Accords and the agreements that followed, the PA pledged to impose security and crack down on

⁴¹ See *Ibid.*, pp. 160–161, 127, 173 and 175.

campaigns of propaganda and incitement against Israel, and to take all necessary measures to prevent attacks against Israel or any of its citizens. The Israeli side has played this card skillfully, to blackmail and encourage the PA to crack down on the Palestinian resistance against occupation, especially Hamas and PIJ.

Palestinian opposition forces were unconcerned by the Oslo Accords, and continued their armed resistance against Israel. The PA considered this a challenge to its own authority, a breach of its commitments, and an attempt to ruin the dream of a future Palestinian state. But the opposition believed that the Oslo Accords did not allow the establishment of a full sovereign Palestinian state in the WB and GS, nor the return of the refugees. And despite the fact that the Palestinian side made enormous concessions, the Israelis didn't offer any fundamental commitment, thus putting it in a comfortable position that would prolong the occupation and squander Palestinian rights. For this reason, these factions believed that resistance must continue.

The opposition (Hamas and pro-resistance factions) insisted on the continuation of armed resistance, but deemed Palestinian blood a red line, and refrained from any confrontations with the PA that could lead to civil war. It adopted a constructive form of opposition aimed at exposing the flaws of the "peace agreements," and preserving the right of the Palestinian people to their land and holy sites, in addition to protecting political freedoms, freedom of expression, and freedom of the press.

When repressed by the PA, Palestinian opposition forces focused on taking revenge against Israel. In other words, the resistance made the relationship triangular, so that if Israeli coerced the PA to put pressure on Hamas, then Hamas puts would escalate armed attacks against Israel.⁴²

The PA sought to resolve its problem with the opposition, especially the Islamist factions that constituted the most serious challenge to the occupation, specifically Hamas. Indeed, Hamas had a presence that rivaled that of Fatah, especially in student movements, trade unions, chambers of commerce, and municipalities. Consequently, the PA pursued three tactics:

1. Dialogue.
2. Containment.
3. Repression, arbitrary arrests, and attempts to marginalize and discredit them.

⁴² For more details see: Hafiz 'Alawi and Hani Sulaiman, "The Movements' Relations in the Palestinian Arena," in Jawad Al Hamad and Eyad Al Barghouthi (eds.), *Dirasah fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi li Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah: Hamas: 1987–1996* (A Study on the Political Thought of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas 1987–1996) (Amman: Middle East Studies Center (MESC), 1997), pp. 225–285.

The PA benefited from its security forces, and the support it received in this regard from the Israelis, Americans, and even the Arab regimes. The slogans it pursued in this campaign were “preventing the duality of authority.”

Actually, unfortunate friction took place, for every resistance operation against Israel, the PA would carry out a broad crackdown on Hamas, PIJ, and other opposition forces. From May 1994 to August 1995, the PA carried out 12 waves of arrest that affected more than one thousand Palestinians.⁴³

In one month, (19/4–19/5/1995), the PA raided 57 mosques 138 times, searching them, tampering with their contents, and even vandalizing them.⁴⁴ On February 7/2/1995, President ‘Arafat issued a decree establishing the State Security Court, which was a military tribunal whose judges were military commanders. The court began its work on 9/4/1995. By 27/5/1995, the court tried 33 people, mostly from Hamas or PIJ. The trials would be held after midnight, in secret, away from the press and the media, some of them lasting no longer than a few minutes. Amnesty International condemned these tribunals, and called on the PA to put an end to them immediately.⁴⁵ One of the victims of these courts was Sayyid Abu Musameh, a Hamas leader who was tried on the night of 14/5/1995, and sentenced to three years in prison for “slandering” and “inciting against” the PA.⁴⁶

One of the most tragic events in this regard was what became known as the “Black Friday Massacre.” On 18/11/1994, the Palestinian Security Forces killed 13 worshippers and wounded more than 200 who were planning to hold a peaceful march after Friday prayers, from the Filastin Mosque in GS, to the home of Hisham Hamad.⁴⁷

Tensions with the PA intensified when it arrested a number of Hamas leaders in the GS in late June 1995, including Mahmud Zahhar and Ahmad Baher. They were tortured and humiliated, and their beards, a symbol of their religious devotion, were forcibly shaved off, causing widespread anger in the Palestinian arena.⁴⁸

However, the most intense crackdowns took place in March and April 1996 following a series of self-immolation operations that rocked Israel. These arrests

⁴³ *Alrai* newspaper, Amman, 25/8/1995.

⁴⁴ Dawud Sulaiman, *al-Sultah al-Wataniyyah al-Filastiniyyah fi ‘Am 1994–1995* (The Palestinian National Authority in 1994–1995) (Amman: Middle East Studies Center (MESC), 1995), p. 135.

⁴⁵ See *Ibid.*, pp. 75–83; and Amnesty International, *Muhakamat Muntasaf al-Lail: al-Muhakamat al-Sirriyah wa al-Fawriyyah wa al-Ja’izah fi Gazzah* (Trial at Midnight: Secret, Summary, Unfair Trials in Gaza) (UK: Amnesty, June 1995), MDE 15/15/95.

⁴⁶ Amnesty International, *Muhakamat Muntasaf al-Lail*, p. 20; and *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 16/5/1995.

⁴⁷ See *Filastin al-Muslimah* magazine, Issues December 1994 and January 1995.

⁴⁸ See *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper, London, 27/6/1995; *Alrai*, Amman, 2/7/1995; and *Filastin al-Muslimah*, August 1995.

affected more than one thousand Hamas and PIJ activists, who were also tortured. The infrastructure of the Islamic movement was targeted, and schools, charities, Zakat (alms) committees, and orphanages affiliated to Hamas and the PIJ were closed down.⁴⁹ The Israeli Army Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and head of Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*) Ami Ayalon praised the “methodical” work of Yasir ‘Arafat in the crackdown on Hamas.⁵⁰

The PA launched a propaganda war against Hamas, accusing the movement of colluding with the hardline Israeli Likud Party to overthrow the government of the Labor Party and disrupt the peace process, as well as receiving financial backing and orders from Iran. It also claimed that Hamas was preparing for a war against the PA all the way to planning the assassination of Yasir ‘Arafat.

The PA tried to create a rift within Hamas, and claimed that there were moderates and hardliners, and a wing at home and a wing abroad, which were conflicting. The PA tried to attract some members of Hamas like ‘Imad Faluji, who was expelled by Hamas, and was admitted to the PA before he ran in the self-government authority elections on Fatah’s list in January 1996 and became a minister in the PA. The PA backed the formation of other Islamist parties, whose members were Hamas defectors, such as al-Watan Party led by Khodr Mahjaz, and the Islamic National Path Party led by Mahmud Abu Dan.⁵¹

For its part, Hamas insisted on adhering to its general policy and refused to abandon armed resistance. It also refused to enter into a confrontation with the PA, but it continued to candidly and strongly express its attitudes vis-à-vis the PA, its conduct, and its practices. Hani al-Hassan, a member of Fatah’s Central Committee, even praised the position of Hamas, saying it had exercised commendable restraint, which will go down in history.⁵²

There were several rounds of official and unofficial talks between Hamas and Fatah after the PA entered GS in May 1994. After the Black Friday Massacre at the Filastin Mosque in November 1994, a joint committee was created for investigation and reconciliation, though it did not achieve any concrete results.⁵³

In August 1995, from his prison cell, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin called on the Palestinian people to find a formula for accord and to preserve their unity, integrity, and future.⁵⁴ On 4/9/1995, Hamas called for a comprehensive and serious national dialogue, which would be binding on all influential parties, the

⁴⁹ Most newspapers and magazines covered these campaigns, see for example: *Al-Mugtama* magazine, Kuwait, 29/6/1996.

⁵⁰ *Alrai*, Amman, 18/4/1996.

⁵¹ See *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 31/8/1995; *Al-Aswaq*, 20/9/1995; and *Alrai*, Amman, 11 and 23/4/1996.

⁵² *Al-Hayat*, 21/8/1995.

⁵³ See *al-Wasat* magazine, London, 25/12/1995.

⁵⁴ *Alrai*, Amman, 27/8/1995.

PA and the opposition, to regulate Palestinian national action,⁵⁵ a call the PA welcomed the following day.⁵⁶

The efforts during that period culminated with dialogue in Cairo between the PA and Hamas on 18–21/12/1995, with Salim al-Za‘nun representing the former and Khalid Mish‘al the latter. The PA had sought this meeting, fearing the possibility that Hamas would thwart the elections of a self-government authority in the WB and GS. It tried to convince Hamas to participate in the elections, to stop its attacks on Israel, and to exercise its role in the opposition under the umbrella of the Oslo Accords, in a way that would not undermine the PA’s commitments to the peace process. During the talks, Hamas insisted that it would boycott the elections, but pledged not to obstruct them by force or compel anyone else to boycott. It also reaffirmed that its resistance operations against Israel would continue.⁵⁷

At any rate, since 1996, the PA no longer felt the need for dialogue with Hamas and opposition forces, especially as it was able to consolidate its control over its areas, thwarting dozens of resistance operations that Hamas and opposition forces tried to carry out. The repressive security approach was the main tactic of the PA in dealing with Hamas from 1996 and until *al-Aqsa Intifadah*. It dealt with Hamas as a “rebellious” movement but one that was “under control.”

The Palestinian security forces continued with their crack down and human rights violations. In January 1997, human rights groups announced that 1,600 Palestinians were languishing in PA prisons, including 700 who had not been charged or put on trial.⁵⁸ The PA repeatedly arrested a number of senior Hamas leader such as ‘Abdul ‘Aziz al-Rantisi, Mahmud Zahhar, Hassan Yusuf, Jamal Salim, and the commander of the Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades Muhammad al-Deif. Even Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was placed under house arrest.

After 1994, military action became more difficult, after the PA took control of the WB and GS. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of resistance operations increased. Hamas carried out five resistance operations in retaliation for the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre. While performing their dawn prayer, Israeli officer Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Muslims and injured more than 300 in Hebron. According to Israeli sources, the five Hamas attacks killed 39 Israelis and

⁵⁵ *Al-Hayat*, 5/9/1995.

⁵⁶ *Addustour*, 6/9/1995.

⁵⁷ See *Addustour*, 23/12/1995; and *Alrai*, Amman, 24/12/1995.

⁵⁸ Palestine Facts, Palestine Chronology, February 1997, site of Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/chronology/1997.htm



wounded 158. Yahya ‘Ayyash rose to prominence during that period, as he was deemed the mastermind behind these attacks.⁵⁹

On 5/1/1996, Yahya ‘Ayyash was assassinated. Hamas responded strongly to his murder in the period 25/2–3/3/1996, and according to Israeli sources, 45 Israelis were killed and 113 injured. These operations resulted in a fierce coordinated campaign to uproot Hamas, carried out by the PA and the Israeli authorities, even prompting an international conference for “anti-terrorism” attended by the leaders of major powers and a number of Arab and world leaders.

But Hamas was able to absorb the shock, and resumed resistance operations, which reappeared clearly in 1997. New names in military leadership rose to prominence such as Muhyieddeen al-Sharif, ‘Adel ‘AwadAllah, and ‘Imad ‘AwadAllah, who were assassinated in 1998.

Hamas and resistance factions suffered from the effective security coordination between the PA and Israel. In 1997–1998, Hamas was only able to carry out two self-immolation attacks, in addition to other types of operations that did not impact the peace process. The following table shows the number of members of Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades killed in the WB and GS, 1/1/1994–31/12/1999:⁶⁰

Table (2): Members of Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades Killed in the WB and GS 1/1/1994–31/12/1999

Year	Killed in a military operation			Killed in a resistance missions	Other		Total
	Self-immolation	Armed combat	Raid on settlement		Assassinated by Israel	Assassinated by collaborators	
1994	5	11	-	2	10	-	28
1995	4	4	-	1	11	-	20
1996	4	-	-	-	4	-	8
1997	6	-	-	1	-	-	7
1998	1	-	-	-	3	-	4
1999	3	-	-	1	-	-	4
Total	23	15	-	5	28	-	71
	38			5	28		

Perhaps the opinion polls carried out by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC), had suggested to the PA that they could be comfortable in continuing its approach during that period. Hamas’s popularity

⁵⁹ See about Yahya ‘Ayyash: Ghassan Duuar, *al-Muhandis: al-Shahid Yahya ‘Ayyash Ramz al-Jihad wa Qa'id al-Muqawamah fi Filastin* (The Engineer: Martyr Yahya ‘Ayyash Symbol of Jihad and Resistance Leader in Palestine) (London: Filastin al-Muslimah, 1997).

⁶⁰ See “Al-Qassam: Facts and Figures,” *Qassamiyyun*, p. 10.

slumped to its lowest level in August 1996, reaching only 6.5%,⁶¹ compared to 18.2% in June 1995. The rating ranged between 10–13% over the following four years, with the exception of November 1997, when Hamas had a rating of 17.3%.⁶² In other words, it no longer posed a serious challenge to the PA, and hence, its ability to influence policy and decision making was weakened.

Hamas in the Diaspora⁶³

Relations between Hamas and the Jordanian government, headed by Zaid bin Shaker, were normalized in late 1992 and early 1993. The government allowed Hamas, according to an unwritten “gentlemen’s agreement,” to engage in political and media activity in Jordan, on the condition of non-interference in the affairs of Jordan. This followed a meeting between Hamas’s leadership represented by Musa Abu Marzuq, Ibrahim Ghushah and Muhammad Nazzal, and Zaid bin Shaker and his deputy Thuqan Hindawi.

Hamas’s leadership continued to operate normally in Jordan after the Oslo Accords. However, the way the Jordanian government dealt with Hamas began to gradually take a negative turn, as Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel on 26/10/1994. The Jordanian authorities initiated a crackdown on some of Hamas’s infrastructure, in conjunction with rising tensions between the government on the one hand, and the MB movement and the Islamic Action Front (IAF) on the other. This was in addition to pressures and complaints by the PA because of Hamas’s activities. In May 1995, the Jordanian authorities asked Musa Abu Marzuq and ‘Imad al-‘Alami to leave Jordan; they went to Damascus.

Musa Abu Marzuq travelled to the US on 25/7/1995, where he was arrested without any reasonable evidence; he and family were in possession of permanent residence “green” cards there. Israel wanted him extradited, a request approved by US courts on 8/5/1996. Hamas warned the US of the consequences of handing Abu Marzuq over to Israel, saying that it was not seeking conflict with it. It further explained that its battle was restricted solely to Israel, and that extraditing Abu Marzuq would be considered an unprovoked hostile act, crossing a red line would lead to “dire consequences.” It appears that the US authorities took Hamas’s threat seriously, and decided to deport Abu Marzuq a year and a half later.

⁶¹ JMCC Public Opinion Poll No. 16 On Palestinian Attitudes Towards Current Issues, August 1996, site of Jerusalem Media and Communications Centre (JMCC), <http://www.jmcc.org/documentsandmaps.aspx?id=495>

⁶² JMCC Public Opinion polls, <http://www.jmcc.org/polls.aspx>

⁶³ Regarding this subject, see interview by the author with Ibrahim Ghushah, 16/8/1998; interview by the author with Musa Abu Marzuq, 12/8/1998; and interview by the author with Khalid Mish‘al, Amman, 19/8/1998. See also Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, pp. 79–134.

Khalid Mish'al took over the presidency of Hamas's political bureau, following the arrest of Abu Marzuq. On 25/9/1997, there was an attempt on the life of Khalid Mish'al by two operatives of the Israeli Foreign Intelligence Service (Mossad) in the Jordanian capital Amman. However, the two agents were arrested through the heroic actions of Mish'al's bodyguard. King Hussein intervened, feeling outraged by the Israeli violation of the treaty with Jordan by carrying out assassinations on its soil. Relations between Israel and Jordan almost soured. However, Israel quickly sent an antidote to treat Mish'al from the chemical toxin that went through his ear, and released Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, who was serving a double life sentence and another sentence of 15 years. In return, Jordan released the two Mossad agents.

The Israeli assassination attempt turned into a political and public relations victory for Hamas. The release of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin from prison helped rebuild Hamas's capabilities in GS, and reorder relations between Hamas in the Palestinian interior and Hamas in the Diaspora. Sheikh Yasin's tour of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Syria, Qatar, Sudan, Yemen, and Iran, from 19/2–24/6/1998 was a resounding success, solidifying Hamas's ties to those countries.

In the late summer of 1999, relations between Jordan and Hamas began to worsen again. After a Hamas delegation left to visit Tehran, the Jordanian authorities arrested 16 Hamas members and office staff on 30/8/1999. All Hamas's offices in the kingdom were closed down, and Hamas was banned. Hamas's delegation returned to Jordan on 21/9/1999, despite threats of arrest. Indeed, Khalid Mish'al and Ibrahim Ghushah were arrested upon their return. On 21/11/1999, the Jordanian Authorities deported Khalid Mish'al, Ibrahim Ghushah, Sami Khater, and 'Izzat al-Rishq to Qatar, even though they were all Jordanian citizens. This led to an estrangement with Hamas that lasted for years.

Thus, Hamas lost a significant base in Jordan. However, it did not lose its popularity and respect in the Jordanian street. Meanwhile, it began rearranging its structure in the Diaspora, and made several political gains through rapprochement with Qatar and Syria. Its leadership began to settle in Syria where it received support for its activities.

Fourth: The al-Aqsa Intifadah 2000–2005

“They wanted to drag us into a bargain, but we dragged them to resistance,” proclaimed Sheikh Ahmad Yasin. By this statement, Yasin explained the essence of dispute between the PA and Fatah, and Hamas and the factions opposed to the peace process, while describing Hamas success during *al-Aqsa Intifadah*.

The anti-peace process camp believed that Oslo Accords carried the seeds of their own failure, and that this would be revealed sooner or later, especially when the time came for final status negotiations, involving the future of Jerusalem, the refugees, settlements, and the state and its sovereignty. This happened when the Camp David Summit collapsed in July 2000. Then came *al-Aqsa Intifadah* in September 2000, which took the Palestinian once again back to resistance, having tired of negotiations and Israeli stalling tactics, efforts to Judaize Jerusalem the building of settlements, in addition to their anger at the performance of the PA and the widespread corruption in its ranks.

The provocative visit by Ariel Sharon, leader of the Likud Party, to *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 28/9/2000 was the spark that ignited the *Intifadah*. Between 28/9/2000 and 31/12/2005, the number of Palestinians killed reached 4,242, including 793 children and 270 women. The number of Israeli targeted killings of Palestinians reached 376, while the number of wounded reached 46,068.⁶⁴ By the end of 2005, the number of Palestinian detainees in Israel rose to 9,200.⁶⁵

Table (3): Members of Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades Killed in the WB and GS 1/1/2000–31/12/2005

Year	Killed in a military operation			Killed in a resistance missions	Other		Total
	Self-immolation	Armed combat	Raid on settlement		Assassinated by Israel	Assassinated by collaborators	
2000	2	4	-	3	3	-	12
2001	23	17	8	5	20	-	73
2002	12	48	21	33	39	1	154
2003	14	53	9	21	46	1	144
2004	9	47	3	69	69	-	197
2005	1	10	2	12	13	-	38
Total	61	179	43	143	190	2	618
	283			143	192		

In 2005, *al-Aqsa Intifadah* subsided somewhat, as a result of the situation that followed the death of Yasir ‘Arafat, and the election of Mahmud ‘Abbas as head of the PA, in addition to the preoccupation of the Palestinians in the WB and GS with the municipal elections and with preparations for the general election. This is not to mention the fact that on January 22, the Palestinian factions declared they would de-escalate unilaterally, before a ceasefire was declared between the PA and Israel on 8/2/2005.

⁶⁴ Site of Palestinian National Information Centre, 9/2/2005, http://www.pnic.gov.ps/arabic/quds/arabic/viol/quds_viol_12-2005.html

⁶⁵ See the report by the Ministry of Prisoners and Liberated Prisoners for 2005, Palestinian National Information Centre, www.pnic.gov.ps/arabic/social/prisoners/2005.html

Hamas was characterized by its major role and its self-immolation operations which shook the security of Israel as most attacks took place in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948. Until 1/12/2005, 135 self-immolation operations took place, mostly carried out by Hamas as well as the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades and the PIJ.⁶⁶ A report by the Shabak indicates that 1,513 Israelis were killed and 3,380 others were injured from the start of the *Intifadah* and until July 2005.⁶⁷ The number of al-Qassam Brigades members who were killed between 2000 and 2005 was 618, including 604 during *al-Aqsa Intifadah* (29/9/2000–end of 2005). This is in addition to scores of other Hamas non-combatants who were also killed, (see table (3)).⁶⁸

Regardless of the political and strategic factors that prompted the unilateral Israeli withdrawal from GS in the second half of 2005, the Palestinian resistance played a major role in this. Hamas emerged as the most effective resistance faction in GS. According to a statistical study prepared by al-Qassam Brigades, for the period from the beginning of *al-Aqsa Intifadah* until 15/8/2005, the Israelis admitted to 400 resistance operations in GS causing casualties among the Israelis. The al-Qassam Brigades carried out 217 resistance operations, killing 79 Israelis, out of 167 that Israel acknowledged, and injuring 646 Israelis, out of 1,084 that the Israelis have admitted to. For its part, al-Quds Brigades (PIJ) killed 12 Israelis and injured 104 others, while the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (Fatah) killed 8 Israelis and injured 43 others. Joint operations carried out by two or more factions killed 51 Israelis and injured 130 others. Regardless of how acceptable these figures are to various parties, it is safe to say that Hamas was at the forefront of armed resistance during the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*.⁶⁹

During the *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, several Hamas leaders were killed, including Jamal Salim and Jamal Mansur on 31/7/2001, Salah Shehadeh on 22/7/2002, and Isma'il Abu Shanab on 21/8/2003. Hamas received one of the harshest blows in its history when its founder and spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was killed on 22/3/2004, followed by the death of 'Abdul 'Aziz al-Rantisi on 17/4/2004. By the end of 2005, around four thousand Hamas members and supporters, mostly from the WB, were languishing in Israeli jails. Among the members were first-, second-, and third-row leaders in Hamas in the WB.

The PA could not resist or disrupt the momentum of the *Intifadah*. So it tried to cope with it and take advantage of it politically to improve its negotiating position. However, Israel's arrogance and attempts to crush the *Intifadah* by

⁶⁶ Site of Israeli Defense Forces, http://www.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/DOVER/files/6/31646.doc

⁶⁷ Published by *Maariv* newspaper and translated by *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 15/7/2005.

⁶⁸ See "Al-Qassam: Facts and Figures," *Qassamiyyun*, p. 10.

⁶⁹ Site of Ezzedeen Al-Qassam Brigades, Press Office, 16/8/2005, <http://www.alqassam.ps/ensihab/ehsaeiat/ehsaeiat4.htm>; and see *Filastin al-Muslimah*, 1/3/2006, <http://www.fm-m.com/2006/Mar2006/story15.htm>

overwhelming force inflamed it further and made it that much stronger, and deepened the bitter enmity between the Palestinians and Israelis. Throughout the first three years of the *Intifadah*, 75–85% of the Palestinians supported its continuation,⁷⁰ despite the massive destruction, economic collapse, and the tens of thousands of casualties and wounded.

Al-Aqsa Intifadah proved the expectations of the resistance movements, and gave them more credibility. Hamas once again proved that it could not be sidestepped in the Palestinian equation. This was encouraged by the wing of Fatah that supported armed resistance, which wanted to participate in the *Intifadah*, paving the way for establishing Fatah's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The latter had a major role especially in operations within the WB and GS. In other words, Hamas succeeded in dragging the PA (including many Fatah members) into the resistance, and was able to impose the agenda of the *Intifadah* on the PA, as well as disrupt the peace process.

Hamas's popularity surged, while that of Fatah (the backbone of the PA) slumped as well as that of Yasir 'Arafat himself. Polls conducted by the JMCC recorded this trend very clearly, although the supporters of Hamas and the opposition expressed reservations as the centers are affiliated to the PA and other parties that tend not to show the strength of the Islamists. In April 2003, JMCC showed a convergence between Fatah's popularity (22.6%) and Hamas (22%), that is, they now shared influence on the Palestinian arena.⁷¹ Another poll in August 2001 showed Fatah had a rating of 26%, and Hamas 27%.⁷²

Hamas's rising influence put the PA face to face with an additional political crisis. The PA found itself in the middle of an intense tug of war. On one hand there was Israeli-US-European pressure calling for an end to the *Intifadah* and further concessions. On the other hand, the Islamic and national resistance forces calling for a national program to escalate the *Intifadah* and force Israel to withdraw. One of the biggest paradoxes was that all sides (enemies, opponents, and supporters) agreed that the PA was corrupt, and needed fundamental reforms, though this meant different things to different parties.

Israeli-American dictates demanded Palestinian de-escalation, or in other words, the crushing or silencing of Hamas, in return for a resumption of negotiations. However, the Palestinian public who overwhelmingly wanted the *Intifadah* to continue, provided support for Hamas and the resistance.

⁷⁰ JMCC Public Opinion polls.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Jonathan Schanzer, "The Challenge of Hamas to Fatah," *Middle East Quarterly* journal, Middle East Forum (MEF), Spring 2003, vol. X, no. 2, http://www.meforum.org/516/the-challenge-ofhamas-to-fatah#_ftn39



Moreover, the intense Israeli pressure on the PA, which included attacks on its offices, police stations, and prisons, and the blockade against its president and even the re-occupation of PA-controlled areas, had backfired. Indeed, Israel ended up weakening the PA, its prestige, and its ability to control things, and hence, the ability to clamp down on Hamas and the resistance. In addition, Israel's conduct showed many Palestinians that the PA could not protect them, at a time when Hamas and resistance forces were carrying out operations that caused panic in Israel, and established some sort of balance of terror. 'Arafat had tried more than once to declare an end to the *Intifadah*, but it continued and expanded, undermining both his and PA's prestige.

Consequently, there were efforts to start an intra-Palestinian dialogue, for the PA and Egypt (which became heavily involved) wanted to stop the *Intifadah* or declare a truce, in order to restart negotiations. The resistance forces welcomed dialogue, to develop a new national program based on defeating the occupation. Hamas, PIJ and other resistance forces knew that the next goal of stopping the *Intifadah* was to strike at the infrastructure of resistance and crush it.

The talks themselves were a practical admission by the PA that it was unable to make critical and meaningful decisions on the ground, without consulting with the resistance factions, particularly Hamas. Egypt was able to benefit from its major role in the Arab world and close relations with the PA, Israel, and the US, as well as its ties with the Palestinian opposition, to call for these talks. Between 10–13/11/2002, one of the most important sessions of this dialogue was held in Cairo between Fatah and Hamas, and again in January 2003 and on 4–7/12/2003, attended by all Palestinian factions.

These talks may have helped to bring points of view together, but the PA failed to get what it wanted, especially since resistance factions were not committed to, or concerned with, the Oslo accords.⁷³ In the meantime, the Israeli side did not commit itself to a truce or to suspending its operations against Palestinian civilians, even if the Palestinian resistance factions declared a truce on their side. The truce declared by the factions of the *Intifadah* in the summer of 2003 (declared for three months, but lasting only 52 days, from 29/6–21/8/2003) was clear evidence of the nature of Israeli practices, as Israel continued its killings and destruction, weakening the prospect of the declaration of any new truce.

Israel continued its attempts to crush the *Intifadah*. Palestinian President 'Arafat was under blockade within his compound in Ramallah for around two and a half years, having angered Israel with his secret support for the *Intifadah* and armed resistance. 'Arafat died in November 2004, in extremely suspicious circumstances with questions about whether he had been poisoned by the Israelis.

⁷³ Newspapers, news agencies, and television stations covered these meetings, see for example: *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, Sharjah.

He was succeeded by Mahmud ‘Abbas as head of the PLO, the PA, and Fatah. In the absence of their symbolic and unifying leader, Fatah suffered from fragmentation, disbandment, corruption and from conflict among factions and leaders within its ranks. This caused a decline in its stature and popularity in the Palestinian arena. Meanwhile, Hamas managed to preserve its cohesion and the discipline of its members, its positive image as a result of its resistance activities, and its social and educational services, not to mention the fact that it was not involved in any corruption cases, and had not been “embroiled,” up to this point in 2005, in the machinations of holding power.

Hamas boycotted the Palestinian presidential election in early 2005, which was won by Mahmud ‘Abbas. However, Hamas dealt positively with the PA leadership, especially regarding its declaration of a truce in order to hold municipal and legislative elections, which Hamas decided to contend. On 15–17/3/2005, the Palestinian factions met in Cairo, including Hamas and Fatah. They adopted a Palestinian political program based on adhering to Palestinian fundamentals, the right to resist the occupation, and to declare a truce that would last until the year’s end. It was also agreed to hold legislative elections, and rebuild and reform the PLO according to principles that allow all Palestinian forces to join the organization.

The municipal elections, which were held in stages in 2005, were one of the strongest indications of Hamas’s rising popularity. The results achieved by Fatah and Hamas were close. Sometimes, it was difficult to identify the winner, because a number of Hamas candidates in the WB had run as independents, fearing arrest. In general, Fatah had better results in small municipal councils, while Hamas fared better in large cities and municipalities, prompting the PA leadership to suspend elections in the cities of Hebron and Gaza, where Hamas carries significant political weight, especially after Hamas took 74% of the votes in Nablus.

Whatever the case may be, the strong results obtained by Hamas challenged the credibility of opinion polls, which had given Fatah a significant lead over Hamas. It also increased Fatah’s fears of losing the general election, prompting President ‘Abbas to postpone the legislative elections from July 2005 to 25/1/2006. The table below tries to give a general overview of the results of the municipal elections, but it remains an approximation given the sometimes-huge inconsistencies between different sources.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ See *al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 18/9/2005; a study by the Middle East Studies Center (MESC) in Jordan published in November 2005; site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 18/12/2005, <http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/palestoday/reports/report2005/entkhabat05/nataeej/nataeej.htm>; and site of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), <http://www.pogar.org/arabic/govnews/2005/issue2/palestine.html#m2a>

Table (4): Municipal Elections Results in WB and GS According to the Number of Seats and Votes in the Four Rounds

Organization	% of seats in each round				% of votes in each round			
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	First	Second	Third	Fourth
	26 Districts in the WB and 10 in GS	78 Districts in the WB and 5 in GS	104 Districts in the WB	39 Districts in the WB and 3 in GS				
Fatah	38.9	35	53.73	32.85	32	40.2	53.73	30
Hamas	36.8	35.4	26.03	30	50	33.7	36.03	50.5

Table (5): Municipal Elections Results According to the Percentage of Seats

Organization	Fatah	Hamas	Other organizations and independents	Total
No of seats	1,164	862	701	2,727
% of seats	42.7	31.6	25.7	100

Conclusion

The reasons that explain the rise of Hamas during the period 1987–2005 concern its ability to present a moderate Islamist platform, which has resonated among wide segments of the population. Hamas also showed a dynamism that allowed it to quickly interact with, respond to and adapt to various events and developments. Thanks to this, Hamas was able to produce and replace three generations of field commanders during the first *Intifadah*.

There have been many times that the Israeli authorities have declared an all-out war on Hamas or pledged to eliminate al-Qassam Brigades, but Hamas would returned, stronger and more prolific than ever. Furthermore, Hamas's loss of many of its symbolic political and military leaders usually had only a temporary effect, and its dynamism allowed it to quickly cope with and overcome these setbacks.

Thirdly, Hamas enjoyed a high level of internal cohesion and organizational discipline, compared to other factions, notably Fatah, helped in this by having a strong institutional Shura [advisory] structure. This has enabled Hamas to deal effectively with various challenges, and made it difficult for its enemies to penetrate it, fragment it, or deviate it from its course. For this reason, there were no splits within Hamas nor any important defections by its cadres throughout the outgoing period.

The fourth factor is that Hamas was the most effective organization in charitable work and social solidarity. It thus became part of the fabric of Palestinian society and its constituents, making it difficult to blockade or eliminate it.

Fifthly, Hamas has distanced itself from the PA and its burdens, and thus it was not implicated in the “sins” of the Oslo Accords and their repercussions, nor did it bear the formal responsibility for managing the Palestinians’ political, economic, or social affairs. This put the blame for weaknesses and failures on the PA and Fatah movement. Furthermore, the suspicions of corruption, extortion, and dubious deals involving many of the PA’s figures, did not affect any of Hamas’s figures, as Hamas was able to preserve its good reputation throughout that period.

Moreover, Hamas distinguished itself in the military field. During *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, Hamas became the foremost Palestinian faction in terms of military operations, especially daring ones, and in terms of the number of Israelis it killed or wounded. Hamas offered a large number of resistance fighters who were killed, including some leaders. Accordingly, Hamas derived legitimacy and prominence from resistance, earning itself the respect of Palestinians, Arabs, and the Muslim world. These see armed resistance as the gauge by which things are measured, and proof of credibility and legitimacy.

By the end of 2005, Hamas had succeeded in avoiding spilling Palestinian blood and being drawn to civil strife. This remained a red line despite Hamas came under broad campaigns of arrest and crackdowns by the PA, especially in the years that preceded *al-Aqsa Intifadah*. This kept its image positive among the general public.

Although Hamas is an Islamic movement affiliated to a movement that most Arab regimes are hostile to or are actively persecuting, and although Hamas has been designated as a “terror group” in the US and Western Europe, Hamas was able to present a balanced discourse, and restricted its military operations to the Palestinian territories. Hamas could not be drawn into side battles or into intra-Arab disputes, earning it a great deal of respect in the Arab street and even among official Arab circles.

Finally, the post-2005 phase compelled Hamas to answer a number of strategic questions and make difficult choices and decisions, as it was no longer enough to criticize and oppose the conduct of the PA. Hamas would have to provide clear visions regarding how to put the Palestinian political house in order, make decisions and achieve national unity. It would have to work with Fatah and other factions in accordance with a comprehensive national program to solve the conflict between the right to resist and the process of building, as well as the PA’s program and the relationship with Israel. It would have to sort out how to handle its local, Arab and international relations, even in hostile or unfavorable circumstances. Hamas would also have to answer the question of how it would actually implement its Islamic project.

دراسة علمية

حركة المقاومة الإسلامية (حماس)

قراءة في رصيد

التجربة 1987-2005

د. محسن محمد صالح

