

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005



Edited By

Dr. Mohsen M. Saleh

Dr. Basheer M. Nafi



Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations

Chapter One

The Internal Palestinian Scene: Change and the Quest for Consensus

E-mail: info@alzaytouna.net

Website: www.alzaytouna.net

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The Internal Palestinian Scene: Change and the Quest for Consensus¹

Introduction: The year 2005 was an eventful year for Palestine not only because of a number of changes in the regional and international scenes that affected the *Intifadah* and the whole Palestinian issue, but also because of some important changes in the internal Palestinian setting. These started with the mysterious death of President ‘Arafat in November 2004, and reached an important watershed with the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006. All this had, no doubt, made the year 2005 a long and agonizing year that was mainly characterized by the quest for new national initiatives, and the consistent drive towards unity and consensus.

The year 2005 was also a year of anticipation in the region as the American occupation of Iraq has faced tremendous difficulties, either from the political forces that strove to control the post occupation government, or from the Iraqi resistance that the Americans failed to defeat and establish a loyal regime in the country. Besides, was the acceleration of the Franco-American pressure on Syria and Lebanon, and the aggravation of the Euro-American conflict with Iran over the latter’s increasing nuclear activities. Due to the close interlink between these three issues and the Palestinian question, the Palestinian political scene had, thus, been in a state of covert anticipation towards the developments in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Iran.

The Palestinian political scene is characterized by excessive plurality that had rarely been experienced before by a movement of national liberation. Besides the impact of this plurality, the Palestinian internal scene is overwhelmed with the legacy of the national cause, particularly with regard to aspects related to the formation of the political forces, their inter relations and the role played by each in the national struggle. But this kind of impact is mainly covert than overt, while the direct influences were motivated by some important developments, and the manner by which the various political forces responded to them. However, it is difficult to isolate these developments and impacts, or their consequences, from each other.

Fatah and the Collapse of the National Consensus: The year 2005 should always be viewed as the year of formidable challenges, to the leadership of Fatah (*The Palestinian*

National Liberation Movement), be it on the internal organizational level or the national level. Admittedly, the Organization had previously faced challenges but they were certainly not as extensive and serious as those of 2005, nor had the Organization itself been in such a profound state of disintegration and dissention. The fundamental factor for the crisis of Fatah, which negatively reflected on the entire Palestinian affairs, is the collapse of the national consensus after Oslo Accords, and the serious repercussions of the changes introduced by the Palestinian Authority (PA) on the structure of the ruling organization. In addition, are reasons related to the diversified political orientation of the Palestinians, and Fatah's failure to achieve any tangible successes, not even the mere start of negotiations, throughout the year 2005.

Fatah came into existence in the late 1950's at the hands of a group of Palestinian youth, who were known for their allegiance to the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza Strip (Khalil al-Wazir, Kamal 'Udwan, Muhammad Yusuf al-Najjar, Salah Khalaf, Mamduh Saydam and others). By that time, the Movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, be it in Palestine or elsewhere in the Arab world, was seriously suffering from its bitter confrontation with Nasser's regime in Egypt. Under the influence of the then Algerian Movement for National Liberation, the pioneers of Fatah felt it absolutely necessary to restructure the Palestinian movement into a united political front that would totally detach itself from ideological concerns, and be solely concerned with the goal of liberation. Within few years of the initiation of this idea, these pioneers succeeded to recruit some activists from the West Bank (Faruq Qaddumi), and from among Palestinian refugees in Syria (Khalid al-Hassan and Khalid al-Yashruti). The latter were either members of the Ba'ath Party, the Muslim Brotherhood or the Liberation Party.²

The great national agitation that accompanied the establishment of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Nasser's support to it in mid 1960's constituted a huge challenge to Fatah. Nonetheless, the initiation of the military struggle, though modestly, in 1965, the Syrian support to the Palestinian military activities and the failure of the Arabs plan to divert the course of the Jordan river, that was planned as a retaliation to the Israeli water projects, helped Fatah to survive. The defeat of the Arab regimes in the June 1967 war and Fatah's early resistance of the occupation had, moreover, paved the way for Fatah's consistent rise to prominence, particularly so after *al-Karama* battle. The Arab and Palestinian masses rallied behind PLO, and it was concurrently welcomed in Cairo and Riyadh. Meanwhile, in February 1969, Yasir 'Arafat became the leader of the PLO, and during the years

1968 and 1969 the PLO became a centre for Palestinian popular and resistance organizations. Fatah and its sympathizers controlled most the seats in the National Assembly, as well as in the leading institutions of the PLO.³

However, Fatah's leadership of the PLO and the Palestinian national movement had not always been smooth. While the Palestinian issue was a source of tense competition between Arab states, the Palestinian resistance was compelled to fight some major battles during the 1970's and 1980's. Nonetheless, Fatah's total commitment to the liberation and the preservation of the national identity, as well as its immense ideological and organizational flexibility, attracted different trends and shades of opinions, and made the Organization the center of national Palestinian consensus, which, however, had gradually faded since the mid 1970's.

The Muslim Brotherhood background of most Fatah's founders stimulated throughout the 1960's close relations between the Organization and the Islamic trend in the Arab region, even after the defeat of 1967. Being the major force for Palestinian resistance, Fatah attracted sizeable number of the Muslim Brotherhood to its military camps, particularly from Jordan. But this cordial relations between Fatah and the Muslim Brotherhood had considerably weakened during the 1970's as many anti-Islamist leftist made it to the Organization's top leadership. Moreover, by then, Fatah had strengthened its relations with the Soviet Union and associated itself with its Middle Eastern strategy, followed by its adoption of the ten-point program of the 1974. Soon, the Palestinian resistance became gradually, but heavily, involved in the Lebanon civil war, hence its role in occupied Palestine declined. Meanwhile the Palestinian Islamic trend was rising at that time, when Islamic resurgence had, anyhow, become phenomenal in all the Arab region, especially in Egypt. On the departure in 1982 of the PLO, as well as most of its institutions and military forces, from Lebanon, the historical Palestinian leadership distanced itself from the occupied motherland, while the activities of the Islamic Palestinian trend continuously grew. By the outbreak of the *Intifadah* in late 1987, it, represented by Hamas (*The Islamic Resistance Movement*) and Islamic Jihad Movement (*al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin*), became a major force that was heavily engaged in the organization of the resistance, as well as in the welfare of all sectors of the community. In an attempt to place the resistance under the Diaspora leadership, Fatah, with other PLO factions, formed the "National United Leadership", but this failed to weaken the Islamic trend.⁴

The *Intifadah* provided a great opportunity to restructure the national consensus, as all Palestinian forces were committed to the struggle for freedom and the defeat

of the occupation. But this did not materialize as the national Palestinian leadership did not view the *Intifadah* essentially as a struggle for national liberation, but simply a means to pressurize the USA and Israel to recognize the PLO and negotiate a partial solution of the Palestinian issue. This, coupled with the collapse of the Soviet block, the end of the cold war, and the Kuwait crisis that culminated in the first Gulf War, imposed a completely new balance of power in the region.⁵ Having lost much of its drive for resistance against Israel, Fatah concluded in September 1993 the Oslo Accords that established a PA on parts of Gaza Strip (GS) and the West Bank (WB). But this led to an unprecedented disarray within the Palestinian camp. The Islamists, a sector of the PLO leaders, Fatah and other non-Islamist organizations opposed the treaty as a complete sell out in return for meager, insignificant and obscure gains.

The Palestinian people had given Oslo Agreement and its architect the national leadership ample time to reach to a just settlement, and many observers felt that the treaty and the establishment of self-government rule would ultimately lead to the decline of the Islamists. But the sequence of events during the crucial six years between Oslo and the second *Intifadah* demonstrated that this was a gross misjudgment. On the contrary, the influence and prestige of the Islamists, particularly Hamas, accelerated. The evils that accompany power had further weakened Fatah, and the popularity of all other Palestinian organizations had also subsidized. Being the spearhead of the negotiation, Fatah naturally dominated the institutions and policies of the PA. Since the delegation of the issue of security in GS and the WB to the self-rule authority was one of the major objectives of Oslo, the latter had naturally become excessively security conscious. It committed serious legal or judicial violations, and its suppressive campaign reached its peak in 1995 – 1996 when the security organs masterminded an ugly campaign of arrest and torture against Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Besides, corruption prevailed within the institutions and ministries of the PA. Hence, notwithstanding the Israeli partial withdrawal from GS and the WB, the Palestinian conditions sharply worsened.

But the Authority's most formidable predicament was its over optimistic expectations from Oslo. Once the ceremonial environment that accompanied the signature of the treaty vanished, it become clear that the Israeli vision of the treaty was dramatically different from the Palestinian expectations. Since Oslo was just a general framework, subsequent partial agreements were concluded under tremendous Arab-American pressure, and with further Palestinian concessions. By the time the two parties were called for the Summer 2000 Camp David negotiations for a final

settlement, the Palestinian people were fed up, and the option of resistance regained momentum, thanks to the Lebanese victory and the resulting Israeli withdrawal from Southern Lebanon in May 2000. Meanwhile, Camp David negotiations failed because what was offered to the Palestinian President did not meet the minimum Palestinian demands, hence a bloody confrontation was on the air. However, the spark that ignited the fire was Sharon's defiant visit to the Holy Shrine of *al-Aqsa* on 28 September 2000, which led to violent Palestinian protest, in which six were killed at the hands of the Israeli security.

It may be interesting to note that at this juncture of escalation in the national struggle, a large measure of national unity was achieved, exactly as had been the case in similar circumstances before. Large sectors of the community in GS and the WB, as well as most of the political forces, including many of Fatah activists, joined the *Intifadah*. The inclination of President 'Arafat to the *Intifadah* encouraged an increasing number of the Palestinian security to defend the people against the frequent Israeli aggression. However, unity around, and during, the *Intifadah* was only proportionate. Since the Palestinian leadership was a prisoner of Oslo Agreement, it was not possible to achieve a fundamental change in the Palestinian political vision, hence the *Intifadah* was viewed just as a means to secure a better deal in the final settlement. Moreover, the *Intifadah* revealed a deep split within the rank of the national leadership, particularly that of Fatah. Some of its leading members, from Abu Mazin to Muhammad Dahlan, openly opposed the *Intifadah* and 'Arafat's way of leadership.

At the initial stage of the *Intifadah*, the Palestinian side was in a better position than its Israeli counterpart. Official and Popular Arab support to the Palestinian cause was as strong as ever, and the international community viewed Sharon's provocation as the direct factor for igniting the *Intifadah*, and held Israel's heavy handedness responsible for the increasing number of victims.

But the assumption of Bush and Sharon to the American presidency and the Israeli premiership respectively, coupled with the incidents of 11 September 2001, placed the second *Intifadah* in a critical situation. The countries of the central Arab axis (Egypt, Syria and Saudi Arabia) were no longer able to provide a cover to the Palestinian resistance of the occupation, especially the "self-immolation"⁶ operations in 2002, which developed from a deterrent means to something similar to a strategic method. However, the failure of the project of the final solution blurred the political vision of the Palestinian leadership. Moreover, notwithstanding its criticism of the increased operations of Sharon's government against the Palestinians, Bush administration essentially remained an ardent supporter of Israel.

The increasing American-Israeli pressure had progressively widened the rift within the national leadership. Abu Mazin first government collapsed in 2003 due to the inability of the American administration to compel the Israeli government to surrender sufficient concessions to the Palestinian premier, though America was then, i.e., after its spectacular conquest of Iraq, in its best form. However, Abu Mazin openly expressed his disappointment of 'Arafat, and, through his close associates, held him directly responsible for the collapse of his ministry. 'Arafat's long siege in his headquarters in Ramallah had contributed in his isolation from the bulk of the Palestinian leadership, as well as from the Arab world and the international community at large. Nonetheless, during the Summer of 2004, 'Arafat continued to be highly regarded by the people, and had the sympathy of the mainstream Islamic trend as well as Fatah activists. But Fatah's political strength was on the wane, and it was about to spilt into conflicting and hostile groups.

During the Summer of 2004, 'Arafat faced a noisy challenge from Muhammad Dahlan, the former leader of the security apparatus, who incited hundreds of his supporters to demonstrate in the streets of the major cities of GS demanding reform. Dahlan seemed to have been supported by some of Fatah leaders, at least the security leaders in GS. Interestingly, Abu Mazin refused to condemn Dahlan's move, or to deny the rumours of an alliance between them. However, Dahlan's major support came from America and the European Union, while the Arab boycott had further weakened 'Arafat and made him vulnerable to the intrigues of some aspirants in his position. Though Hamas and Islamic Jihad stood beside the President, who was enthusiastically supported by large sectors of the Palestinian people and many of Fatah activists, it was evident that by 2005 Fatah had gone in disarray, notwithstanding the appearance of unity that accompanied the President's death.

The year 2005 was indeed very crucial to the Palestinian political path and direction. By then, it was obvious that Fatah lost its command, and was placed in a dilemma. While unable to discard Oslo Accords that gave it the authority of self-rule, Fatah has become increasingly aware that there is no light at the end of the tunnel. A whole decade had passed since Oslo without a final solution, and six years elapsed after the deadline for the end of the interim period. Moreover, Fatah was not in a position to formulate a social program around which the Palestinian people could rally, and it lacked any futuristic plan or vision. Its disarray triggered political unrest and uncertainty in the entire Palestinian scene. While Fatah had lost its traditional and unique leadership of the national movement, its main competitor, Hamas, had, however, thus far been unable to secure a Palestinian consensus.

From Abu ‘Ammar to Abu Mazin:

The demise of ‘Arafat in November 2004 was indeed a turning point in the history of the Palestinian national movement. For over three decades, the pragmatic ‘Arafat dominated the Palestinian scene, and symbolized the long national struggle, as demonstrated by the highly emotional and mass demonstrations that spontaneously erupted on his death. However, it was only after the abortive Camp David negotiations of the Summer of 2000 that the totality of the Palestinian people accepted his undisputed leadership, particularly so during the last two years of his life, when he was a virtual prisoner under tight-Israeli siege. His funeral was an occasion of national solidarity, where all the Palestinian leaders, including those in Damascus and Fatah leaders, came to Cairo to bid him farewell. Hamas and Islamic Jihad previous open criticism to his policies had relatively subsidized during his last two years, and they stood firmly behind him against the Israeli aggression on his headquarters and life. By then, they were, in fact, nearer to him than some Fatah leaders.

Immediately after the death of ‘Arafat, the Central Committee of Fatah officially nominated Mahmud ‘Abbas (Abu Mazin) to be ‘Arafat’s successor, though some of its members, like Hani al-Hassan, were known for expressing serious reservations to his leadership. Seven candidates competed for the PA leadership, notably Mustafa al-Barghuthi, a former leader in the Palestinian Communist Party and the secretary of the “National Initiative”, an activist institution for rallying international civil support for the Palestinian cause. Abu Mazin failure in these elections was farfetched, but the interesting question was how many votes could he secure. Since Hamas did not nominate a candidate in these elections, the votes of supporters were a crucial factor in determining the extent of Abu Mazin’s majority. Finally, Abu Mazin got 62% of those who voted, who represented only 65% of the eligible voters.

Abu Mazin had certainly achieved a comfortable victory, but many thought it not to be overwhelming enough to qualify him for a decisive mandate from the people. The results had also revealed that some of Hamas votes went to al-Barghuthi (who won one fifth of the votes). But this should not be interpreted as an attempt by Hamas, or for that matter any of the other Palestinian groups, like Islamic Jihad, to abort Abu Mazin’s bid for the presidency. On the contrary, it was meant to caution everybody that the peoples’ support to Abu Mazin was conditional.

However, the Israeli and Palestinian authorities failed to arrange a meeting between Abu Mazin and Sharon, the latter had even declared the suspension of

all contacts with his counterpart until he disarm the resistance organizations. At this juncture, Egypt succeeded to convene a conference on 8 February at Sharm el-Sheikh, which was attended by the two leaders, in addition to King ‘Abdullah II of Jordan. In this conference, Sharon emphasized some previous decisions of his government, including the release of 900 Palestinian prisoners, gradual withdrawal from five cities in the WB, and to ease the Israeli military and security pressure on the inhabitants of GS and the WB. However, these largely symbolic concessions were not addressed to the Palestinian side, but were essentially a gesture of appreciation to the Egyptian leadership for its initiative to invite Sharon to Egypt. However, the conference issued a Palestinian-Israeli declaration which guaranteed mutual “cessation of violence” that was considered to be an implementation of the First article of the Road Map.

The Palestinian resistance groups interpreted the phrase “cessation of violence” as a virtual ceasefire, and criticized ‘Abbas for going that much without consulting other Palestinian forces. Besides, no mechanism had been spelled out to implement it on the ground. Soon, however, this declaration faced its first challenge, namely Israeli assassination on 16 February of some Palestinian activists, to which GS activists reacted by bombarding some nearby Jewish colonies. Nonetheless, this development did not obstruct a Palestinian dialogue, held, on Egypt’s initiative, in Cairo during the period 15 – 17 March, and attended by Abu Mazin himself and representatives of all Palestinian forces.

The Palestinian dialogue was by no means smooth or easy. Some small Palestinian organizations tried to prove their presence in the Palestinian scene, but the main controversy was between Abu Mazin and Hamas delegation, which warranted Egypt’s mediation. Finally, the conferees agreed to a political-economic program for the year 2005, which undertook to adhere to all the Palestinian fundamentals. Of these, were the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, the guarantee of the right of return for the Palestinians in the Diaspora and the recognition of the legitimate Palestinian right to resist the occupation, besides a year truce that is conditional on the cessation of Israeli aggression and their release of all prisoners and detainees. The program had, moreover, considered the continuation of the settlement policy and the erection of the Wall as time bombs. It also decreed the holding of elections on time, and the restructure of the PLO on mutually agreed basis that should guarantee the representation of all Palestinian forces and factions.⁷ The compromise embodied in this program illustrated the commitment of all political forces, Islamist and national, to facilitate Abu Mazin’s mission, and to

give him a new chance to achieve tangible progress on the issue of internal reform and on the all important national goals sought by all Palestinians.

But subsequent developments showed that the optimism that accompanied Cairo agreement was unfounded. The inherent assumption that Egypt, the patron of Cairo meeting, and Abu Mazin had secured the support of the Americans and a prior Israeli commitment to cool down, proved to be erroneous. As was the case in 2003, when some Israeli military acts of aggression made an obligation of cessation of violence, given to Abu Mazin by the Palestinian resistance, null and void, Israel continued after Cairo its assassination policy of the resistance activists that reached its peak prior and after the Israeli withdrawal from GS.⁸

During the year 2005 Israeli assassinated 56 Palestinians of whom 23 were from Fatah, 14 from Islamic Jihad and 13 from Hamas. The Palestinian response came from al-Quds Brigades (*Saraya al-Quds*) of Islamic Jihad and from Hamas, who undertook five and two “self-immolation” operations respectively. Hamas then rather limited military activity was due to the Organization’s decision to give priority to some internal issues, notably to put the Palestinian house in order, and to actively engage in the municipal and legislative elections that were boycotted by Islamic Jihad.⁹ On 23 September, a mysterious explosion hit a Hamas rally in the town of Jabaliya in which 17 Palestinians were killed. Hamas held Israel responsible for the attack, and its military wing, al-Qassam Brigades (*Kata’ib al-Qassam*) bombarded some Israeli targets along the line that separates GS from the Jewish state. Israel, on its part, accelerated its attacks in GS, including the assassination of two of Hamas military leaders in GS.¹⁰

The issue of reform within the institutions of the PA had also dragged on, though demanded by both the Palestinian groups and the Authority’s main financier, America and the EU.¹¹ But the reforms asked by the former, whether national or Islamic, was quiet different from those advocated by the latter. The Palestinians targeted corruption within the institutions of the Authority itself, criticized the weak judiciary and the multiple security organs that were largely concerned with supervising and suppressing the activities of the public institutions and the resistance organizations; while USA and EU focused on disarming resistance movements. Certainly, Abu Mazin tried to tackle the issue of reforms of the institutions and the structure of the Authority, but he faced many predicaments that restricted his movement. Fatah nominated him to the presidency on condition that Ahmad Qurei’ (Abu al-’Alaa) would be his premier. The latter, had, moreover, spent a fairly long time to form his government due to Fatah factionalism and his own differences with the President.

Salam Fayad, an intimate friend to the Americans and a former expert in the World Bank, was brought later to the cabinet to be in charge of the Ministry of Finance, which meant that financial reform became high in the government's agenda, particularly the control of Palestinian investments abroad, which was previously directly supervised by 'Arafat himself. However, it is difficult to know the extent of the reform achieved in this respect because of the confidentiality of the issue. On the other hand, the government had seriously addressed the issue of corruption quite late, only a few weeks before the legislative elections, presumably in an attempt to blossom its image during the electioneering process.¹²

Immediately after his elections, Abu Mazin introduced a project to unite the several security agencies into three only: the general security, the general intelligence and the national security.¹³ But the project was implemented at a very slow pace because of the dissension of Fatah into many centers of power, and up to the end of 2005 nothing tangible was apparently achieved in this respect. However, the only project that Abu Mazin successfully implemented was the military pension law that resulted in sending tens of old army officers into pension.

Nothing concrete was, however, achieved after Cairo dialogue on two major issues; the formation of a national leadership, at least in GS, and the restructuring of the PLO. Hamas insisted, in Cairo and afterwards, on a unified leadership in GS to administer GS after the expected Israeli withdrawal, but Fatah declined to have any such partnership with any Palestinian force on the presumption that the previous consensus on the Supervisory National Islamic Committee, agreed upon during the second *Intifadah*, was appropriate and adequate.

With regard to the restructuring of the PLO, Fatah exhibited a little measure of seriousness. On 28 March, Abu Mazin held a meeting of the PLO's Executive Committee to discuss the issue. Islamic Jihad sent a representative, but Hamas boycotted on the ground that the meeting was a retreat from Cairo agreement that provided for the incorporation of the two Organizations in the PLO prior to the reform process. Gaza meeting did not, however, achieve much, it did not even settle the question of the legislative elections. One reason for this rather slow, and perhaps deliberate, progress on the issue of reform was the rising conflict between Abu Mazin, the President of both the Authority and the PLO, and Faruq Qaddumi, a member of the Executive Committee of the PLO and the secretary-general of Fatah. Besides, Abu Mazin and the top leadership of the Authority seemed to have been inclined to weaken the PLO itself, and transfer its function of representing the Palestinian people to the PA.

On 13 August, Qaddumi demanded the election of a new Executive Committee for the PLO,¹⁴ while Abu Mazin continued his drive to strip the PLO's Political Committee from its power and functions and transfer them to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Qaddumi also suggested the formation of a representative committee of the leadership of all the Palestinian organizations in the Diaspora, but the latter declined because they saw in this an attempt to indulge them in Fatah internal dispute. However, a strong tendency developed within the Palestinian camp asking for the restructuring of the PLO, and the incorporation of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in it, on the grounds that Oslo Agreement had practically come to an end, and that there is an urgent need for a new mass Palestinian front within and outside the country. But Fatah continued to focus on GS and the WB, and saw in the PLO a liability rather than an asset.

Irrespective of the percentage that Abu Mazin earned in the elections, the Palestinian people in general, and their political organizations in particular, considered his presidency as a welcome departure from the single-handed, and, to many, almost "sacred" leadership of his predecessor 'Arafat, which was, however, criticized by some others who had insisted that 'Arafat surrenders some of his powers to the prime minister. The Palestinians had, thus, seen in Abu Mazin an ordinary leader who can be held accountable for his deeds without any fear or regret. But Abu Mazin did not succeed during the first year of his presidency to advance towards unifying the Palestinian front, whether in GS, the WB or in the Diaspora, nor had he even been able to stop the split of Fatah into rival and conflicting groups. In addition, Abu Mazin was not robust enough to face the American retreat from their declared promises to the Palestinian side, and the Israeli continuous disregard to the Palestinian demands. Thus, it was generally felt among the Palestinians that Abu Mazin was not up to the responsibilities of the national issue, particularly so after the Israeli withdrawal from GS.

The Withdrawal from Gaza Strip: The Israeli withdrawal from GS was indeed a resounding victory to the Palestinian resistance. Notwithstanding the serious Israeli reservations to extend their colonial expansionist policy in GS and their continuous reluctance to control GS, it is certain that their withdrawal from GS would not have been possible without the heavy political and human losses that they suffered in and around the region. The withdrawal was a unilateral Israeli action that was undertaken without any negotiation or coordination with the PA,

which tantamounted to an effective end of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, or, to say the least, a total Israeli disregard to it. Admittedly, the PA repeatedly protested against this policy and attitude, but the strong Euro-American support to the Israeli decision of withdrawal left the PA helpless. It was unhappy of a withdrawal in which it was not a part, but could not reject.

The Israeli government declared its intention to withdraw from GS a whole year before it actually did in September 2005. Prior to the policy of withdrawal, it was generally assumed that the Authority would fail to administer GS and it would be transferred into a battleground for internal Palestinian conflicts, and possibly a civil war. This would symbolize the inability of the Authority to administer the whole Palestinian affairs, and, thus, supports Sharon's contention of the lack of a credible Palestinian partner in the peace process. Infact, there was a genuine Palestinian concern that the existence of many armed militias in the small, poor and overpopulated GS would make it a theatre of conflict between the popular Hamas, on one side, and some Fatah groups and the security organs, on the other side, especially as Hamas had already signaled its intention to participate in the forthcoming legislative elections.

Israel's preparation for withdrawal from GS included a security deal with Egypt that allowed an Egyptian force of several hundreds soldiers to spread along the Egyptian-Palestinian-Israeli borders. By this agreement, the Israeli intended to hold Egypt responsible for any smuggling of people, arms and ammunition across the border between GS and Egypt. But Egypt viewed the deal differently, i.e., a tangible amendment of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that prohibited the existence of Egyptian military forces east of the Suez Canal. Cairo declared the spread of its security forces along the border about two months after the completion of the withdrawal,¹⁵ but it was soon realized that the Egyptian action was not yet completed. However, this military presence, which took place few days before the Israeli withdrawal, consolidated the already active Egyptian role in the internal Palestinian affairs. The Egyptian intelligence, that had been entrusted with this responsibility a few years ago, sent a delegation to GS that was soon directed to stay there for several months. It played the role of a mediator in the internal Palestinian differences and guarded against the slip of GS into anarchy. Towards the end of August, an envoy of President Mubarak, Major-General 'Umar Sulayman, the Director of Intelligence and a Minister in the Presidency, arrived at GS, where he met leaders of various political groups and addressed the Legislative Council ensuring the continuation of Egypt support to the Palestinians.¹⁶ The Egyptian

cautious handling of the delicate situation in GS had, on the whole, a positive impact on the various Palestinian political circles. But Sulayman's visit and his address in the Legislative Council demonstrated beyond any doubt the strategic considerations behind Egypt's involvement in GS.

The prophecy of a civil war in GS, or it being a battleground for a conflict between Fatah and Hamas, proved erroneous. Despite the aggravated differences between Hamas and the PA for two months, September – October 2005, the Islamists exhibited during the post withdrawal period a greater measure of restraint than other factions. Meanwhile, it became increasingly evident that the PA was unable to administer the Palestinian affairs efficiently, and the pro-Fatah armed militias took the law in their own hands, to the detriment of security and stability in GS.

Following a meeting on 22 August, in Damascus, with the leaders of the Palestinian groups, Premier Ahmad Qurei' firmly declared that the armament of the resistance is beyond question. Nonetheless, with the active support of the Americans and the Europeans, the Authority exploited the Israeli withdrawal from GS to press for the disarmament of the resistance,¹⁷ but the Palestinian groups rejected this on the grounds that the Palestinian issue was far from being resolved, and they firmly declared that they will never ever give up their arms. This left the President with no option but to compromise. He maintained that what was required is not disarmament per se, but an end to armed violence. However, internal tension never subsidized, and, in fact, aggravated following the consecutive announcements of the results of the municipal elections.

By the end of August 2005, the Palestinian Ministry of Interior issued a declaration to the effect that the oneness and legitimacy of the Authority should by no means be doubted or placed at stake.¹⁸ A few days later, an explosion blasted a house in the quarter of al-Shajaiyyah, which belonged to some Hamas activists, and killed four citizens. The conflicting interpretations of this incident, given by Hamas and the Ministry of Interior, increased the tension in the town of Gaza. Hamas subsequent revelation of the names of its military leaders in GS was viewed by the Ministry of Interior as a defiance to the legitimacy of the Authority, and an indication of the existence of a "parallel authority."¹⁹ A further explosion took place on 23 September in the midst of a Hamas rally in the town of Jabaliya in which 17 were killed and many were wounded. This explosion led to a tense conflict between Hamas and the Authority, including President Abu Mazin and the Ministry of Interior, and was followed by a several days Israeli bombardment of some districts in GS.²⁰ President 'Abbas threatened to confront Hamas, the split

among the Palestinians accelerated, and the Israeli aggression on GS intensified. By then, a prominent Hamas leader, Mahmud al-Zahhar, announced the Organization's decision to stop attacks on Israeli from GS.

The intensified tension between Hamas and the PA, that goes back to the days before the completion of the Israeli withdrawal from GS, and in which the Minister of Interior played a major role, was bound to lead to a military confrontation. By early October 2005, a casual misunderstanding between some Hamas activists and the security forces triggered an armed clash in which several were killed and wounded.²¹ But, the situation did not get out of hands. However, Fatah internal strife subsided, thanks to the Egyptian security delegation which brought the military wings of eight Palestinian groups in GS to a reconciliation meeting that issued a document prohibiting internal fighting. Calm was quickly restored, and the conflict between Hamas and the Authority ceased to be military, it returned to its traditional political form.

The attempts during the coming few weeks to arrange a meeting between the Palestinian President, Mahmud 'Abbas, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, had all failed. Besides, western powers did not honour their pledges to extend economic and developmental aid to GS. Europe and the United States practically handed the peace process to Israel, and the PA was totally and indefinitely out of it. Though the Authority accepted unfair security arrangements for the sake of opening the boarder route between GS and Egypt, Israel refused to secure a safe route that connects GS and the WB. The Israeli occupation and isolation plans in the WB continued to be actively pursued, and Palestinian activists were targeted, particularly those of Islamic Jihad, al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (*Kata'ib Shuhada' al-Aqsa*) and Hamas. The inability of the national leadership to achieve any subsequent developments, and the split of Fatah into conflicting groups, lead to PA's loss of ability to rule, and chaos spread in GS.

Meanwhile, Major-General Musa 'Arafat, the military advisor of President Abu Mazin and a former leader of the national security, who was disreputable of corruption and abuse of power, was assassinated on 7 September in Gaza.²² But no serious investigation was conducted on the assassination of this prominent Fatah leader, though a Fatah militia group, al-Nasir Salah al-Din Brigades (*Alwiyat al-Nasir Salah al-Din*), claimed, in some conflicting statements, that some of Fatah prominent leaders were behind the murder. However, immediately after the Israeli withdrawal, conflicts within Fatah aggravated to such an extent that the

Organization's Committee in the central provinces of GS resigned in protest of what it called "the security hazards."²³ The intensity of the internal conflicts within Fatah, that accompanied the Israeli withdrawal from GS, had decreased during the coming few weeks, which anyhow witnessed rising differences between Hamas and the Authority. But these conflicts reappeared during the last two months of 2005 and the first month of 2006. The Authority tried to deal with this imminent threat to their Organization through a plan to incorporate al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in the security organs. But the project dragged on either because of the Authority's inability to incorporate all Fatah militias, or because of the latter's refusal to give up their style of work for the sake of joining the official security forces. The actual competition between Fatah factions over the list of nominees to the legislative elections was a further element for chaos in GS and parts of the WB, where these factions launched indiscriminate attacks that did not even spare the headquarters of some government institutions, and they kidnapped journalists and foreign visitors.

GS glaringly reflected the crisis that the PA had experienced since its formation. While the Oslo Agreement had given the Authority the semblance of a state, with such institutions and organs as presidency, ministries, central budget, parliament, judiciary and security organs, it was, in fact, incomplete. Being formed under the occupation, the PA had no sovereignty over its land and borders, and no right to protect its own people, particularly so after the outbreak of the *Intifadah*. While a state should, on one hand, control all the means of violence and accept no intermediaries between its people, the status of being occupied and its consequential loss of security and freedom would, on the other hand, undoubtedly ignite a national armed resistance. In other words, the self-rule PA lies in a gray area between a state and a national liberation movement. This causes a permanent state of tension between the Authority and the resistance forces that requires huge effort from both sides to avoid a bloody internal conflict.

From the Municipal to the Legislative Elections:

The legislative elections, the second of its kind since the formation of the Authority, was very important and controversial too.

With the departure of the commanding 'Arafat from the Palestinian political scene, the Legislative Council had become a powerful body for the enactment of laws and the supervision of the performance of the PA. Since Hamas, which had boycotted the 1996 elections, ran for this round, these elections provided an important means to test the popularity of the main competitors, Fatah and Hamas. Besides, these

elections were conducted immediately after the municipal elections in GS and the WB that took a whole year, and gave indicators of a profound change in the Palestinian political map.

The first phase of the elections was held in late December 2004 and late January 2005, the second in early May, the third by the beginning of October and the fourth in mid December. Fatah and Hamas gave conflicting reports on the outcome of the first phase, but they seem to have been largely neck to neck. Admittedly, it was difficult to precisely identify the winner as many of Hamas nominees ran on independent tickets, a predicament that the Organization overcome in the second phase by having one certified list of candidates under the name of “Reform and Change.” Whatever the exact results may have been, they shocked Fatah, but boosted the morale of Hamas. The results of the second phase were clearer.²⁴ Out of 84 municipal councils, 76 in the WB and 8 in GS, Fatah dominated 50 and Hamas 30. However, Hamas success was largely in towns, like Qalqilya, Rafah and Jabaliya, while that of Fatah was in smaller municipalities and villages.

During the third phase, competition was around 104 municipal councils which were largely won by Fatah, though Hamas got a large percentage of the total vote.²⁵ As for the fourth stage, Hamas overran most of the councils in the big towns of the WB, e.g. it won 74% of the total vote in Nablus. As for Ramallah, Hamas lost the council, but its representatives maintained the casting vote.²⁶ Fatah and the concerned international quarters were deeply shocked by the outcome of these elections, particularly so as they were the prelude to the all important forthcoming legislative elections. Besides, it was generally speculated that Fatah will achieve supremacy in the WB and Hamas control GS.

Though no exact statistics are available on these elections, we have sufficient evidence to say that Hamas preceded Fatah on the overall vote and in major municipalities, while Fatah was in advance in terms of number of seals and in small municipalities. However, it may be worthwhile to note here that the Authority postponed the elections in two of the strongholds of Hamas, the towns of al-Khalil and Gaza.

The below table (table 1/1), which is based on different sources, gives a broad picture on the results of these municipal elections. However, no exact statistics can be provided due to the conflicting reports given by Fatah and Hamas on the outcome of the elections. Besides, some of the winners in these elections, particularly those who presumably belong to the Hamas Camp, declined to admit where they stand.

Table 1/1: Results of the Palestinian Municipal Elections in its Four Phases²⁷

Movement	The percentage of seat number in the four phases of the Palestinian municipal elections %				The percentage of votes in the four phases of the Palestinian municipal elections %				Number of seats	The percentage of seat number
	The first phase 23/12/2004, 27/1/2005 26 constituencies in the WB and 10 in GS	The second phase 5/5/2005 76 constituencies in the WB and 8 in GS	The third phase 29/9/2005 104 constituencies in the WB	The fourth phase 15/12/2005 39 constituencies in the WB and 3 in GS	The first phase	The second phase	The third phase	The fourth phase		
Fatah	38.9	56	53.6	32.85	32	40.2	53.73	30	1,164	42.68
Hamas	36.8	33.6	25.1	30	50	33.7	26.03	50.5	862	31.60
Independents and other movements	24.3	10.4	21.3	37.15	18	26.1	20.24	19.5	701	25.72
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	2,727	100

The municipal elections confirmed the prevalent trend of voting in the Arab region as a whole; namely that the Islamic forces usually outdo other parties in main cities and among the modern forces, while the ruling parties, on the other hand, dominate the rural regions and the traditional sectors, who believe that their interests can only be guaranteed through alignment with the ruling class. However, taken into consideration the decision of the Islamic Jihad Movement to boycott the elections, it may be said that the Islamic trend enjoys the support of the majority, though not overwhelmingly.

This contradictory shift in the Palestinian political scene appears to have taken place because Fatah (or at least part of it) is still regarded as a resistance force, not just a ruling party. Though voting in these municipal elections was influenced by multiple considerations, politics, services, impartiality, and local interests, it was clear that the Palestinian voters had penalized Fatah candidates for the prevalence of corruption within its ranks and in the PA.

The municipal elections, however, might not be a prototype of the legislative elections, as the latter are largely associated with political considerations, and are usually viewed as a reflection of the future of the Palestinian issue, as well as the nature of the Palestinian relations with the Arab States and the concerned International powers. But this, in actual fact, had fallen short of preventing political upheavals that blew up Fatah a few weeks before the beginning of the legislative elections.

In late November, Fatah conducted preliminary local elections in the WB (not

GS), which resulted in a landslide victory of what came to be known as “Jeel al-Shabab” [roughly translated as the youth-generation] in Ramallah. Nevertheless, the leadership of Fatah disregarded these results, and officially nominated a panel of some traditional leaders, including the unpopular Premier Ahmad Qurei’, who was placed on top of the list. Within a few days, Muhammad Dahlan, the former leader of the Preventive Security Apparatus in GS and a former Minister in the PA, announced, in agreement with the detained Marwan al-Barghuthi, secretary of Fatah Organization in the WB, an alternative list.²⁸

This list, called “The Future List”, included, beside Dahlan and al-Barghuthi, a considerable number of young Fatah leaders, including Jibreel al-Rujub, the former leader of the Preventive Security Service in the WB and the cut-throat rival of Dahlan for several years. The Dahlan - al-Barghuthi list showed that the split within Fatah is essentially an internal schism between some indoor leaders and a group offshore newcomers, rather than being a rift between the old and the young. It also reflected differences on the national agenda of the Palestinian issue, and was a kind of backstairs struggle on the succession of President Abu Mazin, which was not a purely Palestinian struggle, as it included other regional and international beneficiaries.

The existence of Fatah two lists showed beyond doubt that an intense conflict was in the making during the legislative elections, not only between Fatah and Hamas but also within Fatah itself. To avoid a painful collapse of the electoral process, many circles, within and outside Fatah, strove to standardize the two lists, which they actually did on 27 December 2005. However, this standardization was not enough to allay the concerns of many of Fatah leaders, who pressurized Abu Mazin to postpone the elections. But Abu Mazin was apparently aware of the inherent dangers of such postponement. He, furthermore, viewed the elections as an important factor for internal stability, and hoped that Hamas presence in the Legislative Council, and possibly the government, would persuade it to accept the peace process, and abide by the Oslo Accords. However, we have sufficient evidence to argue that Abu Mazin himself had entertained the idea of postponing the elections. For the coming weeks witnessed a barrage of European and American statements that called for prohibiting Hamas participation in the elections unless it agrees to disarm, and in the government until it recognizes the Hebrew state and abides by the diplomatic game. The repeated threats of the USA and the EU that they will suspend all kind of aid to the PA if Hamas participated in it had, furthermore, glaringly showed that these powers have become to all intend and

purposes active partners in the elections.

Abu Mazin tried to resist these Euro-American pressures, and hinted that the electoral process and its outcome is an exclusive Palestinian concern. But the American insistence on holding the elections, which was motivated by the desire of the Bush administration to add a new “victory” to its policy of democratization in the Middle East, was clear to every body. The USA government seemed to have been misled by opinion polls, conducted by some Palestinian institutions, that predicted that Hamas will not get more than 30% to 35% of the Palestinian vote. Faced with these mounting conflicting internal and external pressures, Abu Mazin insisted that Hamas participation in the elections, and its expected membership in the legislative assembly, are within Oslo Accords, of which all the institutions of the PA and its entire existence are mere off-shoots.

Hamas, on the other hand, was faced with the difficult challenge of justifying its participation in the elections. It argued that such a participation does not necessarily mean it abandonment of the armed struggle to achieve full liberation. Since Oslo had practically come to an end, there is a need for a long truce during which an interim solution, that should embody the establishment of a Palestinian state on all the 1967 occupied territories, may be concluded. Hamas further argued that these elections would be based on the achievements of the second *Intifadah*, and that they are necessary to abort the serious intrigues of the Organization’s many adversaries to suppress it. However, this rationale did not prevent Hamas from taking in consideration the mounting internal and external pressures. Thus, its election program neither included its traditional slogans that called for the destructions of Israel, nor focused on the option of the Jihad.²⁹ In response to the increasing controversy over the implications of Hamas’ participation in the elections, President Abu Mazin unprecedentedly declared that he will resign if the majority of the elected Legislative Council opposed Oslo Agreement.³⁰ The contested seats of the Legislative Council were divided into two equal halves, one for the proportional lists and the other for individual competition. Eleven lists contested the election, of which the most important were those of Fatah, Hamas and the Popular Front (*al-Jabha al-Sha’abiyyah*), in addition to other independent and semi-independent ones. As was the case in the municipal elections, Islamic Jihad boycotted these elections, either because of its commitment to its radical position towards the Authority and its institutions, or because of an increasing conviction that its support among the electorate was not strong enough to give the Organization an effective say in the

Council. However, it was generally assumed that most of Islamic Jihad's vote will go to Hamas list and candidates. The PA leadership, as well as Fatah and Hamas, called for a widespread popular participation, the maintainance of law and order and absolute transparency in these elections that were held on 25 January 2006. Hamas won 74 seats, in addition to 4 others garnered pro-Hamas independent candidates. Fatah, on its part, got 45 seats only, and 9 seats were won by four lists. These results had, no doubt, triggered a drastic political change in Palestinian arena.

Conclusion: The year 2005 was an eventful, and, to a large extent, a transitional year. Notwithstanding the continuation of the confrontation with the occupation forces, the perpetual Israeli aggression and the death of President 'Arafat, the Palestinian people succeeded to achieve a smooth transfer of power from a historical leader to a less popular and charismatic one. They also managed to expel the Israeli occupation forces from GS, and to avoid any widespread civil conflict in the region after the withdrawal. Indeed, there was a large measure of difference between the positions of the major political forces on the national issue, but this diversity did not hinder the conclusion of a minimum understanding to govern and control the relations between them. A dialogue between all political forces, attended by Abu Mazin and held in Cairo in the Spring of 2005, exhibited a strong desire for national consensus, and to secure conducive environment for the success of Abu Mazin's presidency. But Abu Mazin and the Egyptian government, the patron of the dialogue, were unable to persuade the Israeli to reciprocate to the Palestinian initiative of pacification.

Meanwhile, conflicts within Fatah, the cornerstone of the PA and the pioneer leader of the national struggle for decades, increased partly because of competition for power, but, more importantly, because of the Euro-American, (even Israeli) interference in these internal Fatah conflicts. However, they were further aggravated because of a general assumption, in Palestine as well as regionally and internationally, that Abu Mazin was too weak to handle that complicated stage in the Palestinian struggle, and that he will step down after the end of his first presidency. The drive of some of the second line Fatah leaders may, thus, be viewed as a preparatory step to succeed Abu Mazin. Since the various Fatah groups in al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades are not united under one leadership, the arms of the Brigades were sometimes misused by one group or another. This intensified fragmentation of Fatah led to a state of military anarchy, particularly in GS.

The outcome of the municipal elections and the subsequent unprecedented major defeat of Fatah in the legislative elections were instrumental in escalating the tension between Fatah and Hamas. Fatah was now challenged by a serious competitor, Hamas, in the municipal councils, and the latter's achievements in the councils that it dominated were too substantial to be ignored or denied. In the Legislative Council, Fatah found itself, for the first time since its control of the institutions as well as the leadership of the PLO in the 1960's, in the camp of the opposition. Though Fatah had been widely acclaimed for not violently reacting to Hamas victory, and for its acceptance of the results of the elections, it is too early to pass a judgment on its attitude towards the current Palestinian government. The fact that Fatah controls the various security organs and the bureaucracy of the PA may encourage it to create problems for Hamas government. If Abu Mazin and other leaders of Fatah seek cooperation with Israel and the concerned Arab and international powers to topple this government, the Palestinian scene will be extremely tense and complicated.

Not only will the intentions of Abu Mazin and Fatah be disclosed on the Palestinian internal affairs, but also on the issue of re-building and activating the PLO. In this connection, it is clearly noticeable that the post elections periods have revealed two contradictory positions. Abu Mazin, who gave little attention to the implementation of the national agreement on re-building the PLO, has apparently come to the conclusion that the current status of the PLO prevents Hamas from controlling the Legislative Council and the government. On the other hand, the Palestinian people and organizations showed a strong desire to re-build and activate the PLO in order to restore national unity, both inside and outside Palestine, and to strengthen the Palestinian stand towards the enemy. Consequently, Abu Mazin and Fatah will be obliged, especially after the results of the legislative elections, to initiate practical procedures for re-building and activating the PLO.

By giving Hamas a substantial majority in the Legislative Council, the Palestinians have shown a clear desire to have new options for the national struggle, other than that of Oslo Accords and its annexes. They, moreover, realized the close relationship between the changes in the Palestinian arena and the rising tendency among the Arab and Muslim peoples to place politics within an Islamic framework that have a clear program of resistance. Hamas' victory has posed a number of questions before all the concerned parties,³¹ but one should never forget that the national struggle has almost always been based on consensus. It is clear that the Palestinians do not only want to entrust Hamas with the leadership of their national

affairs, but also wish that this leadership operate harmoniously, particularly with Fatah. Thus, Fatah's refusal to cooperate with the new government will constitute a serious setback to this strong public tendency, and proves that it endeavors to topple Hamas government through means that do not relate in any way to the ballot boxes.

Finally, it is difficult to conceive the internal changes of the Palestinian situation in isolation from the aggravating crisis of the American policy in the Arab and Islamic regions.³² The increasing American failure to realize their goals in Iraq, the American confusion in handling Iran's nuclear file, and the firm resistance of Syria and Hizbullah to Euro-American pressures are all clear evidence of the comparative weakness of the external aggression on the region that had been continuing for years. If the American politics show in the next period more confusion and retreat, and the Arab-Islamic support for the Palestinian cause becomes paramount, the Palestinian scene may experience significant developments towards a complete departure from the Oslo line, the building of a new Palestinian unity on the basis of a new national struggling program, and the restoration of the Palestinian cause to its dual Arab-Islamic dimensions.

Endnotes:

- 1 Dr. Basheer Musa Nafi': Lecturer of Islamic History and Islamic Studies, at the University of London, Berbeck College.
- 2 On the establishment of Fatah and the Islamic background of most of its pioneer leaders, see: 'Abdullah Abu 'Izza, *Ma'a al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Duwal al-'Arabiyyah* (With the Islamic Movement In Arab Countries) (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1986), pp.59-60 and 75-88; Ziyad Abu 'Amr, *Usuwl al-Harakat al-Siyasiyyah fi Qitaa' Ghazzah 1948 – 1967* (The Origin of Political Movements in Gaza Strip 1948 – 1967) (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1987), pp.85-100; Salih 'Abd al-Jawad, "Dirasah fi Qiyadat Fatah," (A Study on Fatah Leadership), *Qadaya*, 4 August 1990, pp.30-32; and Basheer Musa Nafi', "Al-Islamiyyun al-Filistiniyyun wa al-Qadiyyah al-Filistiniyyah 1950-1980," (Palestinian Islamists and the Palestinian Issue 1950-1980), *Marasid*, 1,2(1999), p.58 and 59.
- 3 On the rise of Fatah, see: Helena Cobban, *The Palestinian Liberation Organization: People, Power, and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp.36-48; and Barry Rubin, *Revolution until Victory? The Politics and History of PLO* (Cambridge, Mss: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.1-23.
- 4 On the origin of Islamic Jihad and Hamas Movements, see: Ziyad Abu 'Amr, *Al-Harakah al-Islamiyyah fi al-Diffah al-Gharbiyyah wa Qitaa' Ghazzah* (The Islamic Movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip) (Acre: Dar al-Aswar, 1989); Iyad al-Barghuthi, *Al-Aslamah wa al-Siyasah fi al-Arabi al-Filistiniyyah al-Muhtallah* (Islamization and Policies in Palestinian Occupied Lands) (Al-Quds: al-Zahra' Center for Studies and Researches, 1990); 'Atif 'Udwan, *al-Sheikh Ahmad Yasin Hayatuh wa Jihaduh* (Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's Life and Strife) (Gaza: Islamic University, 1991); and Ahmad Yusuf, *Ahmad Yasin: Al-Zahirah al-Mu'jizah wa Usturat al-Tahaddi* (Ahmad Yasin: The Miraculous Phenomenon and the Legend Of Challenge) (Worth, Illinois (USA): International Center for Researches and Studies, n.d.).
- 5 On the crisis of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement prior to the Oslo Accords, see: Basheer Musa Nafi', "Al-Mashru' al-Watani al-Filistini Nahwa Marhalah Jadidah," (The Palestinian National Project towards a New Stage), *Qira'at Siyasiyyah*, 2 (1992).
- 6 The overwhelming majority of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims are considering these operations as "martyrdom operations" while most Israelis and western writers and media are considering them as "suicide operations". We used the word "self-immolation" in this report to be as neutral as possible. However, such terms may need more discussions.
- 7 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi* newspapers, London, 18 and 19 March 2005.
- 8 On the Israeli series of aggressions against the Palestinians, which included detention, assassinations, bombardment of civil targets and chasing members of Palestinian resistance forces, see: *al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 24 August 2005, *al-Hayat*, 25, 26, 27 and 28 September, 11, 25 and 28 October and 2 November 2005.
- 9 For example, it was recorded on 28 August that a Palestinian "self-immolation" attack took place in Bi'r al-sabi' (Beersheba) for which al-Quds Brigades and al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades declared their responsibility (*al-Hayat*, 29 August 2005), this operation was, in fact carried out by Hamas; also on 16 October, three Israelis were killed near the settlement of Ghush Etzion in an attack claimed by al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (*al-Hayat*, 17 October 2005); and moreover, on 26 October five Israelis were killed in an operation carried out by Islamic Jihad in al-Khudyrah (*al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 26 October 2005).
- 10 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 24, 25 and 26 September 2005.

- 11 See for instance, The outcomes of the International Conference for Supporting the Palestinian Reformation Process, held on 1 March 2005, in London (*al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 2 March 2005).
- 12 *Al-Hayat*, 8 January 2006.
- 13 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 15 April 2005.
- 14 *Al-Hayat*, 14 August 2005.
- 15 *Al-Ahram* newspaper, Cairo, 13 August 2005.
- 16 *Al-Hayat*, 31 August 2005.
- 17 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 23 and 28 August, 1, 4 and 21 September 2005.
- 18 *Al-Hayat*, 1 September 2005.
- 19 *Al-Hayat*, 6 September 2005.
- 20 *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 24, 25, 26 and 27 September 2005.
- 21 *Al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 3 and 4 October 2005.
- 22 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 8 September 2005.
- 23 *Al-Hayat*, 22 September 2005.
- 24 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 6 and 7 May 2005.
- 25 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 3 and 4 October 2005.
- 26 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 17 December 2005.
- 27 References used in the preparation of this table are: the United Nations Development Programme: <http://www.pogar.org/arabic/govnews/2005/issue2/palestine.html#m2a>, and a study: Middle East Studies Center (MESC), *Results of Municipal Elections in the Early Three Phases*, Amman, November 2005. Besides, *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 10 May 2005, *al-Khaleej* newspaper, United Arab Emirates, 1 October 2005, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, Palestine, 18 September 2005, and The Palestinian Information Center, 18 December 2005: <http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/palestoday/reports/report2005/entkhabat05/nataeej/nataeej.htm>
- 28 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 16 December 2005.
- 29 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 13 January 2005.
- 30 *Al-Hayat* and *al-Quds al-'Arabi*, 19 January 2006.
- 31 To discuss the implications of Hamas electoral rise, see the full report of International Crisis Group, which is neutral in general and oversees the Palestinian issue from a European point of view: International Crisis Group, "Enter Hamas: The Challenges of Political Integration," Middle East Report 49, 18 January 2006.
- 32 To have an academic overview on the inability of the United States to continue a foreign policy based on the principle of Bush, read the following: Robert Jarvis, "Why the Bush Doctrine Cannot Be Sustained," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.120, No.3 (Fall, 2005).

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005



This Palestinian Annual Strategic Report explains, discusses and analyses the events that took place during 2005, and pursues their developments. The primary objective of this Report is to assess the Palestinian situation on a regular basis through a rigorous study of its various aspects, i.e., internal political affairs, economic development, the educational system, demographic indicators, the Arab-Islamic and international positions and the Israeli attitudes and policies.

The chapters of this academic exercise were commissioned to distinguished meticulous specialists. These chapters were submitted to further scrutiny by another high caliber specialist in the Palestinian issue. Then, the two editors edited the texts and incorporated what may have been overlooked. Hence, it is important to note that this project is essentially a product of team work.



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10th Floor, Riviera Centre, Coniche al-Mazraa'h, Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: (961) 1 303 644 | Tel-Fax: (961) 1 303 643
Email: info@alzaytouna.net

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