

HAMAS DEFINED

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By

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ABSTRACT

On January 26, 2009, *Hamas* won a large majority in the new Palestinian Parliament, shocking the world and *Hamas* leadership. As the international community attempted to explain how the organization, classified by many as terrorists, could possibly have won the elections, *Hamas* members and supporters prepared for a “Palestinian renewal.”

This thesis defines *Hamas* as an organization by examining its history starting with its roots as a radical splinter group of the Egyptian *Ikhwan*. The first *Intifada* catalyzed *Hamas*' creation and directly impacted the organization's structure and operations. The organization's ideals, belief in *sharia* and practice of *da'wa* can also be traced back to the *Ikhwan*.

Once this analysis of the history and formation of *Hamas* is complete, a set of conclusions are presented that explain how this violent extremist group has achieved the degree of success that enabled it to win the 2006 elections and take its place in Palestinian politics.

The environment in which *Hamas* ran its campaign was ideal for the group's victory and the failings of Yasser Arafat and *al-Fatah* made *Hamas* an attractive alternative for Palestinians. The campaign strategy used by *Hamas* also aided its

success. The U.S. pressured Palestinian leadership to proceed with elections in spite of warnings from the Palestinian Authority that it was not strong enough to defeat *Hamas*. The organization's longstanding use of *da'wa* not only earned the group favorable recognition by Palestinians, but also established a system of servitude that allowed *Hamas* to expand its logistic network that bolstered its ability to successfully carry out attacks against Israel.

Many Palestinians are hopeful that *Hamas* will lead them to a free and independent state. The final resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, is no closer to fruition with *Hamas* in power. Regardless of the progress *Hamas* has made politically, its violent past defines the organization's present and will most likely continue to plague its future.

The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to Joanna who in addition to being my wife is also my best friend and most critical editor, my parents who have always supported me, and to Dr. Ralph Nurnberger who has always been an inspiring professor to me but most recently has become a patient mentor and good friend.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
CHAPTER I: 1917–1966	1
<i>Introduction.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Jerusalem.....</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>The Early Years.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Jamiat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen and Islamism.....</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Birth of Israel.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>The First Arab-Israeli War.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>The Suez Crisis.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Al-Fatah and the PLO.....</i>	<i>20</i>
CHAPTER II: 1967–1986.....	26
<i>The Six Day War.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>The War of 1973.....</i>	<i>30</i>

<i>Da'wa</i>	36
<i>The Camp David Accords</i>	40
<i>The War with Lebanon</i>	42
CHAPTER III: 1987–1993	47
<i>The Eruption</i>	47
<i>The First Meeting</i>	49
<i>The Intifada</i>	53
<i>The Charter</i>	58
<i>The Reorganization</i>	62
<i>The Gulf War</i>	63
<i>The Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades</i>	65
<i>The Oslo Accords</i>	67
CHAPTER IV: 1994–2004	69
<i>The Suicide Bomber</i>	69
<i>The Palestinian Authority</i>	72
<i>The al-Aqsa Intifada</i>	77
<i>The Disengagement</i>	81
CHAPTER V: 2005–2007	88
<i>The Collapse of al-Fatah</i>	88
<i>The Elections</i>	95
<i>The Aftermath</i>	97

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS.....	100
<i>Hamas' Strategy.....</i>	<i>101</i>
<i>The Ineffectiveness of Arafat and the PLO</i>	<i>104</i>
<i>The Exploitation of Da'wa.....</i>	<i>107</i>
<i>The U.S. Contribution</i>	<i>110</i>
<i>Concluding Thoughts</i>	<i>112</i>
BIBLIOGRAPHY	118

CHAPTER 1: 1917–1966

Introduction

Hamas, an organization that has been associated with violence and terror since the late 1980s, won a large majority in the new Palestinian Parliament on January 26, 2006, unseating the ruling *al-Fatah* party. As a result, ongoing peace negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli leadership have been severely complicated. Immediately after winning, *Hamas* stated that it had no intention of disarming its militant wing, a condition that Israel had set forth as an initial step towards negotiations. Moreover, the U.S., Israel and several other European Union (EU) members have designated *Hamas* a terrorist organization. Interactions with Palestinians are now hindered by policies that limit direct negotiations with terrorist groups. After the 2006 election, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that a political party could not “have one foot in politics and the other in terror. Our position on *Hamas* has therefore not changed.”¹

Most of the world (including, arguably, *Hamas*) was caught completely off-guard by the group’s victory in 2006, raising the question: how did this happen? Indeed, how does a group of individuals come together with the sole purpose of eradicating another group and then build enough credibility to win a democratically held election? Or, from an alternate perspective, how does a group of freedom fighters whose only goal has been to liberate its people from an occupational force *not* deserve the recognition

¹ Scott Wilson, Hamas Sweeps Palestinian Elections, Complicating Peace Efforts in Mideast, *Washington Post*, January 27, 2006, sec A, p. 1.

of the international community, especially when the organization participated in elections that were essentially forced upon them by the United States?

Between *Hamas*' inception in 1987 and February 2007, 1,443 Israelis have died, many at the hands of *Hamas* members.² Because of its prolonged use of violence, the organization is labeled by much of the international community as terrorists. *Hamas*, however, refers to itself as liberators of the Palestinian people in spite of its role in the deaths of innocent Israelis and Palestinians. Can this group be expected to lead the Palestinian people to achieve diplomatic solutions? Is *Hamas* capable of working with global leaders to improve a society that has long been considered one of the poorest and least developed in the world?

This thesis will explore how and why *Hamas* has achieved the degree of success it has and attempt to answer the questions posed above. To do this requires an examination of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the longtime struggle between Palestinians and Jews to coexist. Additionally, this thesis will identify key historical points that led up to the January 2006 election and will reveal the beliefs, activities and events that have shaped the group throughout its history. Finally, conclusions will be presented as to how *Hamas* came to power and whether they have the ability to separate from their violent past. Palestinian supporters of *Hamas* have had the argument that the group has the potential to become a nonviolent body of government. If that is the case, the question becomes whether *Hamas* has the *desire* to change.

² Joseph Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 207.

Jerusalem

The debate over who controls the land referred to as Palestine has been at the forefront of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Palestinians do not recognize the establishment of a Jewish state on land they consider to be theirs. Conversely, the Jewish people do not recognize the refugees' right to return to land that was captured during war. Further complicating these issues are claims by both parties over control of all or portions of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is called *Yerushalaim* in Hebrew (Aramaic for “city of peace”)³ and is referred to by most Arabs as *Bayt al-Maqdis* (House of Sanctity), or most commonly, *al-Quds al-sharif* (Noble Holy Place).⁴ The city plays a vital role in the history of region as Muslims, Jews, and Christians each claim it as an integral part of their religions.

Muslims consider Jerusalem the third holiest city to Islam (after Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia) and a *waqf*, or land endowed to Muslims by Allah.⁵ This designation is primarily due to the *al-Haram al-Sharif*, or “Noble Sanctuary” (referred to as the “Temple Mount” by Jews), a complex of buildings that includes both the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. The *al-Aqsa* Mosque is the second oldest mosque in Islam after the *Ka'ba* in Mecca. The Dome of the Rock marks the site of the *al-*

³ Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 14.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 15.

Isra'a al-Mi'raj, Prophet Mohammed's "Night Journey" from Mecca to Jerusalem where, according to the *Quran*, He ascended to the Seventh Heaven to meet God.⁶

This site is also sacred in the Jewish religion. It is the location where the Temple of Solomon was built and where one can still see remnants of the western retaining wall of the Temple Mount of King Herod the Great. This "Western Wall" is a hallowed place of prayer for Jews.⁷ The Temple Mount, according to Judaism, is also the site where God created Adam and Abraham passed God's test by demonstrating his willingness to sacrifice his own son.

Jerusalem also holds great significance to the Christian religion. Jesus and His apostles delivered sermons from the steps of the Temple Mount. Pontius Pilate sentenced Jesus to crucifixion from within the Temple Mount, and one can still walk the path Jesus took to His crucifixion and death in Jerusalem, the *Via Dolorosa*. Jerusalem is also home to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where Jesus is believed to have been buried and resurrected. This church is considered the holiest Christian site in the world.

Muslims, Jews and Christians disagree over the religion with the greatest claim to Jerusalem. The ownership of Jerusalem has been a constant source of dispute and a major obstacle to any peace in the region.⁸

⁶ Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement* (New York: Nation Books, 2007), 29.

⁷ Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006), 1.

⁸ James L. Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict: One Hundred Years of War – 2nd Ed.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4.

The Early Years

The land known today as Israel and Palestine had been ruled by the Turkish Ottoman Empire since the 1500s. When the Ottoman Empire supported Germany during World War I, Britain sought to defeat the Turks and expand its presence in the region. Soon after the war began, Britain undertook the complicated task of recruiting allies to attack and defeat the Turkish forces. In order to accomplish this, British leaders made conflicting promises to Arabs, Jews and the French in return for their support against the Ottomans.

The first of these agreements was made through the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence in July 1915. Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner for Egypt, pledged Britain's support for Arab independence to Hussein Ibn Ali, the *Sherif* of Mecca, the most prominent and influential Arab leader at the time. McMahon promised Arab independence in former Ottoman Arab provinces if the Arabs supported Britain in the war against the Turks. This agreement, however, did not mention Palestine explicitly.⁹

At virtually the same time Britain was making promises to Hussein and the Arabs, Britain also negotiated a secret agreement with France covering the future of essentially the same areas. The Sykes-Picot Agreement was signed by Britain and France on May 16, 1916. It stipulated that after the war, the Ottoman territory in the Middle East would be divided into zones to be controlled by the British or French.

⁹ Ian J. Bickerton and Carla L. Klausner, *The History of the Arab-Israel Conflict – 5th Ed.* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson Education, Inc.) 35-37.

This agreement directly contradicted the terms of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, which allocated most of this territory to be under the control of *Sherif Hussein* and the Hashemites.¹⁰

The British complicated matters further when they made a third pledge for the eventual control of the same lands. British leaders believed that American Jews might be able to influence U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to enter the war on the British side. The British also hoped that gaining the support of world Jewry might help to keep Russia in the war. Other British leaders also hoped that a Jewish homeland in Palestine might help secure British control over the Suez Canal and its surrounding areas.

Thus, on November 2, 1917, British Foreign Minister Arthur Balfour sent a letter to Edmond Rothschild, a Jewish financier and head of the British Zionist Organization, which committed Britain to work towards “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.”¹¹ The “Balfour Declaration” led Jews to believe that Palestine would be the site of their national home if they supported Britain.

When the Ottoman Empire finally collapsed in 1917, the Arabs and Jews each believed they would control all or at least parts of Palestine in order to establish their independent nation. In actuality, the post-war settlement eventually resembled the Sykes-Picot Agreement, with the British in control of Palestine and Iraq, while the

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict*, 81.

French controlled Syria and Lebanon.¹² Britain first sought to assist Hussein's son, Feisal, to become king in Syria, but he was forced to leave after a French supported coup drove him out. In an attempt to resolve a possible revolt by the Arabs being orchestrated by Hussein's other son, Abdullah, the British established Feisal as constitutional monarch in Iraq. Britain also "carved out" of the Palestine mandate a new region east of the Jordan River to be named "Transjordan" and ruled by Abdullah.¹³ The Council of the League of Nations ratified the change of borders in July 1922.¹⁴

Jamiat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen and Islamism

An Egyptian schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna founded a religious and political organization, *Jamiat al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* (The Muslim Brotherhood), in 1928 in the Egyptian town of Ismailiya.¹⁵ Al-Banna used religious rhetoric and called for political violence to build the perfect Islamic society.¹⁶ As a child, he had been exposed to radical interpretations of Islam at his local mosque. As an adolescent, he traveled to Cairo to study for four years. While there, he continued to associate himself with followers of radical Islam. During his time in Cairo, al-Banna witnessed

¹² Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 20.

¹⁶ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 29.

the “westernization” of Islamic culture. He became convinced that his religion’s decline was a direct result of secular western influence. Al-Banna and a group of similar-minded individuals in Egypt grew increasingly concerned that westernization would eventually affect the entire Middle East. They established *Jamait al-Ikhwan al-Muslimeen* (or simply, “the *Ikhwan*”) in Egypt in 1928 to prevent this from happening.¹⁷

In addition to limiting the western influence on Muslim people, the *Ikhwan* also sought to establish a truly Islamic state within each country and eventually unite these individual Islamic states into one single state representing the *umma*, or Muslim nation.¹⁸ The single-state theory also feeds into the ultimate goal of radical Muslims, or *Islamists*, for a *caliphate* (global Islamic order) that would be controlled by a single *caliph* and one day rule the world.¹⁹ This belief is popular among many *Islamist* groups and is bolstered by the strict interpretations of the *Quran*.

In order to accomplish its goals, the *Ikhwan* began to educate its followers and other members of the Islamic community on the teachings of the *Quran* and their absolutist interpretations of how an Islamic society should behave. The *Ikhwan* and other strict Islamists referred to the “original precepts” of the *Quran*,²⁰ which included violence as an effective method of preserving their religion and punishing nonbelievers.

¹⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 18.

¹⁸ Hroub, *Hamas*, 7.

¹⁹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 5.

²⁰ Levitt, *Hamas*, 20.

This belief is typical among radical Islamist movements and is especially commonplace in the *Salafi* strain of *Sunni* Islam. *Salafiyya* is a school within *Sunni* Islam that believes Islam has been corrupted by idolatry. It is dedicated to returning its religion to its purist form, which they believe was practiced only in the time of the Prophet.²¹ Followers of *Salafiyya* are known for rejecting the westernization of society, modern developments in society, and exhibiting contempt for any non-Muslim. They traditionally adhere to the strictest of interpretations of the *Quran*. *Salifis* interpret the *Quran*, in its most stringent form, to require the oppression of women and harsh punishment for any violations of the Islamic way of life.²²

The concept of *jihad* is an often misinterpreted and significant aspect of Islamist beliefs. “*Jihad*” literally means “struggle,”²³ but the term carries dual interpretations. The non-violent meaning of *jihad* refers to an individual’s personal struggle for virtue and morality, essentially striving to follow God’s will.²⁴ For the majority of Muslims, this is the context in which *jihad* is interpreted and practiced.

According to John Esposito, a leading scholar on Islam, *jihad* can also mean “fighting injustice and oppression, spreading and defending Islam, and creating a just society through preaching, teaching, and if necessary, armed struggle or holy war.”²⁵

²¹ Ibid., 16.

²² John L. Esposito, “Jihad: Holy or Unholy War?” *Alliance of Civilizations* http://www.unaoc.org/repository/Esposito_Jihad_Holy_Unholy.pdf (accessed April 2, 2009).

²³ Levitt, *Hamas*, 8-9.

²⁴ Ibid.

More fundamental Islamists adhere to this interpretation of *jihad*, which has been at the root of many historical and contemporary terrorist organizations. Islamists believe “the duty of the faithful Muslim is to revive Islam to transform the *jahili* (immoral, pre-Islamic) society through militant *jihad*.”²⁶ The concept of militant *jihad* as it relates to Islamism is vital in understanding the *Ikhwan* as it is one of the primary beliefs of the organization.

The Birth of Israel

After World War II, Jews were left with few options. Jewish survivors of the Holocaust could not return to their homes due to the extensive destruction from the war by the Nazis. Without a home, the Jewish survivors were referred to as “Displaced Persons” and continued to face strong anti-Semitism even when the war ended. The American, British and Soviet zones in former Nazi-occupied territories became the only option in which Jewish survivors could relocate immediately following the war.²⁷ Between July and September 1946, 90,000 Jews entered American zones in Germany and Austria, and by the end of 1946, over 250,000 Jews were living in “Displaced Persons” camps in West Germany.²⁸

Americans and the rest of the world were shocked by the horror of concentration camps and abhorrent treatment of the Jews. While the U.S. attempted to help, it was

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 18.

²⁷ Ibid., 74.

²⁸ Ibid., 79.

difficult to provide food and clothes to all of the Jews coming to their zones for refuge. Countless Jews were sent to relocation camps or forced to remain in the same camps where they had previously been held as prisoners during the war.²⁹

Jews continued to campaign for their own homeland and remained focused on the Jewish area of Palestine as the ideal location. The Arabs were convinced that a permanent majority in a united Arab state was the only acceptable arrangement for the land and reiterated this to the British in October 1946. The Jewish representatives preferred the plan that would partition the territory so each group would have its own land. The Arabs vehemently rejected this proposal.³⁰

At the same time, the Egyptian *Ikhwan* continued to expand. Islamists from Egypt established the Palestinian *Ikhwan* by initially opening a few local branches in Gaza, and then throughout Palestine. The Palestinian *Ikhwan* set up its central office in Jerusalem on May 6, 1946³¹ and expanded the group's network to approximately 25 branches and from 12,000 to 20,000 members throughout the British Mandate.³² The Palestinian *Ikhwan* became an emerging Arab voice in the debate with the Jews over the future of Palestine and continued to push for an Arab state, refusing to concede any land to the Jews.

²⁹ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 74.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

³¹ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: A History From Within* (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2007), 5.

³² Levitt, *Hamas*, 20.

The British, still the controlling authority of the Mandate in January 1947, were having an increasingly difficult time ruling the Palestinian Mandate due to their own declining economy following World War II.³³ In January 1947, Britain announced the unresolved issue of land would be turned over to the newly established United Nations (UN), which met in April 1947 to study the issue.³⁴ The UN General Assembly established the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), consisting of representatives from eleven nations tasked with recommending an appropriate course of action to resolve the dispute.³⁵ UNSCOP drew up plans to partition Palestine which consisted of a “crisscross territorial arrangement with kissing points” between the proposed Arab and Jewish states.³⁶ While virtually all Arabs rejected this proposal, a majority of Jews in Palestine were willing to accept this plan.

In August 1947, UNSCOP officially presented its recommendations to terminate the previously established mandates and instead create separate Arab and Jewish states.³⁷ Arab representatives rejected the resolution because it recognized the Arabs’ and Jews’ claims to land ownership equally. The Arabs rejected the concept of any Jewish state in Palestine. They supported their contention with the fact that a majority of Jews had

³³ Hroub, *Hamas*, 4.

³⁴ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 80.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Bernard Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians: Why Do They Fight? Can They Stop? – 3rd Ed.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 118.

³⁷ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 81.

lived in Palestine for less than thirty years while Arabs had lived on the same land for several hundred years.³⁸ Since they had been occupying the land longer than Jews, the Arabs felt entitled to full ownership.

Arab leaders were further outraged because they concluded that the resolution established the Jewish property on what was deemed superior land with rich resources and a lengthy coastline. The partition plan called for 54% of Palestine to become a state inhabited by the 600,000 Jews living there at the time. The remaining 46% of the land, much of which was considered to be barren desert, was relegated to the 1.4 million Arab Palestinian inhabitants.³⁹ Protests notwithstanding, the UN General Assembly voted in favor of UN Resolution 181 on November 29, 1947, which was designed to partition Palestine and set the stage for the eventuality of a Jewish and an Arab state.⁴⁰

The First Arab–Israeli War

The day following the passage of UN Resolution 181, a civil war broke out between Jews and Arabs living in Palestine. The fighting was extremely brutal, and both sides were responsible for horrific acts of violence. The war lasted until the state of Israel was officially proclaimed on May 14, 1948. The Arab community realized the Palestinians were not powerful enough to drive out the Jews without assistance. The

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Hroub, *Hamas*, 4.

⁴⁰ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 83-85.

day after the birth of Israel, Arab armies entered Palestine, and the First Arab-Israeli War officially commenced. The Arabs invaded with the intention of driving out the Jews and establishing an Arab state. The Arab Legion, Egyptian army, Lebanese and Iraqis all entered Palestine and the Syrians posted at the border to prevent any fleeing Jews from entering their land.⁴¹ The *Ikhwan* organizations in Palestine, Jordan and Syria played a critical role in the war,⁴² providing a strong complement to the invading armies. In addition, hundreds of volunteers were sent by the Egyptian *Ikhwan* to fight alongside the Egyptian army.⁴³

The Arab armies advanced to within twenty miles of Tel Aviv before finally being defeated by the Israelis in January 1949. The Arab armies had, until the war, been mostly ceremonial in their duties and had not been battle tested. The result of the war, nevertheless, was completely unexpected by the invading Arab armies. The Jewish people not only defended themselves against the invaders, but actually gained more land than was originally prescribed in UN Resolution 181. The Jews now occupied more than two-thirds of Palestine west of the Jordan River, including parts of Jerusalem.⁴⁴

As a result of armistice agreements signed with Israel in 1949, the Egyptians retained control of the Gaza Strip, and Syria controlled the Golan Heights. The

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁴² Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 18.

⁴³ Hroub, *Hamas*, 9.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

Jordanians occupied Judea and Samaria which were later named the “West Bank” because it is on the west side of the Jordan River. Additionally, Jordan controlled East Jerusalem, which is where *al-Haram al-Sharif* is located. The Palestinians, who had fought to establish dominance in all of Palestine, were left with no land of their own. Because of the disastrous results for Arabs, they have always referred to the war as the *Nakba* (catastrophe).⁴⁵

The defeat by the Israelis not only caused deep humiliation throughout the Arab world and further resentment towards the Jewish people, but also had a devastating effect on Palestinian society.⁴⁶ The war turned 750,000⁴⁷ Palestinians into refugees and rendered them homeless.⁴⁸ These Palestinians migrated to Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,⁴⁹ where they established refugee camps, many of which still exist today. This created obvious separations between refugees and non-refugees in the Palestinian community.⁵⁰ Many of these refugees were a part of the Palestinian *Ikhwan*. Once they were forced to relocate, these individuals joined neighboring branches, often within refugee camps.

⁴⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 53.

⁴⁶ Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians*, 56.

⁴⁷ This number is debated frequently and differs according to the source.

⁴⁸ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 97.

⁴⁹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 53.

⁵⁰ Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians*, 56.

The new borders created by the Israeli victory resulted in the separation of the *Ikhwan* as they no longer had the connectivity between members in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The branches that were located within the state of Israel dissolved when the “mass exodus” of refugees left the region.⁵¹ The members of the *Ikhwan* engaged in immediate resistance to the new state but were hampered by this logistical separation. The Islamist movement gained enough support in the Gaza Strip to establish its own branch of the *Ikhwan* and organized itself as a formidable opponent to its enemies. The group immediately placed Egypt in its sights.⁵²

The *Ikhwan* blamed the Egyptian government for the Israeli victory⁵³ and began to retaliate within the Gaza Strip. Its parent organization, the Egyptian *Ikhwan*, also began to retaliate by carrying out terrorist acts within Egypt which led to a temporary ban of the movement, but it was legalized again as a purely religious organization.⁵⁴ As the organization grew under the umbrella of religion, it continued to orchestrate attacks on the Egyptian government and spread the work of Islamism.

The Egyptian government became increasingly wary of the *Ikhwan* and its desire for Egypt to be governed by *sharia* (Islamic law).⁵⁵ When a member of the *Ikhwan* assassinated the Egyptian Prime Minister in December, 1949, the regime responded by

⁵¹ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 26-28.

⁵² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 16.

⁵³ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 18.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

assassinating the organization's founder, al-Banna, on February 12, 1949. This began a sweeping operation conducted by the Egyptians to imprison or execute thousands of *Ikhwan* members in the early 1950s.⁵⁶ The organization's infrastructure was devastated, and the group was outlawed once more.⁵⁷

Islamism and the *Ikhwan* appealed to a great number of Arabs, but as Egypt continued to target members, the movement became increasingly less popular. By 1954, the organization had been suppressed to the point of near total collapse, so the *Ikhwan* decided to cease all violent resistance activities.⁵⁸

The Suez Crisis

In 1954, the U.S. sought to expand its network of allies bordering the Soviet Union by providing military assistance to Iraq. Shortly thereafter, Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and Great Britain signed a mutual cooperation agreement. This agreement, the Baghdad Pact of 1955, was signed without consulting or even including the Arab League, which meant Saudi Arabia and Egypt were excluded from the agreement. Although the U.S. played a major role in the design and execution of the Baghdad Pact, they did not sign as a full member of the pact, believing this action would weaken Saudi relationships and be detrimental to any efforts to build a relationship with Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 3.

⁵⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 19.

⁵⁸ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 26-28.

⁵⁹ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 120.

Nasser was furious that he had been left out. He subsequently reached out to the Soviet Union for military assistance which he claimed was necessary to stabilize the region given the U.S.' assistance to Iraq and the strength of the Baghdad Pact. The Soviets, seizing this opportunity to challenge the U.S. presence and influence, willingly sold approximately USD \$400 million worth of weapons, tanks and planes to Egypt and immediately established itself as a major player in the region.⁶⁰

To counter the USSR, the U.S. offered to loan money to Nasser to build a dam on the Nile River at Aswan, a project Nasser greatly needed to rescue his failing economy.⁶¹ Regardless, Nasser was hesitant and worried that accepting the loan would force him to cooperate with the West and their plans for the Middle East. When the U.S. grew impatient with Nasser and withdrew the offer, the Egyptian leader announced that he would nationalize the Suez Canal to pay for the dam since the U.S. had broken its promise to finance the project.

The British, French and Israelis each had vested interests confronting Nasser. The Suez Canal was vital to British oil interests in the Persian Gulf. France was facing a potential rebellion in Algeria, which Nasser supported through propaganda and arms shipments.⁶² Along with the Suez Canal, Nasser also closed the Gulf of Aqaba to any ships bound for Israel. The Gulf of Aqaba was a major shipping lane for Israel and its

⁶⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁶¹ Ibid., 122.

⁶² Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 200.

closure had a significant impact on the country's ability to import goods. Israel was also worried about the growing number of arms in neighboring countries. The Baghdad Pact and Egyptian-Soviet arms purchase only intensified the pressure Israel felt to take action. Britain, France and Israel joined forces to confront Nasser.

On October 29, 1956, Israel attacked Egypt in the Sinai, and Great Britain and France issued a warning to Nasser to withdraw from the Suez Canal.⁶³ When Nasser rebuffed the ultimatum, France and Britain attacked Egypt from the west. The Soviets, meanwhile, placed enormous pressure on U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower to use his influence over France and Britain to force the countries to stop attacking Egypt. Eisenhower was in the midst of the presidential election and had no interest in a conflict with the Soviet Union. The U.S. also required a semblance of stability in the Middle East to continue the supply of oil upon which it had become dependent. Eisenhower publicly stated that the attacks against Egypt were a "gross violation of international law,"⁶⁴ and he convinced Britain to agree to a cease-fire, which was signed on November 6, 1956.⁶⁵ France and Israel reluctantly followed.

Israel had pushed its forces all the way to the Suez Canal, but was forced to return any land captured during the invasion. The war resulted in thousands of deaths, but the regional borders did not change. Britain and France lost any credibility they had in the

⁶³ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 126.

⁶⁴ Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 121.

⁶⁵ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 127.

Middle East, and the U.S. and USSR were seen as the two major influencing powers in the region. A UN peacekeeping force known as the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was placed in the Sinai Peninsula to serve as a “trip-wire” and prevent further conflict between Egypt and Israel. Both countries were well aware that if they attacked each other through UN peacekeeping forces, there would be considerable backlash from the global community.

After the war, the *Ikhwan* reiterated its policy to stop violent resistance. This change was implemented across all branches throughout the movement and was designed to give the group time to reorganize and reenergize. Instead, the policy paved the way for another movement to sprout roots.

Al-Fatah and the PLO

Not all members of the *Ikhwan* were pleased with the parent organization’s decision to renounce violent resistance efforts. This decision paved the way for activists to leave the group in order to create their own movements that were more in line with their goals of fighting the Jews and anyone else who was an obstacle to the *caliphate* and the creation of an independent Arab state where Israel was established.

One of these activists was a Palestinian student named Yasser Arafat. Arafat was born in Jerusalem (according to his own account) or Cairo in 1929.⁶⁶ He studied in Cairo where he developed his approach to Palestinian liberation that would guide him through his tenure as the leader of the movement for independence. As a student,

⁶⁶ Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict*, 199.

Arafat founded the student union, *Ittihad Talabat Filastin* (The Union of Palestinian Students).⁶⁷ He realized that problems within the liberation cause stemmed from the misplaced trust in other Arab regimes. Arafat reasoned that these regimes could not be relied on because he believed they were not only corrupt, but that they would act to protect their own interests before ever helping the Palestinians. He concluded that the only way to guarantee a free and independent state for Palestinians would be through armed resistance. Arafat had fought alongside the *Ikhwan* (although he never officially joined) during the first Arab-Israeli War,⁶⁸ but in 1958, Arafat joined forces with others who had also left the *Ikhwan* and established his own group, *al-Fatah*.

Al-Fatah (meaning “conquest”) is an acronym whose letters in reverse stand for *Harakat al-Tahir al-Falastini*, or “Movement for the Liberation of Palestine.”⁶⁹ HATAF also means “death”⁷⁰ on its own, but the group decided to reverse the order to give it a *Quranic* meaning.”⁷¹

Al-Fatah established itself as a more secular alternative to the *Ikhwan* that would carry on the armed resistance, concentrating all of its efforts on defeating Israel and establishing a Palestinian state.⁷² This idea was particularly attractive to members of

⁶⁷ Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 180.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 141.

⁷⁰ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 17.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

the *Ikhwan* who wanted to continue the struggle with violence, but were afraid of being linked to the *Ikhwan* and therefore subject to punishment by the Nasser regime. As *al-Fatah* grew in strength, the *Ikhwan* began to lose many of its members.

Another organization was soon created to carry on the resistance against Israel. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) was established in 1964. It included a military wing of the PLO called the Palestinian Liberation Army (PLA). The creation of the PLO was an outcome from an Arab Summit meeting held at the Arab League Headquarters in Cairo. With the first Arab-Israel War in mind, the Arab League felt it was still unable to militarily defeat Israel and left the responsibility of creating an organization that would lead the effort to liberate Palestine to the Palestinians themselves.⁷³ The PLO had the credibility and backing it needed to begin recruitment and mobilization for the conflict. The official mission of the PLO was to carry out operations that would liberate Palestine, specifically identifying “armed struggle” as the preferred method.⁷⁴

Al-Fatah, meanwhile, had already existed for several years when, on January 3, 1965, members of the group launched its first military operation. *Al-Fatah* soldiers attempted to sabotage the Israeli water system, but a worker found the explosives before they could be detonated, and the commandos were arrested when they attempted

⁷³ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 141.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

to cross back into Jordan.⁷⁵ The failed operation became characteristic of early *al-Fatah* led activity. The group became a voice within the Palestinian community, and its popularity rapidly increased. However, it lacked the experience and the extensive network required to conduct organized combative operations. *Al-Fatah* utilized Syria as a launching pad and an operational base, but took advantage of the Jordanian border with Israel to carry out most attacks due to its ease in crossing.⁷⁶

Recognizing *al-Fatah*'s strengths in recruitment and organization and its failings in operations, the PLO leadership signed an agreement in 1966 that established "full coordination" between the PLO and *al-Fatah*.⁷⁷ This merger boosted membership, networking ability and the overall effectiveness of each group. It also came at an opportune time for the Arab-nationalists as more individuals distanced themselves from the *Ikhwan* in Egypt, Palestine and elsewhere.⁷⁸

There was good reason for individuals to disassociate from the *Ikhwan* as Nasser sustained his attacks on the group throughout 1966. He continued to arrest and execute anyone engaged in Islamic politics and those who could be linked to the group. Among those who were executed in 1966 was Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian political speaker and writer whose work was adopted by several Islamist supporters and groups,

⁷⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 17.

⁷⁶ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 142.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁸ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 17.

including the *Ikhwan*.⁷⁹ After returning from the U.S. in 1949 where he had been studying, Qutb proclaimed the era in which he lived (the twentieth century) to be one of *jahiliyya* (ignorance and darkness) due to the Muslim world's lack of adherence to *sharia*.⁸⁰ Qutb popularized the notion of *jahiliyya*, and through his writings and school of thought, exerted considerable influence over what would later become the primary beliefs of the *Ikhwan*. He was an avid proponent of violent revolution as a means to restore Islam to its purist form and believed "the duty of the faithful Muslim is to revive Islam to transform the *jahili* (immoral, pre-Islamic) society through militant *jihād*."⁸¹

Another key Islamist targeted by Nasser that year was *Sheikh Ahmad Yassin*. Yassin's father died when he was three years old, and Yassin grew up in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. After the First Arab-Israeli War, a twelve year old Yassin and his mother were forced to leave their village.⁸² When Yassin was sixteen years old, he injured his spinal cord while wrestling a friend and became a quadriplegic.⁸³

After finishing school, Yassin taught Arabic to young Palestinian boys at a Gaza school so he could save enough money to attend a university in Cairo. While he was primarily a language teacher, Yassin also began to teach the boys about Islam and

⁷⁹ Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 29.

⁸⁰ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 14.

⁸¹ Levitt, *Hamas*, 18.

⁸² Tamimi, *Hamas*, 15.

⁸³ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 16

encouraged them to attend mosques twice a week, direction that was seen by some as excessive for children in elementary school.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, Yassin continued to influence the children he taught and those who attended the mosques where he also began to speak and promote Islamism. He promoted the idea that in order to contribute to the “growth of the Islamic movement in Palestine...students must have an Islamic education and understand the meaning of *jihad*.”⁸⁵

Yassin traveled to Cairo to take the entrance exam for university in December 1965, where he was immediately arrested. He was accused of being a member of the *Ikhwan* and for conspiring to overthrow Nasser, an accusation Yassin vehemently denied.⁸⁶ Following his arrest, Yassin remained in prison for two weeks, but his poor health condition compounded by a general lack of evidence, resulted in his release on the condition that he would refrain from public speaking.⁸⁷ While he claimed that he had not been previously affiliated with the *Ikhwan*, upon his return from Cairo he formally joined the group and embarked on his mission as spiritual leader for the resistance.

At the end of 1966, the PLO and *al-Fatah* had established themselves as the collective face of Palestinian resistance. Yasser Arafat led the groups and roused the Palestinians to confront the Israelis at every opportunity. Meanwhile, the *Ikhwan* continued to silently grow in strength and support.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 16.

⁸⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 17.

CHAPTER 2: 1967–1986

The Six Day War

The Soviet Union and Egypt, building on their alliance that began during the 1956 war, signed a defense pact in late 1966. For reasons still not entirely known, the Soviets fed Egypt false information in May 1967 to the effect that Israelis were amassing large numbers of troops on the Syrian border and were preparing an offensive.¹ The Israelis vehemently denied this accusation. Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol offered to take Soviet representatives to the areas where the USSR claimed the troops were mobilizing to prove that no mobilization was occurring. The Soviets refused the offer, instead reaffirming their accusation to Nasser, who in turn relayed the information to Syria.

Although the Syrians and Egyptians in all likelihood knew the information provided by the Soviets was false, it provided a justification to Nasser who was eager to utilize in order to prepare for a war with Israel. He had been looking for a reason to expel the UN peacekeepers from the Sinai and reengage military operations against Israel. Nasser met with the Soviets to discuss a course of action and felt confident that the USSR would support Egypt in the event of a war.

On May 14, 1967, Egypt's army crossed the Suez into Sinai to mobilize for war. Their maneuvers were complemented on Israel's other borders when the armies of

¹ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 144.

Syria, Jordan and Iraq also mobilized in preparation for a potential conflict.² Nasser next demanded UNEF leave the Sinai so he could begin positioning his armies closer to the Israeli border. UN Secretary General U Thant complied with Nasser's demands and ordered UNEF to begin a withdrawal from the Sinai, a move heavily criticized by the rest of the international community which saw Nasser's request as nothing more than a first move towards war. On May 23, 1967, Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran, which eliminated Israel's ability to trade from the South and essentially brought its economy to a standstill.

Israel was increasingly being forced to make a decision as the aggressive positioning of enemy troops around its borders expanded. While Israel had been in contact with the U.S. during the escalating tension, Israeli leaders made a plea to the international community for diplomatic assistance. The U.S. offered assistance under the condition that Israel would not attack first. Israel ascertained that waiting to be attacked would result in their forces being overwhelmed and a sure defeat. A decision was made to attack first or face extinction. They were unaware that the USSR had made a similar agreement with Nasser to provide assistance to Egypt in the war as long as Israel attacked first.

On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a preemptive strike and destroyed almost the entire Egyptian air force while its planes were still on the ground, followed by a massive attack against the unprotected ground troops. Syria attacked Israel from the north until Israel countered with a response that did not stop until the Israelis had

² Ibid.

captured the Golan Heights.³ The Israelis reached out to King Hussein and insisted that they would not attack Jordan unless they were attacked first. The Jordanians, for their part, were duped by the Egyptians who told them that they were defeating the Israelis in the south. Hussein ordered his forces to join the war, although the threats by Nasser to Hussein to join Egypt in the war or face severe consequences made the deception nearly irrelevant. The Israelis easily defeated Hussein's army only two days after the start of the war and drove them out of the city that had been under Jordanian rule since 1949.⁴

The entire war was over by June 10, 1967, six days after it had begun. As a result of the Six-Day War, Israel seized control of the Gaza Strip and Sinai from Egypt, the Old City of Jerusalem and the entire West Bank from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.⁵ Indeed, the mass of territory that the Arabs controlled after the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948 now belonged to Israel.⁶ Israel was three times larger in size than before the war. Its population increased by the 1.3 million Palestinians who resided in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, now under Israeli control.⁷

While the main combative efforts of the war ended in June 1967, there were violent eruptions that continued to plague the territories as the Arabs sought to regain captured

³ Ibid., 146.

⁴ Ibid., 145.

⁵ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 17-18.

⁶ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 18.

⁷ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 147.

land. The Palestinians and Israelis faced the same problem in resolving the war as they had after the first Arab-Israeli War. Since the two sides did not communicate, there were no direct talks towards achieving a cease-fire. The UN was called upon to formulate a diplomatic solution. After extensive negotiations, the UN General Assembly adopted UN Resolution 242, which established the principal of achieving peace in the region in exchange for returning captured land. There were, however, some major problems with this resolution. The first issue revolved around the wording of the resolution. The language did not specify which should come first, peace or the return of land. Further, Israel was directed to return occupied territories but not “the occupied territories,” and thus the specific territories to be returned were open to interpretation.⁸ The second problem with the resolution was the lack of oversight for implementation. There was nothing in Resolution 242 that stipulated the methods to be used to ensure compliance with the provisions (peace and land return).⁹

The Resolution was therefore not enforced, and the conflict continued. After the war, a multitude of Palestinian armed splinter groups emerged, all of which fell under the authority, or at least guidance, of the PLO.¹⁰ The PLO had been carrying out military operations against the Israeli military and settlements that were being built on newly acquired land. While the PLO and *al-Fatah* were enjoying their status as the lead symbols of resistance, an opportunity arose for the Palestinian *Ikhwan* to reunite

⁸ Ibid., 149.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 51.

especially as both the West Bank and Gaza were now under Israeli control.¹¹ They began to slowly gain strength after the Six-Day War and waited for their chance to reemerge and present themselves to the Palestinian people.

The War of 1973

The 1967 defeat of the Arabs set the stage for Arafat and the PLO to assume leadership roles within the Palestinian community. This was a drastic change from the view prior to the war that all hope for independence would come by following the leadership of Arab states. To bolster the organization, a decision was made in 1968 to give control of the PLO to Yasser Arafat who quickly declared that only a Palestinian revolutionary movement could “achieve the goal of liberating Palestine.”¹² Arafat’s first move as head of the PLO was to reorganize the organization under the leadership of *al-Fatah*.

The move to bring the nationalist movement (*al-Fatah*) to the forefront of the liberation cause had a dual effect. It enabled the nationalists to gain momentum and take advantage of the emotive Palestinian community which was still reeling from the humiliating defeat at the hands of the Israelis. The growth in membership allowed the PLO to not only continue attacking Israel from Jordan and Syria, where they had established safe havens, but also from within the Gaza Strip.¹³ Bringing the PLO and *al-Fatah* together also left them vulnerable to scrutiny and criticism. Arab nationalism

¹¹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 16.

¹³ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 29.

was discredited by some Palestinians after the 1967 war, opening the door for Islamism and the Palestinian *Ikhwan* to reemerge.¹⁴ Palestinians began to question the Arab nationalists' effectiveness. The reputation of the PLO and *al-Fatah* quickly deteriorated in some circles and both organizations were seen by emerging Islamists as a scapegoat and "panacea for the Arab world's failings."¹⁵ Many of those who left the *Ikhwan* returned. The organization also began to target young men and teenagers and subsequently saw an impressive increase in their ranks from these groups.¹⁶ In fact, after the war, most new recruits to the Palestinian *Ikhwan* came from the student community.¹⁷ An additional boost in membership to the Palestinian *Ikhwan* came from moderate Muslims who were looking for answers that could explain the Arabs' defeat in the war.¹⁸

The Palestinian *Ikhwan* was further strengthened when they decided to unite the two separate branches in Gaza and the West Bank under one umbrella and also include the Jordanian branch in its reorganization.¹⁹ This enabled the group to fall under one sovereign power and spread the authority of the Palestinian *Ikhwan* throughout the territories. The Six-Day War of 1967 significantly changed the political opportunity

¹⁴ Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 16.

¹⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 14.

¹⁹ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 34.

structure facing the Palestinian Brotherhood since the uniting of Gaza and the West Bank under the Israeli state facilitated the emergence of an indigenous territories-wide Palestinian leadership. With a consolidation of branches, however, the *Ikhwan* was forced to abandon its low profile and began to evolve into more of an activist group.²⁰ They were looking to rebuild momentum and inspire passion among Palestinians who were searching for direction after the failed war. When this situation presented itself to the leadership of the *Ikhwan*, they decided to reignite the Islamist movement in Palestine.

The *Ikhwan* increased its rhetoric in the occupied territories, spreading its belief that the loss of land after the 1967 war was “Allah’s punishment for Muslim sinners.”²¹ As a result, the Palestinian *Ikhwan* remained consistent with its Egyptian parent organization’s Islamist views and furthered the resistance cause in Palestine. The message attracted Muslims who wanted to return to their faith and also appealed to those with more radical views who sought to reclaim Palestine. The Palestinian *Ikhwan* remained absent from operations against Israel, but began a massive mobilization and devoted extensive time to recruiting and training efforts.

Concurrently, the PLO continued its attack on all who stood in the way of its quest to liberate Palestine. In 1969, the Palestinian National Committee (PNC) elected its

²⁰ Levitt, *Hamas*, 21.

²¹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 15.

leader Yasser Arafat as chairman of the executive committee.²² Arafat had become the supreme voice and face of the Palestinian cause to the international community. He brought together the political (*al-Fatah*), military (PLO/PLA) and now the national credibility (PNC) to represent the resistance movement.

As Arafat's reach throughout the resistance grew, so did the pressure on King Hussein to quell the PLO's military operations that originated in Jordan. The tension between Hussein and Arafat increased. The King was under pressure by the international community to show force against the PLO, while Arafat could not be perceived by his people to be decreasing the resistance effort. In 1970, during what came to be known as "Black September," tensions between the PLO and Jordan escalated into armed conflict, including a PLO attempt to overthrow Hussein.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) was a group which fell under the PLO umbrella but felt that Arafat was not sufficiently radical or aggressive. On September 6, 1970, the PFLP hijacked several airplanes and landed them in Jordan.²³ The PFLP released the hostages and crew in exchange for political prisoners who were being held, but blew up all the planes on the ground to emphasize their call to violence. This was the breaking point for Hussein who made a final push to successfully expel the PLO from Jordan's borders. The PLO relocated to the north of Israel and established its new headquarters in Lebanon.²⁴

²² Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 158.

²³ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 8.

The period of “Black September” had divisive effects on Palestinians. Arafat’s supporters stood behind the Arab nationalistic stance that the situation was entirely Jordan’s fault, and Hussein should not have interfered with the PLO’s activities because Arabs should unite to liberate Palestine. The *Ikhwan* seized an opportunity to insert the Islamist position that the PLO was equally culpable for turning Jordan, its Arab neighbor, supporter, and a country crucial to the successful independence of Palestine, from an ally to enemy.²⁵

The Palestinian *Ikhwan* continued to gain support, and the Islamist movement grew within Gaza and the West Bank. With Arafat and the PLO in Lebanon, it was relatively easy for the *Ikhwan* to gradually increase its presence within the occupied territories. The *Ikhwan* took advantage of the feelings of despair within the Palestinian community that many had been harboring since the Six-Day War and used Islamism to give the people something upon which to focus their energy.

Other Palestinians started to accept the new realities that the Israeli victory introduced and began to do business with the Israelis rather than resisting them.²⁶ The Israelis, for their part, took advantage of the declining quality of life for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank and adopted a deliberate practice enticing Palestinians to become informants on resistance activity. The Islamist movement took on the

²⁴ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 24.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

responsibility of policing their own, engaging in operations to identify the Palestinian informers and preventing them from working with the Israelis.²⁷ These operations started as simple identification and intimidation tactics, but as the problem worsened, Palestinian *Ikhwan* leaders became increasingly worried.²⁸ “Collaborators” would become a recurring problem for Palestinian resistance leaders and would eventually be addressed during the first *Intifada* in 1987.

Israel’s southern neighbor, meanwhile, was in the midst of a national crisis. Egypt’s reputation as a leader of the Arab community had been decimated because of its failed attempt to defeat the Israelis in the 1967 war and its failing military actions in Yemen. Egypt’s declining status as an Arab leader paled in comparison to the country’s failing economic system. Egypt experienced a drastic decline in tourism after the war, and its offshore oil fields as well as those in the Sinai that had previously accounted for much of its wealth fell under Israeli control after the war.²⁹ Egypt’s new president, Anwar al-Sadat, set a goal to not only expunge the disgraced 1967 war from the minds of the world, but to rebuild self-confidence within the country that was necessary to reestablish itself as the dominant Arab country in the Middle East.

Sadat’s first goal was to recover the lost territory from Israel through diplomacy or force. When his attempts to regain the territory through Diplomatic actions did not

²⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁸ Ibid., 14.

²⁹ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 166.

succeed, Sadat concluded that even a limited war would have greater long-term benefits for Egypt and at a minimum, would force the world to refocus its attention on the Middle East.³⁰ Sadat reached out to his ally in the north, Syria, and concluded that President Bashar al-Assad was eager to join Egypt in pressuring (and attacking) Israel to regain lost land. Assad had been under pressure to reclaim the Golan Heights that were lost to Israel in the war and he never recognized UN Resolution 242 or Israel's right to exist.

On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in what the Israelis call the *Yom Kippur* War (because the conflict broke out on the Jewish Day of Atonement) and the Arabs call the *Ramadan* War since Muslims were in the midst of the holy month of Ramadan. The Israelis were caught off-guard by the attack and initially were overwhelmed. They soon began to recover, however, and showed signs of gaining strength. The Soviets started to provide airlift support to Egypt and Syria, while the U.S. countered with support to Israel. Egypt and Syria were eventually defeated, signing a cease-fire on October 24, 1973.³¹

Da'wa

In 1973, the Palestinian *Ikhwan* capitalized on its growing support by setting up Islamic societies in Gaza, Hebron, Nablus and Jerusalem.³² *Sheikh* Yassin had become

³⁰ Ibid., 166-67.

³¹ Ibid., 168.

³² Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 19.

the predominant voice of Islamism and the Palestinian *Ikhwan*. He founded what became the focal point of all *Ikhwan* activities in Gaza. The *al-Mujamma' al-Islami* (Islamic Centre) focused on educational, social and welfare issues and specifically targeted refugee camps and the poorest areas in Gaza.³³ Yassin established the services provided by the *al-Mujamma' al-Islami* (or simply, the *Mujamma'*) and relied upon the same tactics the Egyptian *Ikhwan* used during the early days of his Islamist involvement. These social services laid the groundwork for a long-term strategy of *da'wa*, or outreach, to the Palestinian people.³⁴ Through *da'wa*, Yassin gained many supporters over the years, just as the Egyptian *Ikhwan* had during its formative years.

The Islamic traditions of submitting oneself to God (*ibadah*) and preaching or spreading true Islam (*da'wa*, literally a “call to God”) are both required of all Muslims.³⁵ As written in the *Quran*, there is nothing dishonest about *da'wa* activities per se. In fact, many *da'wa* organizations play a vital role in Islamic communities worldwide. They take on the form of charities, volunteer work, non-governmental organizations and other beneficial activities.

The Islamist movement, however, manipulates and exploits the true meaning of *da'wa*. Services are only provided in a *quid pro quo* context and target those who could be easily manipulated because of need. Islamists seize the opportunity provided

³³ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 30.

³⁴ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 20.

³⁵ Levitt, *Hamas*, 16.

by *da'wa* to teach, but only their radical version of Islam, thereby actively recruiting a population for violent activities in the name of *jihad*.³⁶ The Islamist version of Islam taught by the *Ikhwan*, and later *Hamas*, elevates the role of the martyr as most important to the cause; the martyr is the most respected and honored citizen in society.

The education services, orphanages, summer camps and even sports leagues provided through the *Ikhwan da'wa* wove the underlying theme of recognizing the “supreme virtue of death-for-Allah.”³⁷ The *da'wa* also provides a legitimate front for many illicit activities carried out by members of the *Ikhwan*. Organizations acting under the auspicious umbrella of *da'wa* actually provide “legitimate” jobs for activists and logistical support operatives so they have the necessary paperwork to avoid suspicion as they smuggle weapons and carry out reconnaissance missions.³⁸

Yassin capitalized on the services provided by *da'wa* to win the hearts and minds (and support) of the many inhabitants of the refugee camps and poor areas in Gaza. He also used the massive network that had been established through mosques, schools and organizations throughout Gaza to spread the word of Islamism and fuel the feelings harbored by many that Islamism would lead the path to independence for the Palestinian people.

The Israelis significantly underestimated Yassin's influence on the Palestinian people. While they initially denied Yassin's request for a license to open the

³⁶ Ibid., 19.

³⁷ Ibid., 110-11.

³⁸ Ibid., 5.

Mujamma,’ they quickly recanted due to pressure from the international community not to disrupt a volatile peace process that was just beginning to take shape. Israel granted Yassin permission to open and operate centers operating under the *Mujamma*’ and the Islamist movement.

The Israelis acknowledged that the Palestinian *Ikhwan* opposed the PLO and Arab nationalist movement and encouraged the Islamist movement to grow by opening mosques to lessen the power over the Palestinians that was currently held by Arafat and the PLO. They believed that by giving Yassin more opportunities to influence, he would in turn be forced to engage Arafat in conflict, preoccupying Israel’s enemy from planning attacks on the Jewish state and its people.³⁹

Further, the only activities the Israelis were aware of were those of *da’wa* or of religious nature. The Israelis were preoccupied with finding the armed resistance from which Yassin’s followers were still abstaining. Yassin and his followers still lacked the capabilities to organize an armed resistance, and in Yassin’s mind, there was still “much to be done before a resistance could be mounted.”⁴⁰

The foresight by Israel to identify the *Ikhwan* as the PLO’s main competitor for the support of the Palestinians and that Arafat was gaining more power was soon proved correct. In 1974, the Arab League recognized the PLO as the “sole, legitimate

³⁹ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 20.

⁴⁰ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 21.

representative of the Palestinians.”⁴¹ This prompted the Israelis to adopt a policy of letting the *Ikhwan* operate with little interference in the hopes that it would counter Arafat’s growing power.⁴²

The Camp David Accords

In November 1977, Egyptian President Sadat visited Jerusalem to address the Knesset (Israel’s legislative branch) in an effort to show good faith and intent to progress with a peaceful resolution between the two states. This move was influenced by the sharply declining Egypt economic system, which still had not recovered from its loss to Israel in 1967 and had continued to plummet in the years following. The decision to visit Jerusalem also led to Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin to a summit hosted by President Carter at Camp David. Egypt became the first time an Arab country to recognize Israel⁴³ when an official treaty was signed in a formal ceremony on the White House lawn on March 26, 1979.⁴⁴ As a result, Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt and accepted the right of Palestinians in the occupied territories to self-govern. The fate of the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem were intentionally left out of the Camp David Accords and remained unresolved.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 29.

⁴² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 19.

⁴³ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 12.

⁴⁴ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 192.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

Egypt and Israel began to explore their new relationship as peaceful neighbors when Israel began its withdrawal from the Sinai. Egypt's relationship with the rest of the Arab world, however, became strained at best. Sadat's actions were perceived by many, especially Palestinians, to be self-serving, motivated by his desire to regain the Sinai and address his own country's problems instead of focusing on what was considered a greater cause for the Arab world. On March 26, 1979, the Arab League punished Egypt for its recognition of Israel by expelling the country from its membership.⁴⁶ The PLO also condemned Egypt and ended all diplomatic relations with the country.

The PLO had always felt as if Egypt would play a role in assisting the Palestinians gain their independence. When Nasser was president, he promised as much to the Palestinian people. They now felt abandoned by Egypt as any hopes in a united fight against Israel were shelved as a result of the peace treaty. Further, while the Israelis recognized their right to self-govern, the decision to leave the future of the West Bank and Gaza completely out of the accords left the Palestinians feeling entirely overlooked.⁴⁷ Although the PLO continued its campaign of violence, Arafat began to publicly speak about a two-state solution, compromise and participation in peace negotiations. Arafat did not seriously consider a two-state solution as a result of the Camp David Accords. The mere mention of this possibility, however, was resented by many Palestinians, and some members of the *Ikhwan* saw this as an opportunity to

⁴⁶ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 193.

assert its position of a one-state-solution and capitalize on the restlessness that was growing within the West Bank and Gaza.⁴⁸

The War with Lebanon

The Camp David Accords made 1979 a significant year in the Arab-Israeli peace process. It was also the year in which Ayatollah Khomeini led the revolution in Iran that removed the Shah in Iran (who was pro-Israel) and replaced him with an Islamic Republic that was extremely vocal in its anti-Israel stance.⁴⁹ That same year, the *jihād* to defend Afghanistan from the Soviet Union was underway and became a great source of Islamist energy. In November of the same year, Islamist militants seized the *al-Masjid al-Haram* (Grand Mosque) in Mecca, claiming that the messiah had come to lead Muslims and reclaim Islam from westernization. These three pro-Islam, anti-Israel situations began to invigorate the *Ikhwan* in Palestine, and a division within the organization was created.

A majority of the *Ikhwan* was comprised of elders heavily influenced by the Egyptian *Ikhwan* who had studied in Jordan and were content to wait for the establishment of an Islamic state. Once this state was instituted, that would lead to the liberation and independence of Palestine by way of *jihād*.⁵⁰ In the early 1980s, however, a second group emerged comprised of the younger members who were

⁴⁸ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 33.

⁴⁹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 41.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

locally educated, many of whom had never left the occupied territories. They grew impatient with the inaction of resistance leaders, especially compared to what they saw happening in Iran and Afghanistan. They heard the teachings of the *Ikhwan* to wage *jihad* to liberate Palestine, but were frustrated when they saw other resistance movements materialize to fight the Israelis.⁵¹ While the PLO and *al-Fatah* had been conducting military operations since their foundation, smaller groups like *Saraya al-Jihad* were organizing and attacking Israelis in occupied territories. The Islamic *Jihad*, another offshoot from the Egyptian *Ikhwan*, also began operations in Gaza.⁵²

To compound the frustration of the *Ikhwan* youth, the PLO, since being ousted from Jordan, had been using Lebanon to conduct military operations against Israel. In May 1982, the PLO intensified its attacks on Israel and launched mortar attacks from Lebanon that struck Galilee. Since the Lebanese government was not interfering with the PLO's actions at the time, Israel took it upon itself to invade the country with the purpose of driving out the PLO once and for all.⁵³ The Israelis publicly declared their plan to invade Lebanon, eliminate the PLO presence there and establish a "secure area" up to 25 miles north of its border.⁵⁴ Israel began pounding southern Lebanon and its capital, Beirut, for two months beginning on June 4, 1982, and then entered West

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 44.

⁵³ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Al-Fatah*, 8.

⁵⁴ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 210.

Beirut.⁵⁵ On August 19, 1982 the Israelis agreed to stop the invasion and withdraw their forces on the condition that Arafat and the PLO leave Lebanon.

Arafat was forced to relocate with rest of the PLO leadership from Lebanon. Arafat and his close followers were granted safe passage to Tunis where they lived in exile.⁵⁶ The war in Lebanon was seen as a colossal failure on the part of Arafat and the PLO. On the other hand, *Hezbollah*, the *Shi'a* Islamic terrorist organization based in Lebanon, continued to fight the Israelis long after Arafat had been driven out of the country. The *Ikhwan* in Palestine seized the opportunity created by the negative sentiments towards Arafat and the PLO following the war and the void in leadership after Arafat's exile to Tunisia. The Islamists began combining the established doctrine of Islamism with the remnants of the PLO's sense of Arab nationalism and began to posit the Palestinian people as "Islamist-nationalists," strengthening their own cause and while simultaneously weakening *al-Fatah* and the PLO.⁵⁷

Sheikh Yassin was one of the main proponents of transitioning the *Ikhwan* methods. He had been preaching and practicing radicalism since he first joined the Egyptian *Ikhwan*, and while his establishments created in the occupied territories were seen by the Israelis as mostly religious and social, he was soon arrested by the Israelis when evidence surfaced that he had been involved in organizing attacks on Israel. On April

⁵⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 42.

⁵⁶ Hroub, *Hamas*, 43.

⁵⁷ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 37.

15, 1984, Yassin was found guilty by an Israeli military court and sentenced to 13 years in prison.⁵⁸ His imprisonment, however, was short-lived as he was included in a prisoner exchange of over 1,150 Palestinians and released on May 20, 1985 in exchange for three Israeli soldiers captured by Palestinians in Lebanon.⁵⁹

Yassin returned to find the younger members of the *Ikhwan* in Palestine more vocal about their desire to join the fight against the Israelis. The pressure on Yassin and the Palestinian *Ikhwan* leadership to become militarily involved in the resistance movement was not only coming from within his organization, but was also being voiced in Gaza, the West Bank and from members of the *Ikhwan* in the Diaspora.⁶⁰ Fearing that he would begin to lose members to the *Islamic Jihad*, or even the PLO, Yassin gave his permission for those who desired to confront the Israelis to participate in a rally to protest against Israeli occupation at Birzeit University (near Ramallah) in 1986.

The rally turned into a riot between protestors and Israeli military forces, ending with 22 Palestinian casualties.⁶¹ The protest was widely publicized and not only called attention to the cause of the resistance, but breathed new life into many of Yassin's followers and renewed the concept of martyrdom. After the protest at Birzeit

⁵⁸ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 46.

⁵⁹ Hroub, *Hamas*, 124.

⁶⁰ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 44-45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

University, Palestinian *Ikhwan* members were not only allowed, but also encouraged to participate in protests against the occupation.⁶²

In the late 1980's, two main Palestinian organization existed. The PLO and the Palestinian *Ikhwan* had both emerged as viable representatives of the Palestinian people. The religious foundation of the *Ikhwan* made the group an attractive alternative to the more secular PLO.

⁶² Ibid.

CHAPTER 3: 1987–1993

The Eruption

A series of events occurred in May 1987 that led to an historic uprising in Gaza. This uprising was the product of growing frustration and resentment that had been festering among the Palestinians, in particular the youth. The incident that triggered the uprising began on May 15, 1987, when six *Islamic Jihad* members escaped from a Gaza prison. Two months later, on August 2, 1987, an *Islamic Jihad* member assassinated the commander of the military police in Gaza, and on October 6, 1987, four members opened fire on an Israeli army patrol in Gaza, killing one soldier.¹

These attacks were highly publicized (as most were), and the Israelis increased their call for a crackdown on Islamist militants. The Israeli army rounded up members of the *Islamic Jihad* and deported them in November, but the violence continued on December 6, 1987, when an Israeli civilian was stabbed to death in Gaza's main shopping district.²

Two days after the stabbing, on December 8, 1987, an Israel Defense Forces (IDF) truck struck a car filled with Palestinian Gazans returning home from working in Israel, killing four of the Arabs and injuring others.³ While the incident was initially reported as an accident, rumors began to circulate throughout the area where the incident occurred, Jabaliya (also an area containing one of the largest refugee camps in

¹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 50.

² Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 24.

³ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 23.

Gaza⁴), that the IDF truck had intentionally hit the Palestinian car as an act of retribution for the stabbing of the Israeli civilian. The mere suggestion that this collision was not an accident was enough to incite rage throughout the Palestinian region.

A funeral for the Palestinians was held the same evening. When it concluded, a furious mob flocked to the barbed-wire fences of the surrounding Israeli military camp and began to chant, “*Jihad!*”⁵ More demonstrations like the one in Jabaliya were organized throughout the area as word spread about what had happened. In the eyes of many Palestinians, what had begun as a mere traffic accident had morphed into a deliberate murderous act by the Israelis.⁶

The Israeli army was dispatched to quell the demonstrations. Many Israelis, however, had already developed their own preconceptions about these events, believing that the stabbing of the Israeli civilian two days earlier had been in direct response to the army’s November deportation of the *Islamic Jihad* members.⁷ The army was soon joined by border police who used tear gas to suppress the demonstrators after violent clashes erupted between Palestinians and Israelis. The “*Intifada*” (meaning “shaking off”)⁸ had begun.

⁴ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 24.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 10.

⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 24-25.

⁸ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 219.

The First Meeting

Even though the *Intifada* resulted from an apparent accident, the Palestinian *Ikhwan* had been preparing for such an uprising for several years.⁹ *Sheikh* Yassin had planned to mobilize the *Ikhwan* in small stages, but accelerated his planning once he realized that his followers, especially the youth and others within the *Ikhwan* network, had become increasingly vocal about their desires to engage in active resistance. Yassin understood that the pulse of the Palestinian people was increasing to a rate that would soon cause an explosion, which is precisely what happened with the *Intifada*.

On the first day of the *Intifada*, branches of the *Ikhwan* inside and outside the Palestinian territories assembled and dispatched orders to the various institutions that fell under the umbrella of social and religious service.¹⁰ The Palestinian *Ikhwan* immediately encountered a problem. The organization had witnessed a slow divide amongst its members, with one group advocating for a change from its nonviolent policy with Israelis¹¹ and the other still preferring to adhere to the traditional viewpoint of the *Ikhwan* which sought to institute a complete Islamist society before embarking on the *jihad* to liberate the Palestinians, regardless of how long it took.¹² The *Ikhwan* was also split along generation lines, with the older generation still insisting that

⁹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 52.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 24.

¹² Hroub, *Hamas*, 13.

tarbiyah (education) and *da'wa* were the correct approach, while the younger generation called for *jihad*.¹³

Ikhwan leaders who lived outside of Palestine decided that the *Intifada* presented a unique and immediate opportunity to not only reinvigorate support for Islamism, but also for the *Ikhwan* to present itself to the Palestinian people as the leader of the uprising.¹⁴ The other leaders of the *Ikhwan* looked to Yassin for guidance. Since his involvement with the *Ikhwan* in Egypt, he had built a reputation of not only providing spiritual guidance to the Palestinian youth but also preaching the goals of the *Ikhwan*, which included the rights of the Palestinians to have a free and independent state, with Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital.¹⁵ He was also sympathetic to the more radical side of resistance because of his involvement in previous militant operations.

The *Ikhwan* recognized that Yassin had more in common with its younger members. It was decided¹⁶ that Yassin should take those members of the *Ikhwan* and form a splinter group.¹⁷ Using a splinter group to carry out violent activities in support of the resistance proved to be mutually beneficial. This enabled the *Ikhwan* to provide logistical support and guidance to the group while being able to safely distance itself

¹³ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 24.

¹⁴ Hroub, *Hamas*, 13-14.

¹⁵ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 36-37.

¹⁶ This decision was made by the *Ikhwan* leadership, but it can be argued that the split would have happened regardless of whether or not the leadership gave its blessing.

¹⁷ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 24.

from any actions that could be deemed acts of *jihad*, and thus remain unpunished by the Israelis. The Palestinian *Ikhwan* came to be known as *Hamas*.

Hamas' genesis took place at *Sheikh* Yassin's house on the first day of the *Intifada*, December 9, 1987. The seven founding members of *Hamas* were *Sheikh* Ahmad Yassin, Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, Salah Shihadah, Abd al-Fattah Dukhan, Muhammad Sha'ah, Ibrahim al-Yazuri, and Isa al-Nashar.¹⁸ These seven individuals from the *Ikhwan* in Gaza held an emergency meeting and organized a new resistance group that aimed to liberate Palestine through *jihad*. Their most immediate goal was to take control of the *Intifada*. *Hamas* established different wings to be responsible for various aspects of the movement: politics, communications, security, youth, *Intifada* and seeking the release of the many Palestinians currently imprisoned for anti-Israeli activities.¹⁹

As the group began to take shape, Yassin needed to establish an operational headquarters. None of Israel's neighbors had the ability to provide a safe haven from where *Hamas* would conduct operations, especially during the group's earliest phases. Lebanon was still recovering from Israel's invasion in 1982; Egypt was enjoying a cooperative relationship with its neighbor as a result of the Camp David Accords; Jordan had been slow to recover from its 1970 war with the PLO and did not want another group launching attacks from within its borders; and, Syria had no wish to

¹⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 25.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

disrupt what had recently been a peaceful border with Israel.²⁰ Thus, *Hamas* leaders needed to conduct their operations from Palestine, specifically the “occupied territories” of Gaza and the West Bank. They concluded that while it might be more difficult to maintain resistance operations in such close proximity to its enemy, it would also be more effective. Gaza served as the group’s headquarters, although *Hamas* also received support from the West Bank. *Hamas* leaders felt this would be the best approach until *Hamas* could find a country that would provide them “a secure base from which to fight the Jewish State.”²¹ While the group’s leadership established themselves within Palestine, an “outer” core of leadership was based outside the territories to provide guidance and to assist in overall policy implementation.

One of the founding members, Dr. Abd al-Rantisi, drafted the first communiqué and released it to the press on December 14, 1987.²² It was signed using the Arabic letters “HMS,” an abbreviation for *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya* (Islamic Resistance Movement).²³ The group’s leaders proposed that “HMS” should be extended to “*Hamas*,” an Arabic word that means “zeal,” and which recalls the organization’s ties to the *Ikhwan* which used “Rights! Force! Freedom!” as its slogan.²⁴ The name “*Hamas*” was also perceived as less threatening. The group initially wanted to avoid

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Tamimi, *Hamas*, 11.

²³ Levitt, *Hamas*, 8.

²⁴ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 23.

the impression that it was a militant organization but rather that it would operate under the guise of religion and *da'wa*.

The Intifada

Hamas spread word throughout the Palestinian community that anyone frustrated with the progress of the resistance should join the organization. It promised to provide leadership during the *Intifada's* early stages and called for civil disobedience against the Israelis when possible. *Hamas* not only sought to end Israeli occupation, but also the complete eradication of the Israeli state and people as a whole.²⁵ The organization quickly gained supporters, taking advantage of its preexisting networks through the Palestinian *Ikhwan* that had provided services under *da'wa* and used mosques and other institutions to organize.

Yassin recognized that Palestinian youth were crucial to the success of the *Intifada*. He created *Jihaz al-Ahdath* (the youth or “under-eighteen” wing) to encourage their participation in demonstrations and public strikes. The *Jihaz* was not only responsible for spreading the word about planned strikes or demonstrations, but also for humiliating anyone not participating in these planned actions by placing burning tires outside their homes.²⁶ The *Jihaz* became the face of the *Intifada* because it was on the front lines of the Palestinian resistance. Its young members were seen around the world as news agencies broadcast images of them throwing stones and Molotov

²⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 53.

²⁶ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 30.

Cocktails at Israeli soldiers who were armed with heavy weapons and armored vehicles. The *Jihaz* was also responsible for making burial arrangements and providing services for mourners when a martyr died in the name of the *jihad*.²⁷

One unexpected consequence of the *Intifada* was that intra-Palestinian conflicts emerged from the chaos. Palestinians with personal grievances against one another used the violence of the *Intifada* as a cover to carry out attacks against other Palestinians. For example, families who controlled sub-areas in “occupied” areas began to fight each other for territorial control.²⁸

Islamism was another manifestation of violence that emerged during the resistance. Support for the radical interpretation of Islam became a popular way for many Palestinians to deal with the frustrations of what they felt was life-long oppression. They saw Islamism as a way to salvation and believed that once society embraced true and pure Islam, Allah would liberate them, rendering them a free and independent people. To ensure that every individual acted in accordance with the Islamists’ vision, individuals who represented “impurities” were attacked. Liquor stores, movie theaters, video stores and any institutions that represented westernization were destroyed. Islamists violently attacked prostitutes and even women who were considered dressed “immodestly.”²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 31.

²⁸ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 55.

²⁹ Ibid., 55-56.

Yassin was concerned that such intra-Palestinian violence did not support the *Intifada*. He was also disturbed that some Palestinians worked with the Israelis. Members of *Hamas* reacted violently against Palestinians whom they identified to be “collaborators,” namely those suspected of aiding Israel in exchange for favors, services or non-persecution. As a result, Yassin made two changes to *Hamas*. The *al-Mujahidun al-Filastriyaniyyun* (the Palestinian *Mujahidin*) was created to serve as a military organization whose sole purpose was to attack Israeli soldiers and Jewish settlers in Gaza.

Yassin also established the *Majd*, which was responsible for identifying and punishing (usually by execution) any Palestinian found to be collaborating with Israel.³⁰ The *Majd* (an acronym for *Majmouath Jihad u-Da’wa*, or the “Holy War and Sermonizing Group”) was essentially the strike force of the *Jehaz Aman* which *Hamas* established as its security branch.³¹ Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip killed at least 800 individuals who were suspected of working for or supplying information to the Israelis.³² These “collaborators” were killed either directly by the *Majd* or by lynching and mob killing which became popular during the *Intifada*.

Arafat and the rest of the PLO leadership were still exiled in Tunis when the *Intifada* began. They were completely caught off guard by the uprising.³³ Arafat had

³⁰ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 50.

³¹ Levitt, *Hamas*, 11.

³² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 55.

³³ David Pratt, *Intifada: The Long Day of Rage* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2006), 30.

been busy showcasing, especially to the U.S., his interest in peace in an attempt to gain international support for his potential return to Palestine. From there, he hoped to lead his people to independence. Once the *Intifada* began, however, Arafat saw an opportunity to be the face of the Palestinian resistance once again. He sought the leadership of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU), which was created just after the beginning of the *Intifada* by Palestinian political factions in the West Bank.³⁴

Arafat's greatest concern was the speed with which *Hamas* was created, gained support and became a fully-functional resistance organization. One of *Hamas*' earliest actions involved distributing leaflets to Palestinians to build support, which the PLO and *al-Fatah* had previously done to bolster their own organizations. Arafat interpreted this as an open challenge from *Hamas* to be the new "sole representative" of the Palestinian people.³⁵

Arafat reached out to the Egyptian *Ikhwan*, requesting that it suppress the new movement's activities. He believed a "parallel movement" would be counterproductive to the overall movement, especially during the turbulent time of the *Intifada*. He even invited *Hamas* to join *al-Fatah* and bring the Islamist movement's operations under his own umbrella.³⁶ When the *Ikhwan* rejected Arafat's request, he

³⁴ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-25.

³⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 188-89.

ordered the PLO to directly compete with *Hamas* for the lead of the *Intifada* and to win the hearts and minds of all Palestinians. Arafat reasoned if this could be quickly accomplished, the PLO could claim that it had initiated the *Intifada*.³⁷

Arafat wanted the world to recognize that he could lead Palestinians under occupation in a well-ordered resistance. His goal was to achieve recognition from the U.S. and the rest of the international community as the “sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and with whom alone peace was to be negotiated.”³⁸ The creation of *Hamas* was clearly a threat to Arafat, the PLO and *al-Fatah*.

Hamas and the expanding *Intifada* were also a threat to King Hussein. During the second year of the *Intifada*, the King grew increasingly nervous that the widespread violence would spill over into Jordan and that his nation would be drawn into the conflict. He renounced Jordan’s claim on the West Bank on July 31, 1988 and declared that “the independent Palestinian state will be established on the occupied Palestinian land, after it is liberated, God willing.”³⁹

This decision gave newfound hope to Palestinians involved in the *Intifada*. Even if they failed to drive out the Israelis, they might still be able to obtain the West Bank. *Hamas*, however, was not interested in a partial victory. Soon after Hussein’s declaration, the group created a document that outlined its intent and vision.

³⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 26.

³⁸ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 53.

³⁹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 27.

The Charter

Hamas was greatly benefitting from the *Intifada*. The influence that *Hamas* was able to exert over those involved in the resistance during the group's first year already rivaled that of *al-Fatah* and the PLO. Palestinians were attracted by *Hamas* leadership's promise of *sumud* (steadfastness) in their pursuit of an independent state and the elimination of Israel.⁴⁰ *Hamas* capitalized on this momentum and published its charter (*al-Mithaq* or "the covenant") on August 18, 1988.⁴¹ This was *Hamas*' first attempt to explain its vision of combining Islamism and Arab nationalism. The document also sought to strengthen *Hamas*' support from the *Ikhwan* and to appeal to wavering PLO supporters. The new charter contained 36 different articles. It outlined an independent Palestinian state with the rule of law based on *sharia*. Such a state could only be established through *jihad*. The charter stated that when "enemies usurp some Islamic lands, *jihad* becomes a duty binding to all Muslims."⁴² *Hamas* made specific references to its plans for Israel. Above all else, the Charter stated, *Hamas* was established to carry out a *jihad* that would continue until Palestine was "liberated in its entirety and the State of Israel was eliminated."⁴³

⁴⁰ Ibid., 55.

⁴¹ MidEast Web Gateway, "Hamas Charter," <http://www.mideastweb.org/hamas.htm> (accessed June 1, 2009).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

The merging of Islamism and nationalism made *Hamas* a very attractive and credible alternative to the PLO and *al-Fatah*. By issuing a formal charter that declared its specific goals and ideas, *Hamas* directly targeted PLO supporters at a time when many were questioning the direction that Arafat was taking the organization. In December 1988, Arafat made his new direction for the PLO public. He shocked the world when he announced that “the PLO has accepted Israel’s right to exist, will participate in an international peace conference...and rejects terrorism in all its forms.”⁴⁴ In a desperate attempt to gain respect and credibility with the U.S. and the rest of the world, Arafat seemed to go against everything the PLO and *al-Fatah* had fought for when he accepted the UN General Assembly Resolution that called for the partitioning of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state.⁴⁵

Arafat’s sudden change of heart regarding Israel sent shockwaves throughout the Arab community. Many Palestinians interpreted Arafat’s new direction as a concession to the Israelis, an action that resulted in him being shunned by many Arab nationalists who had long supported the PLO.⁴⁶ Supporters who had sacrificed to fight alongside him through numerous conflicts felt betrayed by this apparent display of weakness. In spite of these new obstacles, Arafat believed he was gaining credibility with the U.S. and was sure the West would recognize him for his willingness to seek a

⁴⁴ Tamimi, 61.

⁴⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 26.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 26-27.

peaceful resolution to the long-lasting conflict. Arafat did not, however, anticipate the massive backlash from his supporters. As a result, he was no longer seen as the leader who would free the refugees living inside Palestine and allow those in the Diaspora to return home.

Hamas took advantage of Arafat's announcement, coupling his unpopularity with the growing resentment among Palestinians, to maximize the damage to his reputation. *Hamas* identified Arafat's decision to recognize Israel as proof that he had shifted the ultimate goal of the Arab nationalist movement to coexist with Israelis. *Hamas* claimed Arafat would be satisfied with a partitioned two-state solution, which *Hamas* completely rejected. The group quickly became a very popular alternative to the PLO, and activists' actions in the *Intifada* were influenced more by *Hamas* than the *al-Fatah*-supported UNLU.⁴⁷

Hamas began what the group referred to as "the development of the movement's methods of resistance in February 1989."⁴⁸ This development paved the way for a transition to a more radical and violent form of resistance. *Sheikh* Yassin orchestrated the kidnapping of Israeli soldiers and planned to use their dead bodies to help broker a deal to release *Hamas* prisoners. He was arrested by the Israelis when it was discovered that Yassin personally tasked one of executors of the kidnapping.⁴⁹ The

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁹ Levitt, *Hamas*, 35.

news of Yassin's arrest spread throughout the Palestinian community, and the entire region followed his trial which began in 1990 and lasted almost a year. He was sentenced on October 16, 1991 to a lifetime in prison plus fifteen years for added emphasis.⁵⁰ The *Hamas* leader had been, for the first time, linked to a specific act of violence.

Hamas had always been able to operate under the guise of religious and community service, but the arrest and sentencing of Yassin drew new attention to the radical Islamism traits to which *Hamas* had always adhered. On September 28, 1989, Israelis recognized that they had misidentified *Hamas* as a harmless group involved in social and religious endeavors and officially declared *Hamas* an illegal organization. This designation had a resounding effect, but did not produce the damaging results that Israel envisioned. Most Palestinians never truly trusted *Hamas* since the Israelis had an unofficial policy of supporting *Hamas* (or the *Ikhwan*) in its endeavors with the *Mujamma'* in order to strengthen opposition towards Arafat and the PLO.⁵¹ By publicly outlawing *Hamas*, Israel actually enhanced the group's credibility and bolstered the organization's support. *Hamas'* power grew, assisted by the transition away from violence and confrontation by *al-Fatah* and the PLO. As the *Intifada*

⁵⁰ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 63.

⁵¹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 33.

entered its second year, *Hamas* had become the leading voice of the Palestinian resistance.⁵²

The Reorganization

After declaring *Hamas* an illegal organization, Israel conducted widespread arrests of group members and supporters. Israeli forces quickly arrested 1,500 individuals including senior *Hamas* leaders inside the West Bank and Gaza Strip. With Yassin and many of the group's "inside" leaders imprisoned, the Palestinians who were in the "outside" leadership (mostly in Diaspora under the joint Palestinian–Jordanian *Ikhwan*) realized the group needed reorganization.⁵³ It was determined that as long as the leadership was based within the occupied territories, it would always be under Israeli scrutiny and subject to massive arrests at any time and without warning. The group decentralized its organization to avoid the crippling effect of these personnel round-ups. *Hamas* determined that leadership decisions should be made outside the Palestinian territories.

This decision to shift the organization's leadership is considered one of *Hamas*' "turning points." Before the reorganization, the leadership located within Gaza and the West Bank had provided most of the guidance to *Hamas*, and the group outside the Palestinian territories was utilized as a "back-up" or secondary governing body.⁵⁴ This

⁵² *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵³ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 59.

⁵⁴ Hroub, *Hamas*, 117.

was expected given that the members who lived and operated within the Gaza and the West Bank had a better understanding of the Palestinian people and could therefore make more informed decisions regarding *Hamas* operations. The outside group, however, took on a new life under the reorganized *Hamas*. Since members outside the territories were also outside of Israel's reach, they could act without the threat of punishment or persecution coloring their decisions and sustain greater continuity within the leadership to direct the group's activities.

This reorganization was tested several times between 1989 and 1991 as Israel continued to send *Hamas* members within its jurisdiction to prison, and internal leadership roles were in a constant state of flux. When the Gulf War erupted in 1991, *Hamas* (as well as *al-Fatah* and the PLO) increased activities to take advantage of the Middle East's newfound popularity on international news broadcasts and the global stage. The U.S. and the West were condemned by *Hamas* for interfering in Arab affairs, comparing the countries' involvement to the aid that had been provided to Israel for centuries.

The Gulf War

After the Gulf War, the *Intifada* began to subside. *Hamas*, *al-Fatah* and the PLO all hoped that when Saddam Hussein fired SCUD missiles from Iraq into Israel, Israel would be forced to join the war resulting in more Arab nations joining forces and defeating Israel, once and for all.⁵⁵ Instead, Israel was praised for its restraint and

⁵⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 37.

abstinence from the fighting during the Gulf and received global recognition. The converse was said about Yasser Arafat who had gone against the majority of his Arab allies and publicly supported Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. The effect of this decision was devastating to the PLO and resonated through the entire Palestinian community.

The PLO had been the beneficiary of millions of dollars that came from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and other Gulf states to provide assistance to the Palestinian people and institutions since their source of funding was depleted. One report estimated that as many as 700,000 of the 1.8 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip benefitted from PLO assistance which was mostly provided by these Gulf states.⁵⁶

Once Arafat supported Hussein, the millions of dollars that had been flowing into Palestine via the PLO stopped. Arafat was unable to provide funds to families of martyrs, food assistance programs, education, community centers and newspapers.⁵⁷ Arafat and the PLO leadership in Tunis experienced an all-time low in support as Palestinians went hungry and lost jobs. Many Islamic charities that had also been providing support to Arafat followed the Gulf States (upon whom they depended for funding assistance) and began shifting their allegiances to *Hamas*.⁵⁸

Hamas enjoyed the support of many Arab countries after the Gulf War. The group pleased its Islamist constituents by condemning the U.S. for interfering, and by

⁵⁶ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 250.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 31-32.

condemning Hussein's bullying of an Arab neighbor, also pleased the Gulf States. As Arafat's financial support dried up, money began to pour into *Hamas*.⁵⁹ In an attempt to retain some semblance of respect and power, Arafat committed the PLO to the U.S.-led peace process, which resulted in greater separation among Palestinians as *Hamas* had become an attractive alternative to those opposed to the peace process.⁶⁰

The Izz al-Din Al-Qassam Brigades

After the Gulf War, the *Majd* and the *Mujahideen al-Filastinum* merged and became the military wing of *Hamas*.⁶¹ The influx in funds after the Gulf War allowed *Hamas* to strengthen its military capabilities and amass a standing army to lead the fight against the Israelis. The new military wing was renamed *Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades* in honor of the famous Muslim leader who was killed in a rebellion against the British Palestine police during the British Mandate period in 1935.⁶²

The *Majd's* duty of targeting collaborators carried over into the *Qassam Brigades* who increased pressure on Palestinians by kidnapping and murdering those who were suspected of cooperating with the Israelis. The *Qassam Brigades* also began targeting civilians and carried out its first terrorist attack against a civilian when members killed an Israeli settler in December 1991.⁶³ *Hamas* had previously not resorted to attacking

⁵⁹ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 41.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

⁶¹ Levitt, *Hamas*, 11.

⁶² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 37.

⁶³ Levitt, *Hamas*, 11.

civilians, but this incident made a bold statement that the group was encouraging all followers to not necessarily limit their violent resistance activities to military personnel. *Hamas* reasoned that since all Israeli civilians are required to serve in the military at one point in their lives, Israeli noncombatants are non-existent.

As the *Qassam Brigades* continued its assaults on military and civilian enemies, newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was pressured to make a statement against *Hamas* and terrorism. On December 17, 1992, he ordered the deportation of 415 *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad* members to Lebanon.⁶⁴ What began as an unprecedented show of force by Rabin soon became a political quagmire as the Lebanese unexpectedly refused to take the deportees, claiming that they were Israel's responsibility.⁶⁵

The Palestinians were left in a small territory on the Lebanon–Israel border where they were denied entry into either country. This situation, documented by media around the world, further strained the peace process that Arafat and Rabin had been engaging in as Arafat was pressured to suspend any negotiations until the deportees were allowed to return to their homes.⁶⁶ Rabin eventually consented, providing Arafat return to the negotiations, and organized reentry for the deportees. They were allowed reentry into Palestine in phases with the last group returning home in December 1993, a full year after they had been exiled.

⁶⁴ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 115.

⁶⁵ Ross, *The Missing Piece*, 96.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The Oslo Accords

Hamas had demonstrated its ability to mobilize and take advantage of Arafat's absence from the Palestinian territories. In addition to becoming a fully functional resistance operation, the group was threatening to take the lead in all aspects of Palestinian life and had arguably achieved more success in six years than the PLO and *al-Fatah* had in almost thirty years. Arafat gladly accepted the U.S. and Israeli requests to resume peace negotiations in mid-1993.⁶⁷ In reality, he and the PLO had been participating in secret peace talks in Oslo, Norway since January 1993 and had met with Israeli officials at least fourteen times over a period of seven months.⁶⁸

These talks culminated on September 9, 1993, with a simple yet historic exchange of letters. Arafat delivered a letter to Rabin in which he recognized Israel, renounced violence, agreed to collaborate on security issues between the two states and promised to remove any derogatory wording from the PLO charter. Rabin's responding letter gave autonomy to Palestinians in most of the Gaza Strip and Jericho (in the West Bank) and, of the utmost importance to Arafat, contained the official recognition by Israel that the PLO was the sole representative of the Palestinian people and with whom all negotiations would take place.⁶⁹ This exchange of letters was formalized on the White House lawn with the signing of The Declaration of Principles on Interim

⁶⁷ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 250-51.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 256.

Self-Government (known also as the Memorandum of Understanding or “Oslo I”) by Arafat and Rabin on September 13, 1993.

The issue of Jerusalem was intentionally left out of the declaration as neither Arafat nor Rabin could agree on its future. Rabin continued to insist that Jerusalem would remain undivided and the capital of Israel, while Arafat remained steadfast in his intention to have East Jerusalem serve as the capital of a Palestine state.⁷⁰ The declaration did, however, include a plan for Israel to withdraw its forces from cities in the West Bank (in addition to Jericho) and for the two sides to reopen negotiations within two years to finalize plans for Jerusalem and to establish a permanent solution for Palestinian refugees (“right to return”) and borders.

While the Declaration of Principles may have positioned Arafat and *al-Fatah* to negotiate with Israel and also improve its relations with the United States, this did not ensure their undisputed leadership of the Palestinians. In fact, *Hamas* was able to turn what appeared to be an Arafat victory into a liability among many Palestinians who regarded the Oslo process as appeasement. Thus, while on the surface, Arafat appeared to be the clear leader of the Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza, *Hamas* was poised to challenge both his leadership and the overall peace process with Israel.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 258.

CHAPTER 4: 1994–2004

The Suicide Bomber

The 1993 signing of the Declaration of Principles marked the first time that Israeli and Palestinian political representatives met in person and reached a formal agreement. The Declaration was meant to provide the framework for Palestinian self-governance and improve relations with Israel. *Hamas* immediately responded to the signing of the Declaration of Principles by condemning Arafat and the PLO. The group publicly stated the PLO had committed “an act of betrayal of fundamental Palestinian rights.”¹ *Sheikh* Yassin was “saddened and angry” by the negotiations² and vowed to continue the armed struggle in spite of the peace agreements. According to Yassin, the PLO no longer represented the voice of the Palestinians, and he would ensure that any attempt by Arafat to govern the people would be met with strong resistance.

Yassin’s strategy was to provoke Israel to renege on the agreement by making Arafat appear an ineffective negotiator and incapable of controlling his own people. In doing so, Yassin could further demonstrate that the peace process was a waste of time as well as eliminate the PLO from the Palestinian stage altogether.³ Yassin put his plan in motion and prepared *Hamas* for a surge in activity.

¹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 190.

² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 38.

³ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 46.

In 1994, suicide bombers were completely foreign to the Palestinian resistance within the occupied territories and to *Sunni* radical groups like *Hamas*. Only *Hezbollah*, the Lebanese *Shi'ite* organization, had effectively used this tactic in the Middle East at that time.⁴ In fact, *Hezbollah* introduced the U.S. to suicide bombing when the organization attacked the U.S. Embassy in Beirut on April 8, 1983, and again on October 23, 1983. These attacks were in direct response to the U.S. decision to send a Marine Corps peacekeeping force into Lebanon after the war in 1982.⁵

Hamas witnessed the effectiveness of suicide bombing firsthand during a debacle in 1992–1993 when Israel deported several hundred members of the organization to Lebanon. When the deportees arrived, the Lebanese government did not want responsibility over them and thus the group was forced to remain in a desolate region in Southern Lebanon while their fate was decided.⁶ While they waited, the Palestinian deportees learned about the operational merits of suicide bombing directly from *Hezbollah's* use of human bombs in its ongoing conflict with Israel. Upon their return, they eagerly reported back to *Hamas* on this new technique.

Israel began a campaign in 1992 to drive *Hezbollah* forces from the southern border of Lebanon. In February 1992, Israeli forces assassinated *Hezbollah* leader *Sheikh Abbas Mussawi*, along with his wife, child and five bodyguards. *Hezbollah* responded

⁴ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 42.

⁵ Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 66.

⁶ *Ibid.*

with a suicide bomber attack on the Israeli embassy in Argentina. The conflict in Lebanon continued, and *Hezbollah* sought to use suicide bombers to ultimately force the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the country.

Based on the success of *Hezbollah*, *Hamas* began to actively train suicide bombers. When a Baruch Goldstein, a Jewish extremist, killed 29 Palestinian worshippers at the *al-Ibrahimi* Mosque in Hebron on February 25, 1994,⁷ *Hamas* had an opportunity to deploy its new tactic. The orthodox Jew threw a hand grenade into a group of worshipers during Ramadan and wounded 150 more worshippers when he began firing a rifle into the crowd.⁸

With the exception of a small number of Jewish extremists, the entire world was outraged. The incident also motivated a highly skilled bomb maker named Yahya Ayyash. Ayyash landed at the top of the Israeli wanted list when his car was discovered filled with explosives in a suburb of Tel Aviv in November 1992.⁹ He was a member of *Hamas* and personally guaranteed that the group's response would be severe. *Hamas* granted Ayyash permission to begin a campaign of suicide attacks citing the Hebron massacre as justification.¹⁰

⁷ Hroub, *Hamas*, 52.

⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 55-56.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

Ayyash orchestrated *Hamas*' first suicide bombing attack on April 6, 1994, which resulted in eight killed and over forty injured by a car bomb.¹¹ His success over the following months coupled with his ability to evade Israeli authorities earned him the nickname "The Engineer." *Hamas*' leadership enjoyed the success as the world watched images of victims in horror. Islamists were re-energized by their brothers in arms' acts of sacrifice in the name of the resistance. By October 1994, *Hamas* had launched three more suicide attacks inside Israel.¹²

The Palestinian Authority

Yasser Arafat was permitted to leave Tunis and establish a provisional government in Gaza under a stipulation of Oslo I. He became the temporary Palestinian *Ra'is* (president) on July 1, 1994, until elections could be held. Arafat returned to Gaza where he was greeted and celebrated by thousands of supporters.¹³ *Hamas* leaders in Palestine met with Arafat shortly after his return and agreed to temporarily cease violent activities.¹⁴ The group had gained the support of many former PLO and *al-Fatah* supporters who had embraced Islamism after Arafat's exile to Tunis. *Hamas* leaders deduced that a peaceful return of Arafat and the creation of a Palestinian-led government could be accomplished while the group continued to increase its support base.

¹¹ Levitt, *Hamas*, 12.

¹² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 41.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁴ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 276.

The Palestinian Authority (*Sulta al-Wataniyya al-Filastiniyya*) was established in 1994 as the interim governing body, which Arafat primarily staffed with PLO and *al-Fatah* members.¹⁵ This created a division within *al-Fatah*, as previously exiled members who had been in Tunis with Arafat were given preferential treatment over those who had remained in the territories.¹⁶ These new representatives had also accumulated large sums of money while in exile and thus returned significantly wealthier than the rest of the population.¹⁷

Despite the return of Arafat and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the quality of life for most Palestinians began to rapidly decline under the new regime. Many Palestinians from the Diaspora had returned to their homes, hoping to fulfill their dreams of living in a free and independent state. Instead, they found returning PLO and *al-Fatah* members to be wealthy and ineffective at improving conditions in the West Bank and Gaza. Insufficient funds were provided for social institutions and rebuilding efforts for the Palestinian people. Questions surfaced about the source and use of the international financial assistance being provided to the PA. The returning PLO and *al-Fatah* represented an emerging new class of Palestinians who were described by local Gazans as *al-Aesoun*, which literally means, “the returnee” but has a secondary meaning of “nouveau riche.”¹⁸

¹⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 39-40.

¹⁶ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 42-43.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 9-10.

Hamas leadership openly accused Arafat and the PA of corruption and withholding money that could benefit the Palestinian people. They pointed out that Arafat was able to manipulate the news since he held exclusive influence over the media and also had direct control of money entering the West Bank and Gaza since the PA's establishment. Since many of the funds could not be accounted for and conditions for most Palestinians were not improving, *Hamas* concluded that Arafat and his small circle of associates were mismanaging both the money and overall governance. There were also stories circulating that Arafat was cooperating with Israeli intelligence and security forces.¹⁹ In an effort to call attention to the PA's lack of control over the occupied territories, *Hamas*' previously agreed-upon cease in violence ended as the group resumed attacks against Israel.

The second stage of the Oslo Process (known as "Oslo II") was signed in 1995 to establish provisional borders and set the stage for a complete Israeli withdrawal from cities in the West Bank with the exception of Hebron.²⁰ This event failed to replicate the jubilant affair of the September 1993 White House Lawn signing, in part due to the controversy and scrutiny that flanked Arafat and the newly-established PA. The self-proclaimed "sole representatives" of the Palestinian people were seen as incapable of preventing Islamist terrorist acts which led to Israel frequently closing the territorial

¹⁹ Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 103.

²⁰ Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians*, 128.

borders. This intensified financial hardship when Palestinians were unable to travel to work or exchange goods in territories outside of where they lived.

Since much of *Hamas*' funding was still coming from outside the territories (Gulf States, "outside" leadership, fundraising and charities), *Hamas* continued to oblige many Palestinians who relied on the organization to provide much needed assistance. To demonstrate its opposition to Arafat, the signing of the Oslo Accords and the entire peace process, *Hamas* chose to officially boycott the first PA election on January 20, 1996. The group's leadership debated the decision and ultimately decided that participation in the election would validate the peace process. Further, they did not want to risk *al-Fatah* manipulating the election to guarantee a *Hamas* loss, which would cause them to lose face, credibility and support in the community.²¹ Those Palestinians who did participate elected Arafat as their president and gave the majority of legislative seats to *al-Fatah*. Arafat won with an overwhelming 88.2% of the votes. His only competition was a charity organizer named Samiha Khalil.²²

Hamas continued its violent attacks against the Israelis and the PLO that year, but kept a low profile to continue building its support base without interference from the Israelis. *Hamas* leaders from within and outside the territories provided guidance to its members on activities and organization efforts, but did not do so in a unified manner.

²¹ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 48.

²² Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 4.

Hamas received an unexpected boost on September 25, 1997 when Khaled Meshal, the head of the *Hamas* political bureau in Jordan and the public face of *Hamas*, was the victim of an attempted assassination.²³ Two Mossad (Israeli Intelligence) agents, posing as Canadian tourists, approached him on the street and injected him with a poison. The agents were apprehended and turned over to the Jordanian police.²⁴ When the agents admitted they had poisoned Meshal, King Hussein had Meshal checked into the hospital, where his condition began to deteriorate. Hussein was outraged that the Israelis had violated the signed peace treaty with Jordan and attempted an assassination within its borders.²⁵ Hussein threatened to close the Israeli Embassy, demanded the antidote, an apology and a guarantee from the Israelis that this would be an isolated incident.²⁶ Hussein also sent for a specialist from the Mayo Clinic in the U.S. and contacted U.S. President Bill Clinton.

Israeli Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu feared that Hussein would hold the two Mossad agents and that the incident would affect border cooperation with Jordan that was essential to Israel's security.²⁷ This fear, coupled with U.S. pressure, led Netanyahu to provide the antidote and release *Sheikh Yassin* from prison, allowing the

²³ Hroub, *Hamas*, 134.

²⁴ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 104.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 106-07.

²⁶ Ross, *The Missing Piece*, 357.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

Sheikh to return to the Gaza Strip.²⁸ Yassin was released on October 1, 1997 and returned to Gaza shortly thereafter where he resumed leadership of *Hamas*. His return was seen as a victorious symbol of resistance against the Israelis.²⁹ Yassin's freedom was short-lived, however, as he was placed under house arrest a few months later by the PA for instigating violence in Gaza.³⁰

The al-Aqsa Intifada

Another summit at Camp David opened on July 11, 2000, but negotiations failed after only fifteen days.³¹ Arafat refused to compromise on Jerusalem and the Palestinians' right to return to land where they lived prior to the 1948 war. While Arafat created an opening for cooperation with *Hamas* by standing his ground on these key Palestinian objectives, he also alienated members of the PLO who questioned his commitment to peace and the establishment of an independent state.³²

Shortly after the failed summit, Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak dined at Barak's residence to discuss reopening negotiations. During this meal, Barak denied Arafat's request that he prevent Ariel Sharon from visiting the Temple Mount (*Harem at Sharif*). This visit was especially troubling to Palestinians because Palestinians despised Sharon for his ruthless conduct while serving in the military and as the

²⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 34-35.

²⁹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 111.

³⁰ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 107.

³¹ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 329.

³² Tamimi, *Hamas*, 195.

Minister of Defense during the war with Lebanon. Sharon visited the Temple Mount with a full security detail on September 28, 2000 to declare that Israel would retain control of Jerusalem. Palestinians claim that this visit was intended to provoke them into conflict. The second *Intifada*, referred to as the “*al-Aqsa Intifada*” began the next day when violence erupted throughout the territories.³³

There is much debate regarding whether the *Intifada* was sparked by Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount, or had been orchestrated by Arafat. Sharon claimed that Palestinian security had assured him that there would be no violence, provided he made no attempts to enter a mosque. A strong argument can be made that the *Intifada* was a calculated effort by Arafat to restore his place as leader of the Palestinian people.³⁴

Arafat’s popularity had steadily declined after the first *Intifada*, and many Palestinians who had previously supported the Oslo agreements now believed that their quality of life was worse than before the Declaration was signed.³⁵ He made several concessions while negotiating with Israel that seemed to contradict the goals and well-being of most Palestinians. His own party condemned him when he turned his back on the peace process and stood up for the resistance. Palestinian infrastructure in the occupied territories had essentially dissolved as the PA continued to suffer from

³³ Phyllis Bennis, *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Primer* (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2007), 6.

³⁴ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 58.

³⁵ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 48-49.

financial mismanagement and corruption. Senior government officials in the West Bank and Gaza were reportedly abandoning their positions due to lack of pay, and Arafat was accused of hiding millions of dollars he received in international aid. This accusation was later proven accurate after a 2003 IMF audit of the Palestinian Authority revealed over U.S. \$900 million of assistance money had been diverted to Arafat's personal bank account.³⁶

Arafat needed to regain his popularity and power. He believed that leading his people in an uprising would unify his supporters and increase his ability to lead. Just prior to Sharon's visit to the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Arafat reportedly influenced the preacher at the mosque to include a call to all Palestinians to "eradicate the Jews."³⁷ He cancelled classes at schools across all territories and called for a general strike to protest Israel's lack of compromise over Jerusalem. This was followed by an order that Palestinian television continuously play a video from the first *Intifada* which showed young Palestinians throwing rocks at Israeli tanks in the streets.³⁸ The Palestinians were already in a collective frenzied state of mind when Sharon visited which paved the way for an easy transition to a full rebellion.

The PA's security forces swept through the territories and imprisoned Islamists in great numbers as the *Intifada* began. *Hamas* elected not to join the *Intifada* in its early

³⁶ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 361.

³⁷ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 49.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

days due to Arafat's perceived connection, but Arafat took advantage of the opportunity to eliminate his political enemies rather than further the cause of the *Intifada*. Arafat continued to confuse Palestinians as he embraced the violence of Islamism one moment, only to condemn violence and embrace nationalism and the peace process the next. The result was a widespread lack of confidence in Arafat as a leader, which *Hamas* exploited to build additional support.³⁹

Arafat made another confusing decision in late September 2000 when he released hundreds of operatives from PA prisons.⁴⁰ It is believed that this was a final effort for Arafat to ingratiate himself to *Hamas* supporters, and there was speculation that Arafat had been in discussions with *Hamas* leaders before he made this decision. Regardless of any potential deals once the prisoners were released, the PA military wing and the PLO cooperated with *Hamas* to attack Israeli forces.⁴¹

Hamas had its own reasons for joining Arafat and the *Intifada*. Arafat incorrectly reasoned that the group was interested in following *al-Fatah's* lead. Rather, *Hamas* saw the *al-Aqsa Intifada* as an opportunity to expand Islamism in occupied territories. As a result, *Hamas* immediately became the new leader of the uprising once it joined the fighting. *Hamas* further weakened Arafat by calling attention to his need for *Hamas's* assistance to further the *Intifada*. *Hamas* put the PLO, PA and *al-Fatah* in its

³⁹ Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 239.

⁴⁰ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 70.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

crosshairs and publicized its intent “to weaken the Palestinian old guard and eventually displace it.”⁴² *Hamas* was an integral part of the second *Intifada* and emerged far stronger than an opposing force to the PLO (a role it had played in the first uprising). The group had the most effective means of resistance, especially as it increased its use of suicide bombing.⁴³

The Disengagement

Hamas continued to lead the resistance in violent attacks against Israeli forces. Israel retaliated by attacking Arafat and everyone with whom he was connected including the PA, PLO and *al-Fatah*, regardless of who was responsible for specific operations. By 2002, *Hamas* had noticed this trend and realized that its attacks on Israel were increasing its popularity and visibility as leaders of the resistance. Further, *Hamas* was expediting the PA’s infrastructure collapse which further deteriorated Palestinians’ quality of life and encouraged new recruits to seek out *Hamas*.⁴⁴

As negotiations to end the violence continued, *Hamas* conducted a massive suicide bombing at the Park Hotel in Netanya during a celebration on the first night of Passover on March 27, 2002. The attack killed thirty and injured more than 140 people, making it the most catastrophic act of violence since the second *Intifada* began in 2000.⁴⁵ *Hamas* publicly claimed responsibility for the attack, but Israel blamed

⁴² *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴³ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 49-50.

⁴⁴ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 72.

⁴⁵ Levitt, *Hamas*, 3-4.

Arafat and the PA for its inability to control the Palestinian people or curtail acts of terrorism.⁴⁶

The next day, Israeli Prime Minister Sharon authorized the IDF to reoccupy most of the West Bank and surround Arafat in his Ramallah compound. “Operation Defensive Shield” was designed to isolate Arafat from the Palestinian people and to destroy suspected training camps and security offices in the West Bank and Gaza.⁴⁷ Israeli troops reoccupied territories for over six weeks. Arafat, who was confined to his compound for over a month, welcomed an offer from the “Quartet” (a Middle East peace building coalition comprised of the U.S., UK, EU and Russia) to reestablish peace negotiations with Israel.⁴⁸

The Quartet’s plan was announced in a speech made on June 24, 2002 by President George H. W. Bush about the future of Palestinian-Israeli relations. This speech set the stage for what was known as the “Road Map for Peace,” a blueprint for a final resolution to the long-standing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. This plan called for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state by 2005 with several contingencies.⁴⁹ The first step called for an initial halt in violence. *Al-Fatah* pleaded with *Hamas* to suspend violent operations for three months so the new

⁴⁶ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 61-62.

⁴⁷ Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestinian Conflict*, 246.

⁴⁸ Bennis, *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, 53.

⁴⁹ Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestinian Conflict*, 246.

independent Palestinian state could have a chance, to which *Hamas* agreed.⁵⁰ The most critical precept was a regime change for the Palestinians. Bush stated that the Palestinians must “elect new leaders, leaders not compromised by terror,”⁵¹ an obvious critique of Arafat and his corrupt party. Arafat realized he needed to delegate some of his authority and named a longtime friend and ally, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the first Palestinian Prime Minister on March 8, 2003.⁵²

Abbas adopted a new strategy to deal with *Hamas*. He stood behind the Quartet and its Road Map to increase pressure on the organization. Abbas attempted to open a dialogue with *Hamas* rather than directly confronting them and even offered to include them in the new governing body that would be created from the negotiated peace agreement with Israel.⁵³ *Hamas* openly refused any talks with Abbas. Doctor Abdul al-Aziz Rantisi, the *Hamas* spokesman, accused Abbas of ignoring the right to return, a primary goal for Palestinians since the inception of *Hamas*. The group wanted Abbas to publicly state that the Palestinian people had the right to resist the Israeli occupation and to demand “the end of Israel’s assassination policy, and the release of substantial numbers of prisoners.”⁵⁴ *Hamas* refused to negotiate a truce with Abbas because of his cooperation with the Israelis. Many Palestinians questioned why Abbas was asking

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵¹ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 158.

⁵² Tamimi, *Hamas*, 202-03.

⁵³ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 224.

⁵⁴ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 359.

them to abandon the violent resistance while the Israelis were continuing the “occupation,” attacking Palestinian infrastructure and imprisoning their people. Abbas quickly gained a reputation as “a puppet for the Americans installed by them to undermine Arafat.”⁵⁵ Abbas resigned in September 2003 amid pressure from the PA and Arafat with whom he had extensively disagreed over distribution of power between the president and prime minister.

An unexpected twist in the Road Map for Peace came on December 18, 2003 when Sharon extended a seemingly major olive branch to the Palestinians and declared his intent for Israel to disengage from the Gaza Strip. He spoke to Palestinians in a publicly broadcast speech, “it is not in our interest to govern you. We will not remain in all the places where we are today.”⁵⁶ He described the process by which he would return all of Gaza to the Palestinians to self-govern without interference and order the removal of any Jewish settlements within its borders. In reality, Gaza had become too costly for Israel to maintain, and Sharon believed that his country was expending massive resources to protect 9,000 Jewish settlers surrounded by thousands of Palestinians. Moreover, he was certain that this would prove to the U.S. and the rest of the Quartet that he was committed to the peace plan. He hoped that withdrawing from

⁵⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 203-04.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

Gaza would enhance Israel's ability to remain in the West Bank while forcing the Quartet to pressure the PA to hold up its portion of the Road Map arrangement.⁵⁷

Hamas proved to be a major obstacle to Sharon's plan of disengagement. Sharon knew *Hamas* did not have to accept Abbas' offer to join the government. The organization was powerful enough by 2003 to establish its own parallel government which had a growing constituency through social and educational programs.⁵⁸ *Hamas* had repeatedly proven that it would do whatever was necessary to help the Palestinian people enjoy independence without compromise. To ensure that *Hamas* would not take over Gaza once the disengagement was complete, Sharon decided to take action. He ordered a helicopter attack on the spiritual leader of *Hamas* and the Islamist face of the violent Palestinian resistance, *Sheikh Yassin*, on March 22, 2004.⁵⁹ Yassin had just finished dawn prayers at a Gaza City mosque when he was assassinated.⁶⁰ His death caused outrage among all Palestinians, as he was revered by Islamists and respected by the nationalists. Rather than discouraging support for *Hamas*, the attack had the opposite effect as 200,000 Palestinians flooded the streets for Yassin's funeral procession. His death seemed to unite the community in Israeli resentment.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Gelvin, *The Israeli-Palestine Conflict*, 250.

⁵⁸ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 74.

⁵⁹ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 120-21.

⁶⁰ Hroub, *Hamas*, 123.

⁶¹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 80.

Sheikh Yassin was immediately replaced on March 22 by al-Rantisi, who became *Hamas*' new official leader.⁶² Al-Rantisi had been a longtime advisor to *Sheikh* Yassin as well as one of the founding members of *Hamas* and thus a natural choice to succeed him. His reign, however, was short lived. Sharon was determined to eliminate *Hamas* and believed that without leadership, the group would dissolve. On April 17, 2004,⁶³ al-Rantisi was assassinated just four weeks after succeeding Yassin when an Israeli helicopter fired two rockets at the new leader's car.⁶⁴

Sharon was convinced that he had decimated *Hamas*' leadership to the degree that the organization would be unable to recover. On June 6, 2004, the Israeli Cabinet voted 14 to 7 to withdraw from the Gaza Strip.⁶⁵ The Cabinet voiced concerns about the disengagement to Sharon. Members believed that the sudden withdrawal would leave a void in Gaza that would be filled with internal conflict and lead to greater instability. The PA, citing the lack of influence or power to control Gaza, feared that *Hamas*, even with its weakened leadership, would take advantage of the situation and establish itself as a governing body.⁶⁶

Sharon responded by eliminating another rung on *Hamas*' ladder of leadership. On August 21, 2003, he dispatched more helicopters and launched a fatal missile attack

⁶² Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 121-22.

⁶³ Levitt, *Hamas*, 37-38.

⁶⁴ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 126.

⁶⁵ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 366.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 364.

against the third most senior leader of *Hamas*, Abu Shanab, who was expected to succeed al-Rantisi.⁶⁷ *Hamas* figured out Sharon's plan to eliminate the leadership and decided to name future leaders secretly to avoid further assassinations.⁶⁸ Khaled Meshal became the new face of *Hamas*, but he was publicly portrayed as the group's spokesman and not a person of leadership.⁶⁹

By the end of 2003, Arafat had been confined to his compound for over two years. Rumors began spreading of Arafat's failing health which prompted the PA to bring Mahmoud Abbas back to the government and serve in Arafat's place. Abbas returned to Ramallah in October 2004, days before Arafat traveled to Paris on October 29 for medical treatment. Shortly after arriving in Paris, Yasser Arafat, at age 75, fell into a coma and never regained consciousness, passing away on November 11, 2004.⁷⁰ Abbas was named the new Chairman of the PLO the same day.

⁶⁷ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 81.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 208.

CHAPTER 5: 2005–2007

The Collapse of al-Fatah

Yasser Arafat's death left an enormous void within the PA's infrastructure. In spite of his inconsistent popularity, Arafat had been the face the Palestinian resistance for almost fifty years. The PA leadership asked Mahmoud Abbas to re-enter the political arena and lead the Palestinian people. On January 9, 2005, Abbas was officially elected as president of the Palestinian Authority in a one-sided election. No other parties besides *al-Fatah* nominated candidates. *Hamas* chose to demonstrate its discontent with the PLO, *al-Fatah*, and the PA by boycotting the presidential election, claiming it was an *al-Fatah* affair and did not represent the Palestinian people. The organization was joined by other Islamist Palestinians and groups who agreed that the election was fixed and was not the true sentiment of the Palestinian people.¹

Unable to stop the escalating intra-Palestinian violence, Abbas reached out again to *Hamas* and offered a *tahdiyya* (period of calm), which is not necessarily a peace or instituted truce, but rather a "cooling off" period.² Abbas guaranteed that no *Hamas* members would be arrested provided upcoming municipal elections were allowed to proceed as planned. This time, *Hamas* agreed to Abbas' offer, and the *tahdiyya* officially began in March 2005, marking the start of the longest ceasefire in which

¹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 209.

² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 90.

Hamas has ever participated.³ The *tahdiyya* would last until June 2006, but *Hamas*' decision to suspend its violent attacks for such an extended period was more likely linked to the group's announcement that it would participate in municipal and legislative elections.

Hamas made a strong statement against the Oslo Accords by boycotting previous elections, but given that Oslo was virtually a dead issue, the organization's participation in the 2005-2006 elections should not be interpreted as an endorsement. After Arafat's death, PLO rank-in-file supporters had been tenuous in their course of action regarding resistance activities. *Al-Fatah* was also criticized for the manner in which it was running the PA. *Hamas*, therefore, felt that conditions were ideal to seize power in Palestine.⁴

Hamas' decision to participate in the elections was meticulously evaluated and approved at the highest level of leadership. The group's field offices collected extensive polling data and forwarded the information to *Hamas* operatives in Saudi Arabia who sent it to the *Istishari* Council, *Hamas*' highest authority.⁵ The Council determined that public perception was strong enough that the PA (as well as the PLO and *al-Fatah*) were "militarily and politically bankrupt."⁶ *Hamas* leaders thus concluded that their rivals were weak, which made *Hamas* a viable and credible

³ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 221.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 210.

⁶ Mishal and Avraham, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 33.

political alternative for the Palestinian people. A *Hamas* spokesman announced on March 12, 2005 that the organization planned to participate in the upcoming elections.⁷

A *Hamas* campaign team was created with experts who had backgrounds in several aspects of government including communications, sociology, politics and economics. Palestinian youth were targeted early in the campaign as they were deemed crucial for victory. The Islamic University in Gaza became the election strategy headquarters for *Hamas* because from there, the group could maximize youth involvement.⁸

Hamas' campaign strategy was not necessarily to convince Palestinians that its policies would best lead them to a functional independent state, but rather to point out *al-Fatah*'s weaknesses and the PA's continued inability to govern effectively.

Hamas' slogan became "For Change and Reform."⁹ The group stressed the poor economic situation and reminded Palestinians of the constant allegations of corruption that had followed the PA since the failed Oslo Accords. Since *al-Fatah* leaders had signed the various Oslo Accords, the organization was an easy scapegoat. Further, the average Palestinian's quality of life was worsening while many members of *al-Fatah*, the PLO and the PA leadership benefitted from money that should have assisted the overall community.¹⁰ *Hamas* capitalized on all of the PA's failings while remaining focused on its ultimate goal of being free from Israeli interference. This was

⁷ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 211.

⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ Hroub, *Hamas*, 67.

accomplished while continuing to portray a group image that spread the Islamic social institutions of education, welfare and health.¹¹

On May 5, 2005, Palestinian municipal elections were held in 76 villages in the West Bank and 8 villages in the Gaza Strip. *Al-Fatah* won a majority of the municipal councils, but *Hamas* won the second highest number of councils.¹² More significant than the number of municipalities were the locations of *Hamas*' victories. The group was strongest in the most populous areas which correlated directly to the social and community services the organization had provided over the years. The elections revealed that, in spite of *al-Fatah* winning most of the councils, the majority of the population actually supported *Hamas*.

Al-Fatah called for an immediate inquiry into the validity of the results and for the elections to be re-held in three major urban municipalities where *Hamas* had won.¹³ *Al-Fatah* leaders reasoned that another election would give them time to regroup and ensure that they would win the most populous municipalities in order to keep *Hamas* outside of the government's inner circle. *Hamas* was confident that it would win and agreed to the new elections. The group stipulated, however, that *al-Fatah* needed to agree to respect the outcome as well as a few additional minor demands before the re-election could occur.¹⁴ *Hamas* and *al-Fatah* failed to agree on every detail, but *al-*

¹¹ Mishal and Avraham, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 2.

¹² Tamimi, *Hamas*, 213.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hroub, *Hamas*, 114.

Fatah announced its intent to hold new elections regardless of *Hamas*' acceptance of the process.

The new elections were approved by the Palestinian court (in which *al-Fatah* held a majority) on May 21, 2005. Five days later, *Hamas* announced its intent to boycott any election that was not agreed upon by both sides.¹⁵ *Al-Fatah*'s plan to garner more support before holding the new elections was transparent. *Al-Fatah*'s desperation to try and perfectly time the elections to produce the best possible results for the party was apparent to many Palestinians. As Israel's withdrawal date from Gaza neared (August 2005), *al-Fatah* feared that if elections were held after this withdrawal, *Hamas* would take credit and subsequently win the election.¹⁶ *Al-Fatah* agreed to postpone elections until July, hoping an agreement would be reached by all participants and more importantly, that they would have the necessary support to win.

Al-Fatah received a much-needed break on May 26, 2005, when President Abbas and President Bush met in Washington, D.C. Bush publicly referred to *Hamas* as a terrorist organization and claimed that the group should not be permitted to participate in any elections. He even went so far as to say that any *Hamas* electoral victories should not be recognized.¹⁷ Abbas returned to Palestine with newfound U.S. support. There was, however, a growing uneasiness that the U.S.' public condemnation might

¹⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 213.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 213-14.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 214.

actually enhance *Hamas*' support base among the Islamist community. On June 4, Abbas postponed all elections indefinitely.¹⁸

Israel began disengagement from the Gaza Strip after 38 years of occupation on August 15, 2005 and completed the removal of all Israelis by September 12, 2005.¹⁹ *Hamas* led the celebration in Gaza as thousands of Palestinians took to the streets in joyous merriment. Just as *al-Fatah* feared, most Palestinians in Gaza credited *Hamas* with the liberation of the Gaza Strip.²⁰ They saw years of relentless *Hamas* attacks on Israel with no compromise and correlated this directly with the "retreat" of the Israelis from Gaza. The once-occupied territory had become an open area for *Hamas* and other terrorist groups to freely make explosives, move weapons and provide a safe haven for criminals and known terrorists with no fear of Israeli interference. While Sharon's intention was to alleviate the burden of responsibility over Gaza, the withdrawal was perceived by many as an Israeli defeat and a *Hamas* victory.²¹

Al-Fatah could not take any credit for the withdrawal, and Abbas' window of opportunity to win the elections was rapidly closing. The U.S. Bush administration was increasingly pressuring Abbas to continue with the planned election, based on reports that *Hamas* did not have the necessary support to win. Although Abbas reportedly voiced his concerns to the U.S., he reluctantly met with *Hamas* leaders to

¹⁸ Ibid., 213-14.

¹⁹ Wasserstein, *Israelis and Palestinians*, 206.

²⁰ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 213.

²¹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 89.

discuss the new date for legislative elections. Shortly thereafter, it was announced that elections would be held on January 25, 2006.²²

As January approached, Abbas and his party grew increasingly anxious about the status of the campaign and upcoming elections. They worried that *Hamas* had become too powerful since the 2005 elections. Abbas voiced his concerns to the U.S. and to Israel. Israel was convinced and joined Abbas in warning the U.S. not to force the elections to proceed. The U.S. administration, however, was obstinate and insisted that the planned elections be held based on intelligence reports (that have since been proven false). They believed *al-Fatah* was receiving popular support throughout the territories which would lead to electoral victory. Israel, however, wanted to ensure a *Hamas* defeat. On December 21, 2005, the Israelis announced that they would not allow voting in East Jerusalem, where many *Hamas* supporters lived.²³ *Hamas* and its supporters were outraged, although they remained confident that East Jerusalem was not necessary for them to win. The group called for the elections to proceed with or without East Jerusalem's participation.²⁴

Al-Fatah reached out to Israel to discuss the decision to ban East Jerusalem's residents from the vote. They had concerns about the negative perception created and the potential detrimental effect on *al-Fatah*. Conversely, Israel was anxious about the

²² Tamimi, *Hamas*, 216.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

impact of a *Hamas* victory, but on January 10, 2006, announced that a limited number of Palestinians would be allowed to vote in East Jerusalem. The rest would have to travel to other PA-controlled areas in order to cast their ballots.²⁵

The Elections

On January 26, 2006, a reported 1,073,000 Palestinians voted in the legislative elections.²⁶ The world watched pre-election polls reporting *al-Fatah* as the early winner. *Hamas* had instructed supporters to intentionally mislead pollsters throughout the campaign by either not revealing their choice or by falsely indicating that they would vote for *al-Fatah*. *Hamas* reasoned that *al-Fatah* would not campaign as hard if they believed they had a clear advantage going into the election.²⁷ The strategy's impact unexpectedly spilled over to election day as pollsters used the tainted data to predict winners.

When *al-Fatah* was named the early victor, many supporters began celebrating in the streets, flaunting a seemingly obvious triumph. After all votes were counted, *Hamas* held 76 of the 132 legislative seats and was the majority party in the Palestinian legislature.²⁸ *Al-Fatah*, as well as the rest of the world, was stunned. Over 3,000 Palestinians marched through Ramallah, the former home of Arafat's PLO headquarters, wearing green (the official color of Islam and *Hamas*), waving green

²⁵ Ibid., 216-17.

²⁶ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 2.

²⁷ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 93.

²⁸ Levitt, *Hamas*, 8.

flags and chanting *Hamas* slogans.²⁹ Surprisingly, there were no violent clashes reported on election day. This was possibly due to the state of shock in Gaza and the West Bank. It did not take long, however, for the shock to evolve into anger. *Al-Fatah* supporters were furious with party leaders for failing them. They took to the streets and filled the sky with gunfire. The protests turned violent shortly after the elections when *al-Fatah* and *Hamas* supporters clashed in front of the Palestinian Parliament building.³⁰

Hamas reverted to its former ways immediately following the elections; election rhetoric that had offered hope of a peaceful existence with Israel once again vanished. *Hamas* leaders reiterated their intent to drive Israelis from any territory to which Palestinians could lay claim as well as their goal of turning the Palestinian territories into a more Islamist state.³¹ Further, *Hamas* reneged on its 2005 cease fire with *al-Fatah* and its willingness to directly negotiate with or recognize Israel. There was speculation that once *Hamas* won the election it would disband the *Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades*. This action would have helped prove to the world that *Hamas* was a group with whom the international community could deal in a nonviolent manner. Instead, *Hamas* released an official statement that the *Brigades*, “will remain, they will

²⁹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

³¹ Levitt, *Hamas*, 31.

grow, they will be armed more and more until the complete liberation of all Palestine.”³²

As the new Palestinian majority in the legislature, *Hamas* instituted official state policies of distributing literature on *jihad* and promoting “martyr tourism” to attract tourists interested in their struggle.³³ Any optimism that other Palestinians had for a new beginning and a chance at peace with their neighbor essentially disappeared. Instead, hope was replaced with renewed vigor among Islamists to fight the Israelis until they reclaimed all land lost to Israel and then eliminated the enemy permanently. When the first *Hamas* Cabinet was sworn in, one of the new legislators proclaimed, “*Jihad* is our path and dying for the sake of Allah is our biggest wish.”³⁴

The Aftermath

One might conclude that *Hamas* always sought to control the PA and the government. Since the election, many *Hamas* members have publicly stated that their January 2006 victory was not a surprise. There has been far more written, however, that proves the contrary. It is commonly believed today that *Hamas*’ plan for the election was to win enough seats (just under half) to have an impact in the government and represent the Islamist people within the Palestinian territories. There was no plan to gain enough seats to ultimately be responsible for the day-to-day management.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 176.

³⁵ Hroub, *Hamas*, 65-66.

Hamas was not completely prepared for its new role, and thus was not in a position to govern immediately following the election. In the months after the election, tensions between *Hamas* and *al-Fatah* remained high. *Al-Fatah* refused to relinquish control of the government while *Hamas* insisted that its victory had granted the group legitimate control over the PA.³⁶

On February 13, 2006, days before *Hamas* took control of the legislature, outgoing *al-Fatah* members held a farewell session. This session created a new constitutional court to serve as the final arbiter in disputes between the president and the legislature which *Hamas* would soon control. Abbas was granted the authority to appoint the members to serve on this court.³⁷ Outgoing legislators also appointed *al-Fatah* loyalists to four critical positions within the government. Among these new appointees was the head of the government anti-corruption commission, a position *Hamas* needed to fill with one of its members in order to fulfill an election promise to end nepotism and government mismanagement that had become prevalent in the *al-Fatah* PA.³⁸

Al-Fatah continued to resist the government change in power. Months of tension finally gave way to civil war. On June 7, 2007, *Hamas* launched a military offensive against *al-Fatah* in Gaza. *Hamas* seized control of the media and targeted PA government buildings and installations. One of the group's primary objectives was the

³⁶ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 1-2.

³⁷ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 227.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

PA security compound, *al-Suraya*. *Hamas* dug a tunnel beneath the compound, detonated explosives and seized control of the building.³⁹ *Hamas* forces controlled the Gaza streets by June 13 and completed its ousting of *al-Fatah* the next day by securing Mahmoud Abbas' presidential compound.⁴⁰

At the end of the sixth day of fighting, the Gaza strip was under *Hamas*' control. After twenty years of existence, *Hamas* had succeeded in transforming itself from a terrorist organization of resistance rooted in violence to the democratically-elected ruling political party of the Palestinian people.

³⁹ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Hamas successfully ousted *al-Fatah* from Gaza in 2007 because it held several advantages during the civil war. *Hamas* capitalized on *al-Fatah*'s weakened security forces which never fully recovered from Operation Defensive Shield, launched by Israel in 2002. Further, the international community's blockade of foreign aid placed on the Palestinians to protest *Hamas*' continued violence only bolstered *al-Fatah*'s inability to pay its soldiers and other government workers. *Hamas* continued to receive funding from Iran, the primary supportive state of the organization. In 2007, for example, Iran reportedly provided over U.S. \$200 million to *Hamas*.¹

The aforementioned issues help explain how the civil war unfolded, but *Hamas*' electoral win requires greater analysis. *Hamas*' victory was the result of several separate and sometimes unrelated issues. When coupled together, these circumstances produced an environment where a *Hamas* victory became the only viable outcome of the elections.

Hamas' genius in strategy was the primary factor contributing to its ability to gain the necessary support to win the parliamentary elections in 2006. This strategy was bolstered by the PA's and PLO's inability to establish an independent state or come to a peaceful resolution with Israel. *Hamas* also used the PA's failures to improve Palestinians' quality of life by exploiting *da'wa*. Another contributing factor, although to a lesser extent, was the U.S. influence and pressure on Abbas and the PA to proceed

¹ David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair* (April 2008)
<http://vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804> (accessed November 8, 2008).

with the election. Many critics interpret this as U.S. ignorance of the political pulse in the Palestinian territories.

Hamas' Strategy

Hamas was well-positioned for the 2006 elections. The organization continued to improve social and community outreach programs that had begun with the Palestinian *Ikhwan* and quickly established itself as Palestinian caretakers in towns such as Al-Shiyukh, a municipality near Hebron where *Hamas* had won in the local 2005 elections. After the May 2005 elections, *Hamas* built a new town entrance and constructed streetlamps. In Deir al-Balah, Gaza, *Hamas* “reinforced the roads, cleaned the beaches, [they] decorated the streets with flowers and lights” within months of coming to power.²

As the campaign progressed, *Hamas* increased its community presence through *da'wa* activity. Palestinian families would “wake up in the morning and find a box of staples like oil and sugar...on the sidewalk,” as one head of household reported.³ The May 2005 elections revealed the most urgent and relevant issues to Palestinians were poverty and unemployment, and not necessarily independence from Israel. *Hamas* was keenly aware of this fact and effectively employed *da'wa* to increase its support base while downplaying its role as a violent resistance group and terrorist organization.

² Gunning, *Hamas in Politic*, 153.

³ Levitt, *Hamas*, 17-18.

Rather than using the name “*Hamas*,” candidate campaigns operated under names like “The Reform Bloc” or “The Islamic Bloc for Change.”⁴ The goal was to appeal to the nationalist movement and violence-wary Palestinians whose quality of life was suffering. *Al-Fatah*, meanwhile, adopted the opposite strategy to in an attempt to reduce the number of supporters that had left to join the ranks of *Hamas*. *Al-Fatah* ran campaigns under names like the “Martyrs’ Bloc” to appear more in line with the PLO’s militant roots.⁵

Hamas’ decision to participate in the 2005 ceasefire was mutually beneficial to the group as well as to Palestinians with different ideological perspectives. The decision allowed the organization sufficient time to mobilize for the elections, while also appealing to Palestinians who favored the two-state solution that *Hamas* had long opposed. A significant Palestinian faction, including some *al-Fatah* members, believed that if *Hamas* won, it would support peace and abandon negotiations for an independent state. *Hamas* provided no reason for them to believe otherwise, and the group continued to temporarily suppress its anti-Israel rhetoric and violent actions to eliminate the Jewish population.

Hamas’ entire campaign platform intentionally omitted language that would evoke memories of its violent war to eliminate Israel from the globe. *Hamas*’ policy officially called for “a free and independent Palestinian state with sovereignty over the

⁴ Ibid., 240.

⁵ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 177.

whole of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Jerusalem, without concession of any span of the historic land of Palestine.”⁶ *Hamas* even hinted at the possibility of directly negotiating with Israel; a candidate indicated, “we won’t rule out negotiations with the Jewish State.”⁷

Hamas successfully masked its violent past while subtly keeping its ability to violently resist Israel in the minds of the voters. Those in favor of peaceful change and potentially a two-state solution saw *Hamas* as the charitable group who honored the agreed cease-fire. Conversely, individuals aligned with the Islamist approach of using violent *jihad* to drive out the Israelis viewed *Hamas* as a terrorist organization. This dual-campaign strategy was intentional and brilliant.

While *Hamas* alluded to potential negotiations with Israel and the acceptance of a two-state solution, members also constantly reminded the Palestinians of *Hamas*’ role in driving Israel out of Gaza. *Hamas* candidates referenced the resistance during rallies and displayed posters of *Hamas*’ martyrs (including suicide bombers), often in close proximity to the candidate.⁸

In Nablus, *Hamas* candidates converted Yahya Ayyash’s home to a campaign headquarters in an effort to provoke Palestinian emotions stemming from his assassination and attacks that were carried out in his name.⁹ As a result of their

⁶ Ibid., 152.

⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 5.

⁸ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 175.

⁹ Ibid., 175-76.

effective campaigns, *Hamas* candidates enjoyed support from all sections of the Palestinian population.

The Ineffectiveness of Arafat and the PLO

Many analyses of the 2006 Palestinian elections identify the primary driver behind *Hamas*' victory as the longstanding ineffectiveness and corruption by Arafat and the various factions with whom he was associated. This line of thinking might suggest that *Hamas*' success resulted from the PLO's weakness and not necessarily a show of support for *Hamas* and the ideals upon which the organization stood. In truth, many Palestinians were believed to have voted for *Hamas* out of spite for the PLO. To believe that Palestinians who voted for *Hamas* were unaware of the party's beliefs and reliance on violent *jihād*, though, is naive. There were several smaller parties that Palestinians could have voted for to prevent an *al-Fatah* victory without giving the majority victory to *Hamas*.¹⁰

Regardless of the message or intent behind the Palestinian vote, the fact remains that *Hamas* built its support at the expense of Arafat and the longstanding Palestinian leadership's failures. Arafat and his colleagues consistently vied to be recognized by the Palestinians and the international community as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian People."¹¹ This recognition never came, due in part to the constant

¹⁰ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 96.

¹¹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 187.

challenges from Islamists within the Palestinian community led by the *Ikhwan*, and then *Hamas*.

Islamists initially refuted the PLO's claim of representing the Palestinians because the PLO was not elected by the people. This sentiment was echoed by *Hamas*. The group's leadership not only dismissed the PLO, but also made similar claims about *al-Fatah* and the PA. Islamists viewed Arafat's election and those of subsequent leaders as illegitimate because they could be connected to the PLO who, *Hamas* continuously insisted, had no "mandate to monopolize the representation of the Palestinians."¹² Instead of recognizing Arab nationalism as the Palestinians' future, *Hamas* made a strong case to blame Arab nationalism for the loss of land to the Israelis.¹³ The Arab defeat in 1967 was attributed to a weakened and unified opposing force to the Israelis. According to *Hamas* and its supporters, Arab nationalists perpetuated the failures by letting Israel continue to take their land over the decades.

Al-Fatah's history of corruption contributed to its reputation of incompetence and inability to manage the Palestinian future. In the days leading up to the 2006 Palestinian elections, the British newspaper, *The Guardian* reported from Gaza that "corruption and incompetence in Yasser Arafat's faction (throughout the PA) are helping *Hamas* win support in run-up to Palestinian election."¹⁴ The group highlighted

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 220-21.

¹⁴ Ibid., 218.

al-Fatah's repeated corruption allegations while continuing to remind people of *Hamas'* reputation for not being corrupt and holding itself accountable to every Palestinian.¹⁵

An additional failure by *al-Fatah* was its inability to successfully negotiate a peaceful coexistence with Israel. No progress was made to settle the conflict. Instead of improving the quality of life for Palestinians, the PLO and *al-Fatah* engaged in a seemingly endless process that only resulted in broken treaties and increased violence on both sides of the conflict. *Hamas* was an outspoken opponent of the peace process and accurately predicted that Israel would not fulfill promises made to the PA. The group conveniently shied away from any involvement in disrupting the peace process through its use of violence.

Hamas also gained support among Palestinians, especially from those who continued to distrust Israel, by continuing to criticize Israel's ongoing development of settlements. *Hamas* claimed that Israel was using the peacemaking process as a guise under which it could expropriate even more land.¹⁶ Israel continued to build settlements while engaging in talks with Palestinian officials and seemed to be creating more permanent Jewish homes on the land whose future was supposed to be a part of negotiations. Even during the campaigns, *Hamas* allowed proponents of the peace process believe it would continue the process. However, those who had supported

¹⁵ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 153.

¹⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 220-21.

Hamas over the years knew it was “tenacious and unwavering in its rejection of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process.”¹⁷

Al-Fatah further hindered its chances of defeating *Hamas* by its poor strategy to win districts during the 2006 elections. In many districts, *al-Fatah* had several candidates running against each other in addition to the one candidate representing *Hamas*.¹⁸ The result was *al-Fatah* candidates “taking” votes from each other and enabling the *Hamas* candidate to win a district with as few as 21% of the votes. The parliamentary elections for approximately half of the available 66 seats were selected by the districts, but the remaining seats were selected by a national vote. This allowed *Hamas* to win 30 seats in the election while only receiving about 45% of the popular vote. *Al-Fatah* received 41% of the popular vote and 27 of the available parliamentary seats.¹⁹

The Exploitation of Da’wa

In addition to profiting from Arafat’s ineffectiveness, *Hamas* also utilized its extensive networks in the name of *da’wa* to provide vital services to Palestinians. *Hamas* did not have the burden of operational government expenses, and thus was able to provide better and more frequent services to the people living in Gaza and the West Bank than the PA.²⁰ Many Palestinians would barely have been able to subsist without

¹⁷ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 97.

¹⁸ Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell.”

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 97.

the assistance provided by *Hamas*. While the PA offered limited services in conjunction with UN support and a variety of NGOs, the most efficient source of aid was established and maintained by *Hamas* and its supporters.²¹

The deplorable conditions in the West Bank and Gaza left a void that *Hamas* was eager and able to fill.²² Through the organization's use of *da'wa*, it was able to build schools and universities. It also established and supplied medical clinics throughout the territories. The group reportedly spent millions of dollars on aid every year.²³ *Hamas* slowly became the face of progress and assistance to a society that had become accustomed to misery. A Palestinian mother of ten was quoted by a reporter before the elections as saying, "All we know is [Hamas] are the ones who bring us food."²⁴ To further distance itself from the *al-Fatah* members who lived in luxury, *Hamas* instructed its leadership to live among the people like ordinary Palestinians. Many even made their homes inside the refugee camps.²⁵

As one might expect, *Hamas*' services came with strings attached. The PA, Israel, and the rest of the global world did not interfere with social welfare groups' ties to *Hamas* because they were conducted in the name of *da'wa*. The extensive charity network established by *Hamas*, however, not only reinforced the group's reputation as

²¹ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 220-21.

²² Levitt, *Hamas*, 5.

²³ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 220-21.

²⁴ Levitt, *Hamas*, 107.

²⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 220-21.

efficient and helpful within the communities, but also rendered those who accepted services indebted to the organization.²⁶ While no official contract between recipients of financial aid or social services and *Hamas* existed, it stands to reason that people accepting these services were more likely to accommodate certain requests from *Hamas*.

Beneficiaries allowed their homes to serve as safe houses for fugitives and ferried fugitives. They were also tasked with providing logistical support for the organization's violent acts such as moving funds or weapons and housing explosives until needed.²⁷ In the words of an Israeli defense official, "in the territories, there are no free lunches: those who receive help from the Islamic associations pay with support for *Hamas*."²⁸ Individuals who obliged *Hamas*' requests received more *da'wa* assistance than those who did not support the organization. Further, *Hamas* members linked to terrorist activity and family members of martyrs received even more.²⁹

Hamas relied on *da'wa* to establish a logistical support network to conduct violent acts of *jihad*. The organization met in mosques and hospitals to avoid detection and Israeli and PA interference. The group also buried arms caches and explosives under schools and playgrounds.³⁰

²⁶ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 153.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁸ Levitt, *Hamas*, 118.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

Many of the funds that were received from Iran were allocated for *da'wa* assistance. As *Hamas* proved to its supporters that it was providing essential services to the Palestinians, the organization received more funds from charities that were subsequently used to finance *jihadist* operations.

Charity committees were established to subsidize housing for suicide bombers whose homes were destroyed in retaliatory attacks by Israel.³¹ While many Palestinians who voted for *Hamas* in 2006 did not approve of *jihad* against the Israelis, the services provided in the name of *da'wa* by *Hamas* were far too vital to lose. The resulting dependence on *Hamas* to provide these services was an intentional and integral part of the organization's strategy for electoral victory against *al-Fatah*.

The U.S. Contribution

Any analysis of the *Hamas*' 2006 electoral victory would be incomplete if it did not consider U.S. involvement and, perhaps, contributions. U.S. President George W. Bush and his administration were adamant about promoting democracy throughout the Arab world. Many viewed the 2006 Palestinian elections as an example of the U.S. imposing its will on a people in an environment it did not understand.³² At the time of the elections, the U.S. government was leading a global war on violent Islamism, and

³¹ *Ibid.*, 123.

³² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 97.

the administration posited that radical Islamist ideology could only be successfully combated through free elections and governmental transparency.³³

The U.S. reportedly pressured Abbas to proceed with the legislative elections in the Palestinian territories in January 2006, in spite of Abbas' warnings that *al-Fatah* was not positioned to do well.³⁴ The U.S. had received Palestinian polling data that practically guaranteed an *al-Fatah* victory. This polling data reflects, in part, *Hamas*' successful execution of plans to influence and mislead poll results. *Hamas*' leadership instructed supporters to tell pollsters that they were undecided or would be voting for *al-Fatah*. The U.S. placed great confidence in these polls which gave the administration confidence that it was backing the winning party.

After the elections, the U.S. attempted to perform damage control and negate the results. While President Bush was careful to commend the Palestinians for showing what "democracy" and the "will of the people" could accomplish, he also stated that the U.S. would not recognize a *Hamas*-led government while it continued to promote violence and calls for Israel's abolishment.³⁵ The Quartet formally issued a demand that *Hamas* "renounce violence, recognize Israel's right to exist, and accept the terms of all previous agreements."³⁶ On March 29, 2006, the U.S. severed diplomatic ties with newly sworn-in *Hamas* government and joined the EU, Russia and the UN in

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell."

³⁵ Bickerton and Klausner, *A History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 396.

³⁶ Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell."

cutting financial aid to the Palestinian Authority. The U.S. Department of State sent an email to all diplomats containing orders to cease any cooperation with *Hamas* government ministries.³⁷

The White House, however, continued to communicate with non-*Hamas* Parliament members and President Abbas.³⁸ Reports allege that the Bush administration assured Abbas that it would support him and *al-Fatah* if an attempt was made to remove the new *Hamas* government from power. The U.S. gave Abbas the confidence to mobilize for an offensive against *Hamas* which led to all-out civil war in Gaza.³⁹ The U.S., however, failed to adequately support Abbas. Instead of removing *Hamas* from power, the *al-Fatah* fighters allowed *Hamas* to seize control of the entire Gaza Strip in 2007. *Hamas* captured weapons and ammunition supplied by the U.S. to assist *al-Fatah* and had “free reign” in Gaza to set up a base of operations from which to launch rockets into Israel.⁴⁰

Concluding Thoughts

With every vote cast for *Hamas*, Palestinians essentially turned their backs on the decades-long *al-Fatah* led peace process. Rather, they chose to place their futures as well as those of subsequent generations in the hands of an organization that has throughout its history condoned and actively engaged in violence. The same

³⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 158.

³⁸ Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

individuals who created *Hamas* as a means of radical resistance are now charged with leading the Palestinian people as leaders of government.

The current leadership in Gaza primarily consists of the same individuals who led *Hamas* to victory in 2006. The current Palestinian Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, was one of the youngest founding members of *Hamas*. During his youth, Haniyeh was active in Islamist politics at the University of Gaza in the early 1980s. He became *Sheikh Yassin's* first confidant and aide and subsequently was given the responsibility of leading *Hamas's* 2006 election campaign.⁴¹ Haniyeh was named Prime Minister on March 29, 2006.⁴² While *Hamas* continues to recognize Haniyeh as the Prime Minister of its de facto government in Gaza, the official PA Prime Minister is Salam Fayyad, appointed by President Abbas.⁴³

Another key figure in *Hamas* leadership, Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahar, was a pediatrician before becoming *Hamas's* spokesman in Gaza.⁴⁴ He was an active member of the *Ikhwan* in Gaza and Egypt and had the distinction of being the “voice of *Hamas*” since the early 1990s.⁴⁵ Al-Zahar served as the leader of *Hamas* after the assassinations of

⁴¹ Hroub, *Hamas*, 130.

⁴² Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 97.

⁴³ Howard Schneider, “A Palestinian Technocrat Rises Steadily, but Questions Persist,” *The Washington Post*, 13 July 2009, sec. A, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 164.

⁴⁵ David Horowitz, *Still Life With Bombers: Israel in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 117.

Yassin and al-Rantisi⁴⁶ and became the foreign minister in *Hamas*' elected government in 2006. His son, Hussam, was killed in January 2008 during an Israeli attack.⁴⁷ Al-Zahar, who lost his first son during an attack by Israeli forces in 2003, held press conferences where he held a bloody cloth taken from his son's body and blamed the recent visit to the Middle East by U.S. President George W. Bush.⁴⁸

After the 2006 election, Israel imprisoned several *Hamas* leaders. Dr. Aziz Duwaik, the Speaker of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) for *Hamas*, was arrested along with several other members of Parliament, heads of municipalities and many senior *Hamas* members in the West Bank after the abduction of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit on the Gaza-Israeli border.⁴⁹ Duwaik gained notoriety as the English-speaking spokesman for the group of deportees to Southern Lebanon in 1992.⁵⁰ He was released from Hadarim Prison in late June 2009.⁵¹

Hamas leaders inside Gaza continue to rely on the group's senior members in the "outer ring" of *Hamas* leadership. Since the 1989 reorganization, leadership has become increasingly dependent on exiled members in states such as Syria for guidance

⁴⁶ Hroub, *Hamas*, 130.

⁴⁷ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 184.

⁴⁸ Haaretz Daily Newspaper Online, "Exiled Hamas Leader Says Bush 'Incited the Zionists' To Raid Gaza," <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/944967.html> (accessed July 6, 2009).

⁴⁹ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 197.

⁵⁰ Hroub, *Hamas*, 132.

⁵¹ Al-Manar Lebanese Communications Group, "Hamas Parliament Speaker Released From Israeli Jail," <http://www.almanar.com.lb/NewsSite/NewsDetails.aspx?id=91235&language=en> (accessed July 6, 2009).

and representation. Khaled Meshal continues to serve as the *Hamas* Political Bureau Director. After the 1997 failed assassination attempt on Meshal in Jordan and the relationship between *Hamas* and King Hussein deteriorated, Meshal was expelled to Qatar and later relocated to Damascus, Syria. Syria is a safe haven from where Meshal and many other Islamist extremists can freely operate.⁵² His status as an influential *Hamas* leader spurred visits from former U.S. President Jimmy Carter to Damascus in April and December 2008 to discuss conditions under which *Hamas* would enter peace negotiations with Israel and *al-Fatah*.⁵³ Neither meeting produced any significant improvements in *Hamas*' position. The group's leadership has not rescinded its refusal to recognize Israel since the 2006 election, halting any momentum in the peace process.

A series of issues and events combined to create the ideal environment for *Hamas*' 2006 victory, one such issue being the desire to oust *al-Fatah* from power. To most Palestinians, *al-Fatah*'s removal meant the elimination of corruption and an inability to lead. Once *Hamas* decided to participate in the elections, the group designed and successfully executed aggressive and brilliant campaign strategies. The organization relied heavily on its history of *da'wa* services. The exploitation of *da'wa* by *Hamas* to fuel its violent activities did not go unnoticed by Palestinians, but the services they received from the group were essential by design.

⁵² Horovitz, *Still Life With Bombers*, 207.

⁵³ Cable News Network, "Carter Meets With Hamas Officials in Egypt," <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/meast/04/17/carter.hamas/index.html> (accessed July 6, 2009).

It can be argued, however, that Palestinians were motivated to vote for *Hamas* because of its commitment and support of the Palestinian dream.⁵⁴ Since the war in 1948, most Palestinians have dreamt of a free Palestine. Specifically, they dream of returning to the land from which they were driven when Israel won the war. This is true for both the die-hard Islamist extremists and those Palestinians who have agreed to support a peaceful solution to the conflict.

To Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and the Diaspora, *Hamas* was an unwavering symbol of optimism during a time when there was little hope. Since *Hamas* and other Islamists have not traditionally participated in the corrupt Palestinian political system, they became the face of a “Palestinian renewal.”⁵⁵ When Palestinians voted for *Hamas* in January 2006, they also voted for a new beginning.

It has yet to be determined where *Hamas* will lead the Palestinians. *Hamas* claims to offer a new direction away from the traditional leadership established by Arafat and PLO. The desired end-state of this “Palestinian renewal” must be established. For Palestinians, the dream of a free and united Palestine is perpetually on the horizon. The short-term goal of Palestinians, however, is an improved quality of life. *Hamas* did not expect to win the majority power, but will undoubtedly use its newfound authority to continue its quest to end the occupation in land it deems to be Palestinian and to completely eliminate the state of Israel.

⁵⁴ Tamimi, *Hamas*, 220-21.

⁵⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas Vs. Fatah*, 96.

When *Hamas* won student council elections in 2001, the group allegedly celebrated by issuing a statement that its “military wing...would reward Hamas supporters for the victory by carrying out a major suicide attack against Israelis.”⁵⁶ Similar statements have been made since the organization’s victory in 2006. The latest chapter in *Hamas*’ arduous history has culminated with its succession as the Palestinian political power. As a result, the future of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process is nebulous. *Hamas* has attempted to become more political in nature and to distance itself from its violent past. Its military wing, however, has remained intact and continues to carry out violent attacks against Israelis.

It is doubtful that any political behavioral change represents an ideological change for *Hamas*. Even if *Hamas*’ political leaders were to agree to a ceasefire with Israel and re-visit peace negotiations, its military wing lacks the discipline and desire to support the successful implementation of any such agreement. The final resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, therefore, is no closer to fruition with *Hamas* in power. This group of violent and intolerant Islamists cannot lead Palestinians in a peaceful coexistence with Israelis. *Hamas* is defined by its past and will continue to place its contempt for Israel over the well-being of the people it has been elected to lead.

⁵⁶ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 176.

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