

## Israel 2016

After the full return of Sinai to Egypt in 1982.



Credit: Modified from the United States National Imagery and Mapping Agency

**V** **Hamas Ideological Victory, Resistance, and Pragmatism 2000 to 2016**

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**Overview**

In the year 2000 US President Bill Clinton invited Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the PA/PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat to the Camp David Summit to secure what many thought would be a permanent status agreement invoking a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians. When Arafat arrived, he had little intent to compromise. Rather, he used the negotiations as a tactical move for consolidation and radicalization of the overall Palestine national movement. Orchestrating the failure of the negotiations, he positioned Hamas as his “point man” in the planned uprising against Israel.

Arafat lined up ideologically with the Islamists; both The Palestinian National Charter (PNC) and The Hamas Covenant (HC) call for Israel’s demise. The PLO/Fatah strove to harness Hamas’ commitment and activism in their joint struggle against Israel, and in doing so unwittingly reinforced Hamas’ power in the Palestinian street. Hamas turned the tables and proved dominant during the ensuing four year Second Intifada, or Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). Using the plan advocated by the Hamas strategist Ibrahim Makadme, Hamas attacked Israel knowing full well the PA would be held responsible for all security breaches emanating from Gaza and the West Bank. As a result of these attacks, Israel destroyed PA security forces, viewing them as complicit with the perpetration of Hamas violence. Once the PA was weakened, Hamas moved to solidify its leadership among the Palestinian population.

From the outset, Hamas declared a two-front war against both Israel and the corrupt secular PA regime. Israel attained military success, but its deterrence was weakened. The PA was discredited while Hamas achieved respectability and gained legitimacy as a positive leadership alternative. In the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections Hamas claimed victory, yet PA Fatah President Mahmoud Abbas repressed its influence. Abbas replaced Arafat after his death in late 2004. Discussions and attempts at national unity were accompanied by street battles between Fatah and Hamas. By June 2007 the Hamas military captured the Gaza

Strip, banishing Fatah. With US and Israeli help, the PA regime reconstituted itself and regained full control of the West Bank.

In June 2006 Hamas flexed its muscles once again and abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in a daring cross-border raid from Gaza. The move pitted the more pragmatic political leadership of Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh against its own Jihadi military faction “Izz a-Din al-Qassam,” led by Ahmed Jaabari. Jaabari’s success was a result of defiance against “political Hamas.” Over the next few years, Hamas strengthened its hold on Gaza, using both the dawa calling for educational and social services and the Jihadi demand for conflict. In particular, conflict included rocket attacks against Israel. Eventually tensions exploded into the “Cast Lead” operation in 2008/09. Hamas suffered massive military failure, but won the propaganda war against Israel, portraying the Palestinians as victims and leaving its own bravado behind. Two factors came into play: Jaabari initiated much of the conflict and outmaneuvered Haniyeh, and when the dust settled the Hamas political echelon shifted to become more Jihadi and less hudna-oriented or “pragmatic.” In short, all of Hamas became even more activist militant after the 2007 takeover.

Israel imposed a partial blockade in the wake of the Hamas electoral victory, but such a move was circumvented by the ever-expanding tunnel operations under the border between Gaza and Sinai. Legally enforced Islamization continued and Hamas sought both Iranian and Turkish support. Islamists led by the IHH Turkish NGO and closely aligned with Hamas organized the “Marmara Flotilla” in 2010 to openly break the Israeli naval blockade of the Strip, which intensified after Cast Lead. Once again Israel succeeded on the ground, but lost in the media. By the time of the 2011 Islamic Awakening, journalistically known as the “Arab Spring,” Hamas imposed its will on Gaza, facing opposition only from the more extreme Salafist/al-Qaeda groups. Overall Hamas enjoyed a hero’s status having been among the first Islamists to overthrow a secular regime in the Arab world. By the year’s end Haniyeh and the civilian leadership shifted further to the right, declaring their ultimate objective as world conquest through Jihad. As 2012 drew to a close, Hamas served as a role model for much of the Arab world and would rule in Gaza for years to come.

Periodic intensive rocket attacks into Israel resulted in limited responses with operations “Pillar of Strength” in November 2012, and “Protective Edge” in July 2014. Such actions only damaged Hamas temporarily. More troubling was the loss of Egyptian support when General a-Sisi overthrew the Muslim Brotherhood regime in July 2013, and Hamas faced a growing challenge by smaller, more fanatical organizations such as the Islamic Jihad, the Resistance Committees, al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. By the summer of 2014 Hamas had a formidable arsenal, including medium range rockets which they began firing at Israeli urban centers, especially Beersheva and metropolitan Tel Aviv. On the other hand, Israel

hesitated to destroy Hamas fearing the rise of even more radical leadership from the fanatical Jihadi opposition referred to above. Although somewhat weakened Hamas remained firmly in power in Gaza through 2016.

### **The Low Intensity Conflict (LIC) of 2000 to 2004, The Second or “Al-Aksa” Intifada**

In most Western circles it is commonly understood that the US and Israel were interested and even believed in the possibility of peace in the summer of 2000; the Fatah dominated PA was perceived as firmly in control throughout the Palestinian areas. Conversely, Yasir Arafat and the Palestinian Authority saw the Camp David meeting as much more of a tactical move. He refused to make concessions and understood that Israel could never accept his demands, in particular regarding refugee return, a demand including all refugee descendants, which would result in millions of Palestinians flooding into Israel. As pointed out previously, the Palestinians are virtually the only refugees who can pass down their status from one generation to the next for eternity, taking advantage of the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) to advance their goal.<sup>1</sup>

By entering the Oslo process, many saw Arafat as accepting the two-state solution, although his words and actions rejected the State of Israel and Jewish national legitimacy. His rejection was abundantly clear, as seen in Article 20 of the PNC. On the tactical level Arafat accepted the need for negotiations, and recognized Israel as a state—at least for the present. He technically negotiated, but still held the idea that Jewish nationalism was not legitimate. The only peaceful prospect was Israel negotiating itself into oblivion, which was a non-option. Consequently, Palestinians believed the Jewish nation-state had to be destroyed, whether by war or peace. Destruction would be inevitable if Israel agreed to demands for a withdrawal to the indefensible 1967 borders, and full refugee return. The “red-line moment” or point beyond which one cannot make any more concessions arrived in 2000 when Israelis understood they were being asked to abdicate national existence. At that time Arafat publicly re-embraced the Jihad concept, which he likely never abandoned, under the semantics of the “armed popular revolution to liberate Palestine” as urged in PNC Article 9. This is in full concurrence with The Hamas Covenant Article 11, which demands re-conquest of the Islamic waqf lands, including the State of Israel. In essence, the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem were all non-issues since Jewish sovereignty, even in

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<sup>1</sup> Lapidot, Ruth, “Legal Aspects of the Palestinian Refugee Question,” *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, September 1, 2002, retrieved January 10, 2011, <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp485.htm>.

It is said that the Sahrawi refugees fleeing the Western Sahara War between Morocco and the Polisario guerrillas (1975-91) enjoy the same status. The number of refugees is disputed and stands between 50,000 – 200,000.

Israel's pre-1967 borders, was by definition considered illegal by both the PLO and Hamas.

The Palestinian LIC took most of Israel's political leadership by surprise. The PA leadership and Arafat referred to the same conflict as the "Al-Aksa Intifada," citing its point of initiation, giving it religious overtones and historically linking it to the disturbances led by Haj Amin el-Husseini in 1920 and 1929 at the Western Wall and the Al-Aksa mosque domain. However, Israel's security forces were prepared, since they foresaw the failure of the Camp David 2000 Summit from the outset. On September 29, following Friday afternoon prayers rioting broke out throughout the Palestinian territories and quickly spread to the Israeli Arab population a day later. Initially most violence was focused in East Jerusalem. Likud leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount the day before was played up as the trigger for what Arafat hoped would be a Palestinian popular uprising demanding independence. As long as there was violence Arafat could not agree to any compromises, hence he stoked the flames. Publicly he blamed Hamas and other extremists for the assaults against Israel, yet simultaneously his security forces were involved in attacking the Israeli military and police. Initially he played a brilliant tactical game, placing himself and the PA in the middle between the Israeli "aggressor" and Islamist "extremists."

In 2001, PA Minister of Communications Imad Falouji spoke of the PA preparations for the uprising while on a visit to the Ein Hilweh refugee camp in south Lebanon. He stated, "It had been planned since Chairman Arafat's return from Camp David, when he turned the tables in the face of the former US President [Clinton] and rejected the American conditions." Falouji, a former Hamas activist now cooperating with Arafat continued, "The PLO is going back to the 60s, 70s and 80s. The Fatah Hawks, the Kasam Brigades, the Red Eagles and all the military action groups are returning to work." In December 2000, Al-Falouji explained the PA prepared for mass violence in the immediate aftermath of the Camp David failure.<sup>2</sup>

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and what remained of his government scrambled to contain the hostilities in the Palestinian territories and in Israel proper. By mid-October the collision with Israel's own Arab population calmed down after ten days of riots, where thirteen Arabs and one Jew were killed. The government established the Orr Commission to investigate the violence. The Egyptian-initiated Sharm el-Sheikh conference convened in October to end the violence met with little success.

In December, Clinton presented his "Parameters." A month later in January 2001, Israelis and Palestinians met in Taba, Egypt in an attempt to end the clash and return to the negotiating table. Attempts at peace failed. The Fatah/PLO-

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<sup>2</sup> Lebel, Jennie, *The Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini and National Socialism*, Cigoja stampa publishers, English translation, Paul Munch, Belgrade, 2007, pp. 299-300.

controlled PA took an uncompromising line and the conflict intensified. From Camp David in July 2000 to Taba in January 2001, the four basic issues were land, refugees, security and Jerusalem. The land issue was based on the 1967 borders. Israel proposed keeping 6 percent of the West Bank and the Palestinian negotiators, without Arafat's consent, agreed to let them keep 3.1 percent. In addition there were to be minor land swaps by the two sides. They also discussed Israel leasing 2 percent of the land. In a "non-paper," or unofficial document, Israel suggested taking back 25,000 refugees over a three-year period, but that the remainder would be rehabilitated in their host country, or reabsorbed elsewhere should they not want to live in the future Palestinian State. The Palestinians insisted all refugees and their descendants had the right to return to their homes in accordance with the recommendations in UN Resolution 194, Clause 11, from December 1948, which states:

. . . the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible . . .

From Israel's perspective, expecting Palestinian refugees to "live at peace" was completely unrealistic after over fifty years of suffering, publicly blamed on Israel as a matter of policy. Palestinian refugee descendants were not part of the resolution, and needed to be treated equal to refugee descendants from all other conflicts as defined by the United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees (UNHCR); meaning they have no refugee status. Yet the United Nations Relief Works Agency (UNRWA) awarded favorable discriminatory extra rights to Palestinian Arabs over the years. Since the rights came from the UN, it was a measure that would ultimately assure Israel's demise. Compensation to be given "by the Governments or authorities responsible" could certainly refer to the Palestinian Arabs themselves and the surrounding Arab nations that invaded Israel in 1948. They rejected Resolution 181 and initiated the conflict. It is true that claims can be made against Israel on the local battlefield level, but here adjudication would be necessary to determine whether individuals were forced from their homes for no reason. Realistically, the US and Western world offered to help resettle and rehabilitate refugees in their countries of residence, or to facilitate their move to the newly declared Palestinian State to-be. The costs would be in the tens of billions of dollars. In Clinton's "Parameters" he suggested the Palestinians retain

94 to 96 percent of the West Bank, but this made no difference since Arafat concentrated on full refugee return.<sup>3</sup>

As for security arrangements, Israel insisted on keeping troops along the Jordan River, although the Jordan Rift Valley was to be given over to Palestinian control. The new State of Palestine was to be non-militarized and allow Israeli early warning stations and international forces to strengthen security. Jerusalem was to be a split city between Israel and Palestine, serving as a dual capital. Issues arose over sovereignty at holy sites, in particular over the Kidron Valley and the Mount of Olives, known as the “Holy Basin.” The Israeli concept was to work within an international forum, an idea unacceptable to the Palestinians. Israel sought control over the Jewish Quarter and Western Wall, while the Palestinians were to be given jurisdiction over the Christian and Muslim Quarters of the Old City. The Temple Mount/ Noble Sanctuary proved to be the most problematic holy site as the Palestinians, Arafat in particular, insisted Jews had no historic or religious connection to the site. Even Clinton took offense at the falsehood, claiming Christians also believed that both Temples stood on Mt. Moriah. It should be pointed out that the Koran supports this perspective as well in “The Night Journey” 17:2-8. Citing numerous fatwas, Arafat insisted on full Islamic control of the site. One can understand that Arafat felt he had no discretion in the matter, and if he took any action contrary to the Islamic legal opinions he would be branded a traitor. Even a suggestion to divide the Mount/Sanctuary, with the upper public area going to the Palestinians and Israel retaining the lower archaeological site underneath was rejected.<sup>4</sup> Arafat’s argument was Muslim waqf oriented and to him Islam superseded Judaism and Christianity.

The Taba Talks ended without agreement in late January 2001 immediately after President George W. Bush took office. The failure to compromise was of little significance since neither Arafat nor Barak attended the talks, and Arafat himself had already set the tone—no deal was possible. Some say the Taba discussions were too close to the Israeli elections to achieve a successful outcome. Others believed the continued violence overcame attempts to make peace, and that the asymmetry in casualties—279 Palestinians and 41 Israelis killed alongside thousands wounded, mostly on the Palestinian side—prevented Arafat from disengaging from the conflict. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) was accused of not following demands by the Barak government to ease up security restrictions on the Palestinians, particularly roadblocks, which resulted in more conflict. Though Arafat faced the most dovish Israeli government and negotiating team

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<sup>3</sup> Mishal, Shaul and Sela, Avraham, *The Palestinian Hamas, Vision, Violence and Coexistence*, Columbia University Press, New York, USA, 2000, p. 18. Hroub, pp. 19-24.

<sup>4</sup> Rubin, Barry and Rubin, Judith Colp, *Yasir Arafat, A Political Biography*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005, pp. 26-29.



ever presented, it was clear even his advisors knew he did not want to finalize an accord.

To cap it off, at the Davos World Economic Forum Arafat publicly insulted Israeli Minister for Regional Cooperation Shimon Peres<sup>5</sup> and condemned Israel by declaring “the present Israeli government has been waging a savage, barbarous war and fascist military aggression against our Palestinian people . . . using weapons forbidden by international conventions . . . [including] depleted uranium.” Arafat made these remarks at the conference despite the fact that Peres was in attendance—a man whom Arafat shared the Nobel Peace Prize with in 1994. Israelis were livid; any idea of peace with Arafat evaporated. Ten days later, the Likud leader Ariel Sharon won the prime ministerial elections against Ehud Barak by a landslide.

It is common knowledge Clinton considered Arafat responsible for the failure of the Camp David 2000 initiative and the follow-up talks ending in Taba.<sup>6</sup> The question remains as to why Arafat “abandoned” the peace process. Simply put, he could never tell the Palestinian refugee descendants that there would be no refugee return, since refugee return represented the winning card in Israel’s destruction. Arafat believed the final Palestinian victory would be brought about with the support of the Arab world. As far as the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem was concerned, he made absolutely no concessions to the Jews whom he saw as having no claim to the site.

Arafat played the media card to its fullest; the Palestinians were victims and the Israelis the oppressors. He worked his way toward international hero status as if fighting for the meek against the powerful. As radicalization set in, the PA took a much harder line despite declarations of trying to rein in Hamas. The “secular” PLO adopted a more Islamic absolutist perspective of the conflict, leaving little or no weight to Israeli Jewish narratives concerning the Land of Israel and especially the Temple Mount. On the secular level, the shift was back to the full and literal understanding of the PNC. Palestinians retained expectations of at least an independent state in the pre-1967 territories of the West Bank and Gaza, and a return of the refugees to Israel while envisioning full control over East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount/Noble Sanctuary. A victorious future was foreseen. Israel would collapse as a bi-national state with an Arab majority and be re-united with the West Bank and Gaza as an Arab State. Palestinian leaders, especially Arafat, were not making public speeches to the contrary, or preparing the people for

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<sup>5</sup> Mishal and Sela, pp. 17-18 and Hroub, pp. 29-31.

<sup>6</sup> Rubin and Rubin, pp. 185-217.

Ross, pp. 753-758

Both review Arafat’s refusal to make peace. At Taba nothing changed. Neither Arafat nor Barak were present



compromise. The PA directed rising expectations and popular anger at Israel despite the Oslo peace process.

The PLO/PA thought in terms of political gain, yet Hamas was to be the greatest beneficiary. The PA moved toward a mixed PNC /Islamist understanding embodying uncompromising conflict until victory. Fatah invoked the PNC in full, most specifically, the armed struggle mentioned in Articles 7-18, and those delegitimizing Israel and condemning all compromises as found in Articles 19-23. The Fatah secular language of struggle was no less ardent than calls for Jihad.

The left leaning Labor Prime Minister Barak called for a prime ministerial election, the Knesset was unaffected, and in February the Likud's Ariel Sharon defeated him by a landslide of 62.4 percent to 37.6 percent. The election results reflected Israeli frustrations and the vote put in power a security-minded hard-liner known for his pro-settlement activities. In early 2001 after Barak resigned as party leader, Shimon Peres led Labor to join the national unity government, with the Likud as the senior partner. Now the battle with the Palestinians was even more fully enjoined.

Arafat sought to absorb his erstwhile Hamas adversaries in the hope of riding the Islamic tiger to victory over Israel. The PA chairman thought he was using a beaten, exhausted Hamas for his own purposes, but as it turned out the Islamists got the better of the PLO/Fatah despite their designated inferior role. The Palestinian LIC rejuvenated a moribund Hamas. The Islamists had a solid worldview in Islam and Sharia law, never deviated from full rejection of Israel's right to exist, and were unswerving in their demand for Jihad. The dawa organizations consistently provided social services and Hamas retained the people's support. Regardless of abuses suffered for supporting the Islamists, Hamas commanded much greater loyalty than the PLO/PA, despite the fact that Arafat regained and increased his popularity, especially after calling for war against Israel. Copying Hamas strengthened Arafat, no matter how corrupt or abusive his regime.

Arafat blamed everyone else, never took responsibility and insisted to the international community that he was working to halt the violence. He continued to deceive the West and directed attacks against Israel, but quickly lost control as clashes with the IDF led to mounting casualties and Palestinian rage. Hamas led the attacks, but was soon in competition with the Al-Aksa Martyr Brigades, a radical activist Fatah subsidiary group comprised of Arafat's personal guards and unwittingly funded by the US and the international community. Hamas representative Sheikh Hassan Yousef met with the PA's Marwan Barghouti and Arafat on a weekly basis, although by now the Islamists were in the lead. Working to show a civilian side to the uprising, the Palestinian leaders led mob charges at Israeli positions, abandoning their flock just at the moment they feared the IDF would open fire. Fatah's Al-Aksa Brigades, Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and other

political militia groups were involved, but quite often individuals initiated and carried out attacks. Every organization wanted to claim martyrs. Iraq's Saddam Hussein paid out some \$35 million to families for their sacrifice, stating, "Ten thousand dollars to the family of anyone killed fighting Israel and twenty-five thousand to the family of every suicide bomber."<sup>7</sup>

Fatah/PLO was now following the Hamas activist lead, integrating together in a ferocious battle against Israel. Two of the most powerful emotions were now blended together: the impulse to love and to kill. From the Islamic perspective infinite love for Allah brought young people to murder in Allah's name. They murdered not only enemies but themselves. People were willing to die multiple deaths to achieve a full fusion with the beloved god of Jihad, Allah, as seen in The Hamas Covenant Articles 8 and 15. In the secular national sense, suicide and homicide bombers gave their lives for the revolutionary cause and their ultimate leader, Yasir Arafat—an almost deified figure. Such actions went well beyond the demand for the armed struggle found in PNC Articles 9, 10 and 15. With the adaptation by Fatah of the Hamas modus operandi, there was an Islamization of the conflict, one previously viewed much more in the nationalist Third-World Liberation context. And, lest one forget, Arafat and the PLO/PA leadership were constantly involved in "taqiyya" (lying) and "kitman" (omissions) when explaining events to the West. As far as Arafat was concerned, any claim or accusation was considered acceptable when working to defeat the Israeli Jewish adversary. Western observers and diplomats were constantly willing to excuse Arafat due to his military and political weakness, so much so they were complicit in accepting his deceitfulness and often demanded concessions from Israel. For many Western statesmen, peace was not only an objective, but had become a value in its own right. Arafat's weakness became his strength, "wrapping him in Teflon" so to speak. No matter what he did Arafat had an "acceptable" excuse to justify his actions. Arafat was not a Third World revolutionary. He was not interested in state building and behaved more in line with Islamist Jihadi thinking than any secular national liberationist understanding.<sup>8</sup> Hamas understood his game, knew he was untruthful to the West and waited for the day of reckoning when the PLO would either be crushed or absorbed by their Islamist ways, as seen in The Hamas Covenant Article 27.

The four year Palestinian-Israeli clash known as the Second Intifada but which will be defined here as a Low Intensity Conflict (LIC), can be divided into four stages. In general, the initial LIC was directed more against the IDF/police and Jews living in the West Bank during 2000 and 2001. In the spring of 2001, there

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<sup>7</sup> Yousef, Mosab Hassan, *Son of Hamas*, Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2010, pp. 135-145.

<sup>8</sup> Ne'eman, Yisrael, *Mideast on Target*, "Arafat and Netanyahu Face the Sharon Evacuation Plan," February 3, 2004, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5978>. Website is the author's blog, hence there is no retrieval date.

was a shift to a terror offensive perpetrated against Israeli civilians, which continued into 2002. The third period of “planned anarchy” came once Arafat was surrounded by Israeli forces in his Mukata’a Ramallah headquarters from 2002 to 2003. By 2004 Arafat spoke of the victory of demographic factors, invoking the “womb of the Palestinian woman” as his ultimate weapon. This last shift from the armed to the demographic struggle exposed his overall objective of a one-state solution, forcing Israel into a non-viable bi-national state.<sup>9</sup> This dovetailed completely with the Hamas objectives. There was no more pretense of recognizing Israel’s existence or its right to exist. Palestinians abandoned the expected moderate stance of accepting Israel’s right to exist as part of a bi-lateral understanding, and turned to Hamas absolutism. The Palestinian military offensive against Israel failed, but demographic entanglement could succeed. The Israeli settler movement demanded the expansion and development of new settlements throughout the West Bank and Gaza in response to Palestinian terror attacks, thereby further burying any possibility for a two-state solution. Hence, Palestinian Arab and Jewish populations became more “entangled” and played into the Palestinian demographic offensive. In essence, Arafat ran a united command according to Islamist guidelines, while engaging in taqiyya and kitman to handle Western complaints.

Commencing on September 29, 2000, attacks were directed against Israeli security forces and Jews living in the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) and the Gaza Strip. Stirred up by Palestinian religious and secular authorities, rock-throwing youth attacked Jewish worshipers in the Western Wall Plaza and a less-than-alert Israeli police force stationed not far from the Mount. The violence quickly escalated when Israeli police broke into the Al-Aksa compound. On the first day, four Arabs were killed and 160 wounded; 14 Israeli police were injured.<sup>10</sup> Marwan Barghouti and Arafat organized wellplanned simultaneous riots, which spread throughout the West Bank and Gaza, while PA security personnel attacked Israeli forces when they tried to intervene.<sup>11</sup> The Palestinian territories quickly descended into chaos, Israeli resolve was strengthened as evidenced by Sharon’s election in early 2001, and the PA/Hamas alliance shifted its tactics to a much more damaging and painful initiative against Israel.

Although many saw Arafat as a hero-liberator, Mosab Yousef, the son of Hamas leader Hassan Yousef, had this to say: “Yasser Arafat made it clear that he wanted to be a hero who was written about in the history books. But as I watched him, I often thought, “Yes, let him be remembered in our history books, not as a hero,

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<sup>9</sup> Ne’eman, Yisrael, *Mideast on Target*, “Arafat and Netanyahu Face the Sharon Evacuation Plan,” February 3, 2004, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5978>. Website is the author’s blog, hence there is no retrieval date.

<sup>10</sup> Enderlin, p. 290.

<sup>11</sup> Morris, Benny, *Righteous Victims*, Vintage Books, New York, 2001, p. 666.

but as a traitor who sold out his people for a ride on their shoulders. As a reverse Robin Hood, who plundered the poor and made himself rich. As a cheap ham, who bought his place in the limelight with Palestinian blood.”<sup>12</sup>

When considering Sharon’s Temple Mount excursion, Yousef said, “Conventional wisdom among the world’s governments and news organizations tells us that the bloody uprising known as the Second Intifada was a spontaneous eruption of Palestinian rage triggered by General Ariel Sharon’s visit to what Israel calls the Temple Mount complex. As usual, the conventional wisdom is wrong.”<sup>13</sup> Yousef concluded, “Yasser Arafat and the other PA leaders had been determined to spark another Intifada. They had been planning it for a month, even as Arafat and Barak had been meeting with President Clinton at Camp David. They had simply been waiting for a suitable triggering pretext. Sharon’s visit provided just such an excuse. So after a couple of false starts, the Al-Aqsa Intifada began in earnest and the tinderbox of passions in the West Bank and Gaza were inflamed once again.”<sup>14</sup>

By the spring of 2001, the Palestinians initiated a “terror offensive” against all Israeli Jews. For the first five months there were few attacks within Israel’s 1967 borders directed solely at civilians, but there were bombings in Jerusalem and Hadera. Beginning in March 2001, Fatah/Hamas and allies targeted civilians inside Israel and achieved infamy through unforgettable massacres perpetrated by suicide bombers. Bombings, stabbings and shootings occurred daily. The list below is a survey of the worst attacks.

On June 1, the bombing at the Dolphinarium in Tel Aviv killed 21, and injured 120. On August 9, the Sbarro Pizzeria bombing in Jerusalem killed 15 and injured 130. On December 1, an explosion on Jerusalem’s Ben Yehuda Street killed 11 and injured 180. On the next day, the Haifa #16 bus bombing killed 15 and injured 40. Ten days later on December 12, a public bus serving the non-Zionist ultra-orthodox community of Emmanuel in the West Bank was attacked, killing 11 and wounding 30.

The terror attacks continued into 2002, making it the worst year ever; however it led to the Israeli operational responses known as “Defensive Shield” and “Determined Way.” Until now, Israel had only partial success sending in forces to specific Palestinian towns and villages to root out terror. It took several other attacks before Israel decided on sweeping counter terror operations. On January 17, 2002 there was an attack on a Hadera bar mitzvah celebration where 6 were killed and 35 wounded. On March 2, in another attack on the ultra-orthodox Beit Yisrael neighborhood, where mothers and children were waiting outside a synagogue in Jerusalem, resulted in killing 11 and injuring 50. On March 9, the

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<sup>12</sup> Yousef, p. 127.

<sup>13</sup> Yousef, p. 127.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 132.

Moment Café was attacked in Jerusalem's Rechavia neighborhood, killing 11 and injuring 54. On March 20, a suicide-homicide bomber blew up a bus on Highway 65 in Wadi Ara, killing 8 and wounding 30.

On March 27, terrorism reached a crescendo when a suicide-homicide bomber blew himself up at what came to be known as the Netanya Seder Passover Massacre, killing 30 and wounding 140. It was Hamas' most deadly attack. On March 31, Hamas continued the offensive with the Matza restaurant bombing in Haifa, killing 15 and injuring 40. Hamas took credit for most terror operations, although the Islamic Jihad, Al-Aksa Brigades and Tanzim also took part, as sometimes more than one organization demanded accolades for the carnage.

After the Passover Massacre the Sharon government took definitive action and initiated "Defensive Shield," a broad sweeping operation expected to continue for eight weeks. The operation enabled Israel to scour Palestinian West Bank cities and towns, arresting suspects, uncovering explosives laboratories and seeking out terrorist leadership. As the internationally recognized chairman of the Palestinian Authority Arafat could not be arrested and used his invulnerable status to provide a safe abode for dozens of suspected terrorists, hiding them in his Ramallah Mukata'a headquarters. He was allowed to travel from the Mukata'a but should he do so, Israeli forces were ready to pounce on the terrorists he was protecting. In April Israel did major battle in the Jenin refugee camp against the well organized, dug-in positions located in civilian zones. Not wanting to use air power, the Israeli army suffered 23 dead, while 52 Palestinians were killed, of which 7 were civilians. Initial Palestinian reports claimed five hundred killed, but the UN investigation proved otherwise. Israel's anti-insurgency, anti-terror campaign only began to bear fruit in 2003 when successful terror attacks dropped significantly. Terrorism continued during the Israeli offensive begun in 2002. There was another bus bombing on April 10, killing 8 and injuring 22. Two days later in an attack on Jerusalem's Jaffa Road, 6 were killed and 104 wounded. On May 7, in Rishon LeTzion, 15 were killed and 55 wounded. On June 5, a bus from Tel Aviv to Tiberias was attacked, killing 17 and wounding 38. On June 18 a Gilo bus exploded, 19 were killed and 74 wounded, and the next day at a Jerusalem bus stop in French Hill there were 7 killed and 50 wounded.<sup>15</sup> On July 31, the infamous Hebrew University cafeteria bombing killed 9 and wounded 85.<sup>16</sup> Over a two-year period Israel and the Palestinians went from "almost" peace to downright war, even if it was the low intensity, terror vs. anti-insurgency/anti-terror type of conflict. In

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<sup>15</sup> Hanus, George D., *The Compendium*, Gravitas Media, Chicago, USA, 2002. Statistics from terror attacks taken from pp. 14-35. Usage permission thru telecom granted Nov. 25, 2015.

<sup>16</sup> "Terrorist Bombing at Hebrew University Cafeteria," *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, retrieved March 18, 2011, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFA-Archive/2002/Pages/Terrorist%20bombing%20at%20Hebrew%20University%20cafeteria%20-.aspx>.

Palestinian society, the disabled PA and the secular Palestinian organizations led by Fatah followed the Hamas lead. In Israel the population lined up behind Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and the Likud, who initiated national unity governments with Labor as a junior partner. The world did not stand still. In the meantime Israel received condemnation for using “excessive force.” Even immediately after 9/11, an event which would eventually change world attitudes toward Israeli actions, Sharon found himself in conflict with the Bush Administration over the Israeli military reply and American urgings of restraint. All of this took place before the Defensive Shield anti-terror IDF response. Israel’s capture of the Karine A’ weapons shipment originating in Iran brought about a significant shift in the American and Western position. George W. Bush was convinced Arafat was a liar when he denied any connection to the shipment.<sup>17</sup> Much more important was the PA and Fatah’s developing Iranian alliance following in the footsteps of the Hamas-Hezbollah working relationship, which began in 1992-93. As the PLO cooperated with Hamas, both received support from Hezbollah and Iran.

From April 2 to May 10, 2002 there was the standoff at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem when Hamas, the Al-Aksa Brigades and Fatah operatives occupied the Church to avoid arrest by the IDF. Some 220 men were holed up inside, not all associated with the operation. In the end 26 militants were sent to Gaza and 13 exiled to Europe.<sup>18</sup> Over the first half of 2002, the Americans sharply shifted gears, placing blame on Arafat and publicly suggesting his removal.<sup>19</sup> That same summer the Israeli government finally decided on building a security or “separation” fence mainly along Israel’s 1949-67 armistice line or “green line” with the West Bank, but at times spilling over to the east to include Jewish settlements not far from the demarcation. The bombings had their effect, ideology or not—Israel’s political right was under massive pressure from the populace to separate mainstream Israeli society from the Palestinians. What Arafat had not done at the negotiating table Hamas succeeded in doing by leading the way through armed resistance and terrorizing Israeli civilians.

Remaining in his Ramallah Mukata’a headquarters and surrounded by the Israeli army, Arafat no longer controlled his forces from the top down. Not only had Israel taken most of the West Bank, but it was destroying the power of the Palestinian security forces, and exposing the Chairman’s communications. Israel

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<sup>17</sup> “Karine A Affair,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved March 18, 2011, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karine\\_A\\_Affair](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karine_A_Affair).

“Karine A,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, retrieved March 18, 2011, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=1471>.

<sup>18</sup> “Church of the Nativity,” *Palestine Facts*, retrieved March 18, 2011, [http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf\\_1991to\\_now\\_church\\_nativity\\_2002](http://www.palestinefacts.org/pf_1991to_now_church_nativity_2002).

<sup>19</sup> Bush, George W., “Rose Garden Speech on Israel Palestine Two-State Solution,” June 24, 2002, retrieved February 23, 2012, <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush-twostatesolution.htm>.



tapped his land and cell phone lines and observed anyone coming to visit. This time frame became a period of what can be termed “planned anarchy.” All Palestinian fighters and terrorists were on their own, and Arafat could not give orders from the top.

Such pressure helped solidify PA/Hamas cooperation, the best example being when the PA released engineer Saleh Talahme from jail—a man who was involved in the Hebrew University bombing. Arafat’s release of Hamas terrorists was in violation of previous agreements with Israel. Once freed, Talahme rebuilt the Al-Qassam Brigades, assembled explosives and worked with Bilal Barghouti recruiting homicide-suicide bombers. Israeli forces eventually killed Talahme in December 2003.<sup>20</sup> Hamas operated in a much more centralized discreet manner. Israeli security rounded-up suspected terrorists, but new Hamas operatives replaced them. Political power and the operational center were in the hands of Khalid Mashal. He ran the Hamas office in Damascus, Syria. It took time, but the IDF and Israeli intelligence broke the back of Hamas through firefights and arrests. In 2006, Hamas organizer Ibrahim Hamed was apprehended and the other Hamas operational leaders in the West Bank were exposed. These men had advanced university degrees, and led quiet, professional, and mostly secular lifestyles.<sup>21</sup> Because Hamas was working much more innocuously underground than Arafat, it took considerably more effort to break the Hamas operational network than any comparable Fatah initiative.

The clash with Israel entered its most critical stage from mid-2003 until early 2004. Arafat and the PA were expected to line up with the Bush “Road Map” approach calling for a two state solution in three steps: 1) A Palestinian halt to terror and an Israeli halt to settlement building; 2) An interim Palestinian state with temporary borders; and 3) A permanent status agreement.<sup>22</sup> Realizing Arafat was not a partner, Bush and Israel pressured for the appointment of Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, as prime minister in March 2003. Abbas and Arafat clashed over policy. The new premier was seen as far too moderate in agreeing to end the violence and in being receptive to the idea of demilitarization of a future Palestinian State. Abu Mazen fell from power six months later. By early 2004, Arafat still spoke of the armed struggle, but now openly called for Palestinian victory through “the womb of the Palestinian woman,” an admission that where military resistance had not succeeded, demographics would eventually overwhelm Israel’s Jewish population. This was especially true should Israel not withdraw

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<sup>20</sup> Yousef, pp. 211-213.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp. 217-221.

<sup>22</sup> “President Discusses Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East,” March 14, 2003, retrieved December 28, 2015,

<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030314-4.html>.



from the West Bank and de facto be forced into a bi-national state. Arafat remained under siege in Ramallah, preferring the image of a fighter and not that of a peace partner since many Palestinians equated peace to betrayal.<sup>23</sup>

During this period there was much discussion about a hudna, or an Islamic cease-fire. Israel accepted a cease-fire in wake of the “Road Map” and agreed to lift the closure of the Palestinian territories. The US put considerable pressure on Israel to agree. It was another possible point of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas whereby all would be allowed to recover from the Israeli offensive, yet minor attacks against the Jewish State, as agreed to by Abbas, would continue. During mediation attempts between Israelis and Palestinians, arch terrorist Abdullah Kawasmeh, who was responsible for the deaths of 52 Israelis and the wounding of hundreds, was killed by Israeli forces. From Israel’s perspective, if Hamas and Fatah still advocated certain operations, then so did Israel. Everyone understood the nature of a hudna, and Israel continued its anti-terror sweep into Hebron, arresting some 120 suspects. Abbas attempted to revive the peace process with Israel, but was unable or unwilling to contain Hamas. Mapping out future actions against Israel included the production and transport of rockets and plans for suicide-homicide bombings. The Jerusalem bus bombing by Hamas in the middle of August, which killed 20 civilians and wounded dozens more put an end to the hudna and the planned Israeli withdrawal from four West Bank cities, which was scheduled to take place the next day. This terror reorganization offensive by Fatah and Hamas was only partially successful due to Israeli preemptive actions.<sup>24</sup> The last surge in attacks against Israel began, but was contained by the spring of 2004.

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<sup>23</sup> Tamimi, Azzam, *Hamas: A History from Within*, Olive Branch Press, Northampton, MA, USA pp. 202-203.

Ne’eman, Yisrael, *Mideast on Target*, “Israel Forces a Hudna,” June 24, 2003, <http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13819>.

Ibid, “Dismantling the Terror Infrastructure – the Only Issue,” July 28, 2003, <http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13827>.

Ibid, “Mideast Cycle of Violence is Linear,” August 22, 2003, <http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13830>.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, “Hudna Cease-Fire or Disarmament?” May 11, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13805](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13805).

Ibid, “Hudna Lunacy,” June 23, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13818](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13818).

Ibid, “Israel Forces a “Hudna,” June 24, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13819](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13819).

Ibid, “The Islamic Movement Considers a Hudna,” July 1, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13822](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13822).

Ibid, “Dismantling the Terror Infrastructure - The Only Issue,” July 28, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13827](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13827).

Ibid, “Hudna Collapse,” August 9, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13829](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13829), and “Mideast Cycle of Violence is Linear,” August 22, 2003, [www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13830](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13830).

Hamas was on the rise, absorbing Arafat and Fatah more fully into their way of thinking and operating. Fatah-style secular nationalism was seen as weak and greatly discredited in the face of Israeli demands, but even more so because of corruption and exploitation of the Palestinian masses. By now the Israeli leadership concluded it was necessary to eliminate the spiritual and operational command of Hamas. Hence, in the early spring of 2004, Sheikh Yasin and Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi were killed in targeted removals. The pivotal Fatah commander Marwan Barghouti was arrested two years earlier while others were liquidated. Arafat was suffering from a terminal illness, lost control of the PA/Fatah, and died in November 2004.<sup>25</sup> Militarily, Israel clearly gained the upper hand.

From the Israeli perspective, the security forces responded too late in the effort to regain control. The best example was the targeted removal of Salah Shehadeh, the Hamas mastermind of terror attacks against Israeli civilians. Responsible for dozens of terror operations and over 100 dead and wounded, the initiative to kill him was postponed eight times for fear of civilian casualties. Finally, in July 2002, the Israeli air force killed Shehadeh. Unfortunately, 15 other people died in the collateral damage when the explosives dropped on his Gaza residence proved too powerful. Shehadeh, and those like him, planned and operated terror attacks from civilian areas using non-combatants as human shields, hoping the fear of causing civilian casualties would halt any Israeli actions against them. For a while it worked, until Israeli civilian casualties mounted from continuing terror attacks and the government was left with no choice. Jihadi groups such as Hamas had no qualms about using their own populations as hostages while planning to kill Israeli civilians. In particular, their wives acted as unarmed bodyguards. Terrorists hoped that the presence of wives alongside the husband-bomber-masterminds would prevent their elimination. These women, and other unarmed adults, in essence were fully responsible when acting as human shields for their husbands. Children were exploited as unwilling or unsuspecting hostages. Israel tried its best to only kill terrorists, but eventually reconciled that collateral damage incurred was the moral responsibility of Hamas, Fatah or whoever used innocent people as human shields. In the end, killing terrorists who planned attacks against Israelis saved both Israeli and Palestinian lives, though collateral damage was an unfortunate corollary to certain operations.<sup>26</sup> As far as Hamas was concerned, everyone killed became

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<sup>25</sup> Tamimi, pp. 206-207.

Ne'eman, "Removing Sheikh Yasin," March 22, 2004,  
<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!6021>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, "The Schadeh Elimination," July 25, 2002,  
[www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13683](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13683).

Ibid, "After Schadeh: The Morality Debate," July 26, 2002,  
[www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13684](http://www.me-ontarget.org/pws/page!13684).

In these blogs Shehadeh's name was spelled as "Schadeh." The author is referring to Shehadeh, the Hamas operative.

shaheeds, or “martyrs,” whether it was the perpetrators themselves, their bodyguards, wives, children or other innocents. It is clear in The Hamas Covenant, Article 18, that a Jihadist role is demanded of wives and children, who are instructed in Jihadist education. Anyone participating and dying in the Jihad would be a shaheed, whose death for Allah was most glorious, as described by the Hamas motto in Article 8. Such battles and deaths are to be repeated innumerable times until final victory is achieved as exhorted in Article 15 of The Hamas Covenant.<sup>27</sup>

When counting casualties, general estimates for the Second Intifada/LIC included over 1,000 Israelis and more than 3,000 Palestinians killed in direct conflict with each other, and three times as many wounded. Psychological damage on both sides is hard to access, but lasting scars remained. Furthermore, Palestinians killed hundreds of their own people during internal clashes, especially between Fatah and Hamas. Officially, the conflict is said to have lasted from September 28, 2000, to February 8, 2005 (when Mahmoud Abbas took office), or almost four and a half years—approximately 1,600 days.<sup>28</sup> Despite massive societal disruption, especially for the Palestinians, we are speaking of fairly low casualties—averaging less than four deaths per day.

In the aftermath Sharon’s Likud-led national unity government decided in conjunction with the Bush Administration to disengage from the Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank. Many, especially in Hamas, interpreted this initiative as Israeli weakness in the face of Palestinian resistance. In the Bush-Sharon letters of April 2004, the US and Israel synchronized policies. Israel would leave the above-mentioned territories while the US made clear four major policy decisions: 1) The 1949-1967 armistice lines were not sacrosanct and could be altered; 2) The construction of the security fence was legitimate and could be moved; 3) Israel had the right to defend itself from terrorism wherever need be; and, 4) There was to be no US support for Palestinian refugee return to Israel proper. Many saw Israel’s removal of some 8,000 Jewish residents from Gaza as a step to avoid demographic entanglement with the 1.3 million, mainly Hamas-supporting Palestinians who dominated the region in 2005. Israel contemplated, but never implemented, a Defensive Shield-style military operation in Gaza, as was done in the West Bank. Since 1994 and Oslo I, Israel ceded control of 85 percent of the Gaza Strip to

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<sup>27</sup> al-Qaradawi, Yusuf, “The Prophet Mohammed as a *Jihad* Model” and “Those Who Oppose Martyrdom Operations and claim that they are Suicide are Making a Great Mistake,” in Bostom, Andrew, ed., *The Legacy of Jihad*, Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, USA, 2005, pp. 248 and 249 respectively.

<sup>28</sup> The numbers are well known and numerous sources - Palestinian, Israeli or international, agree on the figures. This author takes issue with the date given determining the end of the LIC and believes the Palestinians faced total exhaustion by mid-2004, essentially ending this stage of the conflict. Too many emphasize the relevancy of Arafat’s death in November or the election of Mahmoud Abbas to the Palestinian presidency in early 2005 as indicating this LIC was finished.

Arafat and the PA. Israel fully withdrew from Gaza at the end of the summer 2005. In Palestinian eyes, Hamas gained credibility while Israel was weakened and the PA discredited.<sup>29</sup>

### End of the LIC

#### Hamas Gains Power Despite Fatah, Israeli and Western Opposition

Abbas succeeded Arafat, and in January 2005 he won the presidential elections, running virtually unopposed. Yet Hamas overwhelmed Fatah in the parallel municipal elections held throughout the next few months. The Oslo peace process was declared dead and Fatah lost legitimacy. Hamas demanded continued resistance toward Israel and an end to PA corruption, while countering American and Israeli overtures for calm. Israel and the US vacillated over free, open elections for the 132 member Palestinian Legislature, and finally agreed to such. In January 2006, Hamas won a landslide taking 74 seats to Fatah's 45 even though the popular vote was almost even. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was appointed prime minister. Credited with purist ideals, Hamas popularity grew slow and steady. They were viewed as honestly and selflessly administering social services while living amongst the people and not above them. With the peace process and secular nationalism judged as failures, the alternative was to return to basics—Islam and its revival. Belligerence toward Israel played a major role. It was believed the Jewish State would still retain control over Palestinian lives through any international peace agreement. Hamas' rejection of the peace process removed the stigma of a weak, dominated refugee population, especially concerning Gazans, who now saw themselves as vindicated in the battle for victory.<sup>30</sup>

According to Azzam Tamimi, Hamas and Islam were triumphant and everyone else was defeated, in particular Israel. The US set conditions for recognizing Hamas, including the renunciation of terror, the recognition of Israel as a state, and the acceptance of previous Palestinian-Israeli agreements including Oslo I, Oslo II and the Wye Accords. The Hamas victory proved the Palestinian people democratically rejected these agreements, at least for the present. Hamas stipulations to initiate a short-term process of non-violence, or the temporary

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<sup>29</sup> Tamimi, 204-207.

“Exchange of letters between PM Sharon and President Bush,” *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, April 14, 2004, retrieved February 23, 2012  
<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/MFADocuments/Pages/Exchange%20of%20letters%20Sharon-Bush%2014-Apr-2004.aspx>.

Ne'eman, “Likud Referendum,” May 2, 2004,  
<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!6010>.

<sup>30</sup> Tamimi, pp. 209-222.

“Palestinian Legislative Elections 2006,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved March 18, 2011,  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian\\_legislative\\_election,\\_2006](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palestinian_legislative_election,_2006).

Ne'eman, “Hamas Victory: Following the Trend,” January 28, 2006,  
<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5095>.

hudna Islamic cease-fire, demanded Israel withdraw to the 1967 lines, remove all settlements and abandon East Jerusalem, including the Old City and Jewish Quarter. Hamas made it clear that recognition of Israel's right to exist would never be forthcoming, even with agreement to a long term truce.<sup>31</sup> Hamas stipulated there must be a multi-religious state in Palestine based on Islamic Sharia law as would be legislated by the end of 2008 in Gaza. The vision meant Jews and Christians would live under the dhimmi strictures stated in The Hamas Covenant, Article <sup>31</sup>. While Israel and the West worked on sanctions in the hopes of crippling the Hamas victory, the Arab world and even Russia began to embrace the Islamist officialdom.

Hamas offered a national unity government (NUG) to Abbas, but he turned it down at first. He attempted to bolster his own security forces, especially the Presidential Guard, and sought to rally Fatah business interests. The ensuing clash over power, wealth and influence led to initiatives by both sides to force a NUG on their own terms. Paralysis and violence between the two set in for over a year. Fatah controlled the official security forces and Hamas rebuilt their militia. Abbas repeated the demand for the acceptance of Oslo coupled with the Saudi Arab peace initiative of 2002 calling for pan-Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist as part of a peace package, provided Israel made wide-ranging concessions including withdrawal to the 1967 borders.<sup>32</sup> Hamas continued to insist on its prerequisites for a hudna. Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh toured Arab countries, including Egypt and Iran at the end of 2006, raising millions for the cause. Meanwhile, the West moved for sanctions to pressure the Islamists. Abbas demanded new elections in 2007, although the legislature had a four-year term scheduled to expire in 2010. Violence ensued between Fatah and Hamas, bringing Palestinian society to the brink of civil war by February and March 2007.<sup>33</sup>

Recent Palestinian narratives show the people fully supporting Hamas, especially in Gaza due to its firm stance against all adversaries. Hamas was vindicated with the Mecca Agreement negotiated by Saudi Arabia in February 2007. The agreement advocated a national unity government consisting of 24 cabinet posts, whereby Hamas took eleven ministers, Fatah six and independent groups seven. Haniyeh led the government as prime minister under President Abbas. At the time it was thought the accord would save the Palestinians from a civil war. President Abbas, the US and Israel lost virtually all influence. Hamas respected only international agreements not seen as damaging to the Palestinian people's interests and swore no recognition of Israel. The Islamist interpretation was clear, the Oslo Accords and the two-state solution were abandoned. The

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<sup>31</sup> Tamimi, pp. 225-226.

<sup>32</sup> Document: 'The Arab Peace Initiative 2002 Al-Bab,' retrieved July 20, 2011, [www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm](http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm).

<sup>33</sup> Tamimi, pp. 229-234 and 252-254.

Saudis apparently held out hope that their 2002 peace plan recognizing Israel could be implemented after a full Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines.<sup>34</sup> They most likely expected Hamas to become part of such an initiative.

Israeli journalist Shlomi Eldar, who has covered Hamas activities extensively over the past twenty years, believes there is always a pragmatic side to the organization even if at times it is obscure. By 1994, after returning from his Lebanese exile, the future prime minister, Ismail Haniyeh—a middle level activist at the time—explained his willingness for a twenty-year hudna in return for freeing all prisoners in Israeli jails, a full withdrawal to the 1967 borders, and a fair solution to the refugee problem. Should Israel agree, somehow this could be construed as acceptance of Israel's existence.<sup>35</sup> The Hamas Covenant insists on Sharia law and waqf claims of eternal Islamic dominance over all lands contained within the borders of the State of Israel. Such theological dogma cannot be reconciled with a compromising political diplomatic progress or "pragmatism." No concession was made by the Islamists, the hudna cease-fire was only temporary, and the issue being addressed was Israel's short term existence and not Israel's fundamental right to exist. Such a Hamas shift was tactical, leaving the option open for renewed hostilities sometime in the future.

The 2006 Hamas electoral platform advocated more individual freedoms for Palestinians while allowing for differing opinions. Hamas made no demands for a state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, the implementation of Sharia law, or for Jihad to destroy the State of Israel. In an apparent overture to the West, Mahmoud al-Zahar even hinted that The Hamas Covenant could be changed, as if it was only a political document. Such Hamas overtures were and are misleading because of the inherent contradictions between Islamism and pragmatism, when possible policy changes are explained away as being done in the interests of the Palestinian people. Any seeming policy moves in contradiction to Islamic objectives are subject to a hudna and cannot be construed as part of a permanent status accord to ensure peace. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert understood this in the aftermath of the Hamas election victory when he demanded an end to terrorism and a cancellation of The Hamas Covenant, knowing full well the power and ramifications of such a document of Divine intent overrode all other considerations.<sup>36</sup> One must recall that the Covenant is also known as the "Charter of Allah." The issue was simple: nothing was done in the interest of true conflict resolution. To do so meant to take into account Jewish national legitimacy in the eyes of the Islamist regime and not just to act in the interests of Palestinian Muslims at any given moment.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid, pp. 257-261.

<sup>35</sup> Eldar, Shlomi, *Getting to Know Hamas*, Keter Publishers (Hebrew), 2012, pp. 49-50.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp. 155-160 and 173-174.



Hamas supporters like Tamimi believe the Saudis moved to force a NUG to forestall Iranian influence and intervention on behalf of Hamas. He dismisses Saudi concerns, stating categorically there is no evidence Iran or their Hezbollah allies ever had any intention of influencing Hamas. Secondly, as he worked out of Damascus, Mashal stated he would accept a Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza alongside Israel provided there be full Palestinian refugee return to Israel. Tamimi and Hamas advocates believe this proves a complete departure from The Hamas Covenant,<sup>37</sup> when in essence these are major steps toward Israel's destruction. Such a denial of Hamas intentions can only be described as ludicrous if one is hopelessly naive or deviously deceptive - invoking both taqiyya and kitman. A complete Israeli withdrawal and full refugee return are two major steps for the destruction of the Jewish State, the same as advocated by Arafat, the only difference being that the PLO/PA leader was willing to conclude peace under such conditions while Hamas would only agree to a hudna for a limited time. Such differences are of little importance when the final objective is the demise of the State of Israel.

Western researchers and analysts such as Michael Jensen viewed the hudna in terms of a Western cease-fire whereby the sides agree to a mutual recognition of legitimacy, despite clear evidence presented demonstrating the opposite. Jensen provided interviews with Hamas leaders Sheikh Yasin and Abu Shanab where Israeli withdrawal was demanded from Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and freedom of movement was guaranteed between the three regions, meaning open travel across Israel proper. Furthermore, all Palestinian prisoners jailed as terrorists by Israel were to be released, and all Israeli settlements removed. In return, Israel would receive a hudna expressly limited in time, and others would later decide whether to reignite the conflict, or continue the truce. Mahmoud al-Zahar and Abdul Aziz Rantisi were emphatic about the need for a hudna, but never spoke of an "End of Conflict" scenario. A commentary by Daniel Nepp made the point that all cease-fires begin this way, and that Israel was rejectionist for considering the hudna to be temporary.<sup>38</sup> Such a claim is deceitful as Hamas constantly made and makes clear it is fully cognizant of Israel's existence as an enemy to be destroyed.

Hamas totally rejects Israel's legitimacy as a state entity, even within the 1967 borders, as a matter of Divine dogma.

Hamas never nullified its belief in the Islamist manifest destiny of world conquest. As for Tamimi's first claim that there is no evidence of Iranian intent to influence Hamas and the PA, we have Arafat's weapons order smuggled in the Karine A' arms shipment in 2002 from Iran and a later Iranian arms smuggling

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<sup>37</sup> Tamimi, pp. 260-261.

<sup>38</sup> Jensen, Michael Irving, *The Political Ideology of Hamas: A Grass Roots Perspective*, translated from Danish by Sally Laird, I.B. Tauris, London and New York, 2009, pp. 34-40.



attempt in 2011, when the Victoria weapons shipment destined directly for Gaza and Hamas was intercepted by the Israeli navy.<sup>39</sup> Until Hosni Mubarak's overthrow in February 2011, Egypt itself battled Hezbollah and Iranian operatives in Sinai who were trying to smuggle weapons into Gaza.<sup>40</sup> The second claim is even more absurd, since full refugee return to Israel would mean the end of the state. The halt of hostilities was to be only during a limited hudna period, which upon completion allowed for an overall Jihadist military offensive. Mashal's remarks simply break down Israel's destruction into steps culminating in an Islamic state and Jewish disabilities under the *dhimma* restrictions—basically, a twenty-first century Charter of Omar.

Backtracking to the 1990s, Hamas already behaved as a semi-state underground entity prior to their overthrow of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza by military means in 2007. This situation is known as “dual sovereignty” when the loyalties of the populace are not given to the official leadership but to an opposition group who may or may not seek to oust those in power. As clearly stated in its Covenant, Hamas never made secret its desire to Islamicize Palestinians, though in practice the policy was applied in particular to refugees. The Israeli deportation of Hamas activists in December 1992, which lasted for a year, reinforced the policy objective of replacing the PLO at the helm of the Palestine national movement as the exiled leadership. The objective was now heavily influenced by their Hezbollah hosts who themselves were conquering the Lebanese State step by step.<sup>41</sup> Acting as a shadow semi-state to Arafat's PA, Hamas had representatives in Jordan until 1999, when relations were broken due to Western pressures. The diplomatic relationship with Syria and Iran was on a quasi-state level.<sup>42</sup>

The Palestinian relationship with Iranian Shiite extremism began in the

1970s. Many exiled Iranians returned home to the Khomeini Revolution in 1979, including Abu Al Hassan Bani Sadr, Mustapha Mohammed Najjar and Muhsen Rafiq Doust, who later became the president, defense minister and Revolutionary Guards' leader, respectively. All grew up in south Lebanon alongside the Palestinian Sunni refugee populations, and their families were often guests of Fatah. Fatah and the Shiite Amal organization were allies.

When Khomeini took power in February 1979, Arafat arrived in Tehran to discuss the Iranian Revolution and the liberation of Jerusalem.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> ISRAEL SIEZED WEAPONS SHIP 'VICTORIA',' *Global Jihad*, March 22, 2011, retrieved December 28, 2015, [www.globaljihad.net/?p=4469](http://www.globaljihad.net/?p=4469).

<sup>40</sup> Stern, Yoav and Issacharoff, Avi, “Egypt: Major Hezbollah Attack in Sinai Thwarted,” *Haaretz*, April 10, 2009, retrieved February 24, 2012, [www.haaretz.com/egypt-major-hezbollah-attack-in-sinai-thwarted-1.273842](http://www.haaretz.com/egypt-major-hezbollah-attack-in-sinai-thwarted-1.273842).

<sup>41</sup> Chehab, Zaki, *Inside Hamas*, Nation Books, New York, N.Y., 2007, pp. 129-130.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 131-134.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 135-136.

The alliance did not last long. Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988, and his pre-Oslo peace gestures toward Israel in the late eighties brought Hamas in as the militant Islamic substitute. Holding firm to an anti-peace policy, Hamas found a natural partner in the Iranian Shi'ite regime. Tehran responded with financial and military support while Syria became a major ally despite the Assad regime's repression of Syrian Muslim Brotherhood forces in the Hama massacre of 1982 when over 20,000 were killed. By the mid-1990s there was a four-way alliance of Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran and Syria. Iran donated some \$3 million to Hamas martyr families and prisoners while Palestinian Islamists continued to reap the benefits from Arafat's pro-Saddam policies.<sup>44</sup> Hamas was already a powerful non-state actor with three major allies when the organization wrestled Gaza from the PA.

Despite attempts at a NUG in the early spring, the Palestinian civil conflict was not long in coming and exploded for eight days in June 2007. Hamas built its military strength from within the ministry of interior policing apparatus and through outside funding, while the Fatah/PA faced increasing economic pressure from Israel, which withheld tax revenue transfers as a result of the Hamas legislative victory.<sup>45</sup> In Gaza, 6,000 dedicated fighters representing the people's will crushed Fatah's 22,000 man armed force with between two to three hundred killed, a fairly low figure considering the levels of animosity. Hamas had better pay, better training and better morale than the PA forces who suffered from low salaries, deficient training and corrupt leadership. Hamas secured Gaza while Fatah, after calling in Israeli and American support, took control of the West Bank and rebuilt its security forces under US guidance.

The origins of the conflict began with the Hamas electoral victory in January 2006, tensions having risen a full year earlier when Mahmoud Abbas replaced the deceased Arafat. When previously functioning as prime minister in 2003, Abbas advocated limiting and even halting the conflict with Israel, while Arafat became an Islamist ally. The fact that Abbas became PA president did not serve Hamas' interests, nor did the three conditions he presented: renunciation of violence against Israel, the acceptance of Israel's right to exist, and the honoring of all accords signed with her. The US, the EU and the moderate Arab States suspended foreign aid and imposed sanctions as a result of the Hamas victory. In particular, Israel boycotted Hamas and imposed economic sanctions on the Gaza Strip in the wake of its overthrow of the PA and the continuing demand for Israel's demise. Hamas did offer Israel a one-year hudna, but insisted on rejecting all other demands.

The US and Israel attempted to strengthen Abbas and the PLO/Fatah by undermining Hamas, but failed miserably. In December 2006, battles between

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp. 140-151.

<sup>45</sup> Many considered this to be a very shortsighted Israeli policy which eventually backfired.

Hamas and Fatah began in Gaza, but were halted in early 2007 when the two sides attempted a NUG negotiated by the Saudis in Mecca. The conflict exploded again in May, killing dozens. The Hamas-Fatah Mecca Accord called for dialogue to replace armed conflict, honoring all agreements including those signed with Israel, continued reforms in the PA and cooperation, pluralism and respect for all Palestinian political factions.<sup>46</sup> In June, Hamas won a full Gaza military victory, but lost to Fatah and Israeli security forces in the West Bank. Abbas dismissed Prime Minister Haniyeh, thereby breaking up any national unity arrangement and declared emergency law, sparking legal disputes between the two. Force on the ground determined the outcome. Hamas ruled in Gaza and Fatah in the West Bank, consolidating its control with Israeli security help and American military training directed by General Keith Dayton. Economist Dr. Salam Fayyad was appointed PA prime minister in an attempt to gain Western favor, rehabilitate its administration and to battle corruption. Two Palestinian entities evolved: “Hamastan” in Gaza and “Fatahland” in the West Bank. Fatah was accused of betraying the cause because the democratically elected, Hamas-dominated Palestinian legislature no longer convened, and Abbas ruled by executive fiat. Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar threatened Fatah with retaliation should further action be taken against its operatives in the West Bank, but to no avail. Hamas waited to even the score until November 12, when 200,000 pro-Fatah demonstrators took to Gaza’s streets in remembrance of Yasir Arafat. Hamas fighters opened fire on the participants, killing 6 and wounding over 80. Both sides consolidated control in their respective territories, repressed activities by their adversaries and inflicted casualties on the other side.<sup>47</sup> Years later in the spring of 2011, Fatah and Hamas reached a reconciliation agreement for a NUG, but implementation never followed.

The Hamas move in 2007 was emboldened by its Lebanese Hezbollah allies who fought Israel in a month-long summer war the previous year and suffered major damage, yet managed to launch 4,000 rockets into Galilee and were heralded as victorious throughout the Arab world and in much of the West. Likewise, Hezbollah was encouraged to take on Israel after Hamas was credited with forcing Israel from the Gaza Strip in the August 2005 Disengagement. Taking its cue from both, in June 2006 the Hamas Izz a-Din al Qassam military leader Ahmed Jaabari and the Islamists’ affiliate known as the Popular Resistance Committees killed three Israeli soldiers and captured Corporal Gilad Shalit during a cross border raid,

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<sup>46</sup> Eldar pp. 245-246.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, pp. 187-188.

“Fatah-Hamas Conflict,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved July 20, 2011, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah-Hamas\\_conflict](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatah-Hamas_conflict).

“Battle of Gaza (2007),” *Wikipedia*, retrieved July 20, 2011, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Gaza\\_2007](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Gaza_2007)).

while the PA still ruled in Gaza.<sup>48</sup> Shalit was held for five years and eventually released in October 2011 in exchange for one thousand Palestinian security prisoners held by Israel, mostly Hamas members. Such a successful operation encouraged Hezbollah to open hostilities on Israel's northern border in July 2006, by killing several Israeli soldiers and abducting two others who died of their wounds. Five weeks of battle ensued between Israel and Hezbollah in what became known as the "Second War in Lebanon."<sup>49</sup>

Jaabari's Izz a-Din al-Qassam military wing, in alliance with the splinter Popular Resistance Committees and Army of Islam, outmaneuvered the Hamas political leadership. The politicians attempted to calm tensions and were in direct contact with Israeli Prime Minister Olmert when Gilad Shalit was abducted. When Israel responded with the massive "Summer Rain" retaliation bombings, Jaabari and the Hamas military became the de facto decision makers in Gaza. Shalit was released years later only when Jaabari gave the okay. In essence, it was a double coup. A year later, Jaabari's forces defeated Fatah, making it clear to the politicians that the military wing was the true ruling body in Gaza. Haniyeh's prudence lost out to Jaabari's Jihad.<sup>50</sup>

By 2008 the PLO/Fatah-Hamas split looked to be permanent and what had been a major crisis in the Palestinian territories stabilized into two semistates. There were increased rocket and terror attacks from Gaza, and Israeli retaliations helped Hamas solidify power. Fatah demonstrations were repressed with gunfire, and, despite denials, Gaza became an Islamic entity by implementing Sharia law in late December 2008, just days before Israel initiated the "Cast Lead Operation" to halt Hamas attacks.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Eldar, pp. 196-197.

<sup>49</sup> Ne'eman, "A Time of Reckoning," July 14, 2006, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5049>.

Ibid, "Seeking Total Victory" July 16, 2006, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5048>.

Ibid, "Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings," July 28, 2006, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5036>.

Ibid, "Hezbollah-Israel War: Comments," August 4, 2006, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5033>.

Ibid, "Hezbollah Victory," September 3, 2006, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5011>.

<sup>50</sup> Eldar, pp. 218-230.

<sup>51</sup> Wage, John, "Hamas Leaders Enforce Sharia Law in Gaza Strip," *CBN News*, October 12, 2009, retrieved August 16, 2011, <http://www.cbn.com/cbnnews/world/2009/august/hamas-leaders-enforce-sharia-law-in-gaza-strip/?mobile=false>.

"Hamas Parliament Votes for Sharia in Gaza," *Jihad Watch*, December 24, 2008, retrieved August 16, 2011, <http://www.jihadwatch.org/2008/12/hamasparliament-votes-for-sharia-in-gaza>.

None of this was a surprise. Just prior to the 2007 Gaza civil conflict, Palestinian journalist and political analyst Zaki Chehab wrote that Hamas was continuing to deny Israel's right to exist while pushing a tough Islamist line in its domestic battles with the PLO/PA. They had the support of the people. To quote Chehab: "The Hamas electorate is unlikely to tolerate any diversion from the political and religious principles which Hamas has consistently advocated. By maintaining this rigid position, Hamas must realize that it risks losing a significant range of support unless it comes out and says categorically that it will accept UN resolutions and other agreements signed by the PA and the State of Israel." Furthermore, Hamas failed at government in partnership with Fatah. Chaos and corruption reigned in both Gaza and the West Bank, militias taking the place of a well-organized security force.<sup>52</sup> Israel also received messages from its own security forces on the ground at the still-functioning Gaza crossings manned by IDF Druze soldiers prior to the 2006 elections a year and half prior. Arabic being their first language, Palestinians spoke to the Druze soldiers freely and made it clear their hatred for Fatah and their intentions to support Hamas.<sup>53</sup> There was no reason to believe that the populace would stop short of sweeping Fatah out of Gaza entirely.

On the peace-making front, in November 2007, Israel and Fatah engaged in the American-sponsored Annapolis discussions in an attempt to arrive at a two-state solution. The West and Arab moderates supported the initiative with the moderate centrist Kadima-Labor coalition led by Prime Minister Olmert from 2006-09. Both sides re-committed themselves to the three-step Bush "Road Map" and agreed to a timetable resolving the core topics of borders, security, Jerusalem and refugees by the end of 2008. Donor nations were to give \$7.7 billion as part of the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan 2008-10. Serious international supervision was necessary to avoid the massive corruption experienced during the Arafat years.<sup>54</sup> Economic progress advanced in the West Bank, but not for the forty percent of the Palestinian population residing in the Gaza Strip. Western and Israeli sanctions continued as a result of the Hamas military overthrow of the PA regime in Gaza and the Hamas refusal to recognize previous agreements, renounce violence and negotiate with Israel.

On the other hand economic growth in the West Bank was estimated at six percent in 2009, and was seen to be about eight percent in 2010, but much of this was donor-generated according to the World Bank. Under the Olmert government, an extensive amount of progress was made between Israel and the

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<sup>52</sup> Chehab, pp. 202-205.

<sup>53</sup> Eldar p. 143.

<sup>54</sup> For a sweeping perspective by an insider of Yasir Arafat's financial misdeeds see Uzrad Lew's work (in Hebrew), *Inside Arafat's Pocket*, Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, Israel, 2005.

PA concerning borders, security and issues of sovereignty.<sup>55</sup> Negotiations set in for over a year, but no final agreement was reached when Benjamin Netanyahu and the Likud took power at the end of March 2009.

Hamas rule in Gaza was economically devastating, with 30 percent unemployment in 2007, rising to 40 percent the next year. The West Bank saw 18 percent unemployment in 2007 rise to 19 percent in 2008.<sup>56</sup> To circumvent the Israeli demand that all goods be sent through the overland Kerem Shalom/Rafiah Crossing to avoid contraband entering the Strip, Hamas and other operatives dug hundreds of tunnels under the Egyptian-Gaza border in a coordinated system to smuggle in weapons, ammunition and banned commercial goods. Israel eased the blockade significantly in June 2010 after the Mavi Marmara “flotilla” incident the previous month. Gaza did not keep pace with West Bank development. Israel played a major part, not only in aiding with security and the removal of roadblocks, but with tourism development in Bethlehem, bringing an estimated 1.5 million visitors in 2009, and Jericho in tandem with such joint Israeli-Palestinian business ventures as “Olives for Peace.” Israeli President Shimon Peres, who was elected in 2007, remained directly involved in such peace ventures in the hope of achieving conflict resolution, at least with the Abbas Fatah regime. Ramallah served and continues as the West Bank economic hub. Investor confidence was high enough to enable work to begin on the new urban development of Rawabi north of the city.<sup>57</sup> In August 2009, Prime Minister Fayyad announced his plan for an independent Palestinian State to exist alongside Israel.<sup>58</sup>

For Hamas, the acceptance of a two-state solution by the officially recognized Palestinian Authority represented a near death blow to their ideology, forcing the demand for an immediate Jihad against those allowing the relinquishment of any part of the Divinely endowed waqf lands. Ideologically at least, Hamas was and is

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<sup>55</sup> Avishai, Bernard, “The Israel Peace Plan That Could Still Be,” *The New York Times*, February 7, 2011, retrieved August 31, 2011,

[www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/magazine/13Israel-t.html?pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/13/magazine/13Israel-t.html?pagewanted=all)

<sup>56</sup> “World Bank: Real GDP Growth in West Bank and Gaza During 2008 - 2%,” June 4, 2009, *Aldawaba*, retrieved August 31, 2011,

<http://www.albawaba.com/business/world-bank-real-gdp-growth-west-bank-and-gaza-during-2008-2>.

<sup>57</sup> “West Bank” and “Gaza Strip,” *CIA World Factbook 2011*.

“Valley of Peace Initiative,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved February 29, 2012,

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley\\_of\\_Peace\\_initiative](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_of_Peace_initiative).

<sup>58</sup> “Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State,” August 26, 2009, retrieved March 1, 2012, [www.mideastweb.org/palestine\\_state\\_program.htm](http://www.mideastweb.org/palestine_state_program.htm).

Program by Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad to declare Palestinian independence by 2011. As is known, the Palestinian State initiative did not succeed in October 2011 at the UN. However the plan was presented and Fayyad began building infrastructure for the state entity. The Palestinian State received non-member observer state status at the UN on Nov. 29, 2012.



committed to a civil war to destroy the PA/Fatah and then to continue in its victory over Israel. The first half of 2008 proved critical. Hamas did its best to undercut the Annapolis peace initiative through increased rocket attacks against Israel. Already in January it undermined the blockade by destroying the iron border wall originally built by Israel between Egyptian and Gazan Rafiah. There was increased construction of tunnels from the Egyptian side to avoid the official border crossing and inspections. Hamas and its Muslim Brotherhood allies gained stronger footholds in the Sinai Peninsula and made their case on the Qatari-based Al Jazeera TV station, claiming they represented “the people,” as opposed to the corrupt semi-military secular regimes ruling throughout the Arab world. Egypt was accused of being anti-Islamist, although President Mubarak refused to fully confront Hamas or the Muslim Brotherhood and their Bedouin allies in Sinai. To do so could backfire and stir the Islamists in Cairo. It was better to allow a smoldering border war with Israel as a safety valve to alleviate pressures.<sup>59</sup>

In early 2008, there were increased rocket attacks, including medium range Grads, on the northwest Negev region of Sderot, Ashkelon and the surrounding agricultural villages. This led to Israeli retaliations, especially in early March when 120 Palestinians were killed, though 80 percent of those killed were directly involved in the battle. Hamas spokesmen begged for a “tahadiya” or “calm” while others pleaded for a hudna to last five to ten years, but never retracted the demand for Israel’s destruction. Hamas TV broadcasts requested that civilians enter homes of Hamas activists to act as human shields to deter Israel from considering targeted removals of those responsible for rocket attacks and terrorism against the Jewish State. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak even consulted judicial experts to determine how legal it was to eliminate terrorists should they surround themselves with supposedly innocent civilians.

Civilian participation as human shields became official Hamas policy. Israel learned from its previous dilemma during the 2000-04 LIC and decided that Hamas operatives needed to be eliminated despite the fact that civilians, including women with children in tow, were threatening to sacrifice themselves alongside the Hamas military and political leadership. Israel deemed human shields responsible for their own fate as well as those of their children.

In March 2008, Israel was again planning for a full-scale assault on Gaza with the intent of destroying the Hamas government. While some Israelis expected a cease-fire could be arranged, others, like Israeli Member of Knesset Yuval Steinetz, believed Hamas was walking in the footsteps of Hezbollah by becoming “a forward Iranian position for raining down rockets on Israel.” For many Israelis

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<sup>59</sup> Ne’eman, “Hamas Dilemma,” November 25, 2007,

<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!4945>.

Ibid, “Gaza Humanitarian Issues in the Service of Islamists,” January 29, 2008,

<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!4455>.



and in particular the leadership, Iranian activism against Israel remained a constant. Israel continued to be in conflict not only with Hamas but also Iran.<sup>60</sup>

Although Hamas gained a reputation for aiding its civilian population through the *dawa* social organizations, over the years it proved itself much more Jihadi and significantly less socially sensitive, especially should economic relief come through cooperation with Israel. A case in point was the terror attack at the Dor Alon fuel depot at Nahal Oz that April, where two Israeli workers were murdered while making shipments into Gaza. The plan was to get Israel to halt fuel supplies to Gaza and then complain to the international bodies and world media of boycotts and strangulation. This was a continuation of the Hamas activist policy, often aided by Fatah, of forced unemployment of its Gaza population. The continuous terror attacks against the Erez Crossing and Industrial Zone in 2004 brought its eventual closing for security reasons. This proved to be the most successful example of such a policy when overall 19,000 Palestinians lost their income, 15,000 no longer entered Israel to work, and another 4,000 lost their jobs in the industrial zone itself, which was known for Palestinian-Israeli joint ventures and cooperation. In January 2005, there was another attack—this time on the Karni border crossing in an attempt to strangle this last major economic lifeline of supplies after the demise of the Erez enterprise.<sup>61</sup>

Despite its adversarial relationships with Israel, the West, much of the Arab world and the PLO/PA, Hamas persevered and retained the support of the people especially in Gaza, right up until the “Cast Lead” operation at the end of December 2008. Furthermore, Sharia law became the law of the Gaza mini-state<sup>62</sup> and although possibly annoying some, it did express the will of the people. Many would ask and theorize as to the secret of Hamas’ success—an organization seen as enjoying vast support while remaining uncompromising in its demands for war against Israel and for a universal Jihad. The answer lies partially in the *dawa* actions,

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, “Closing in on Hamas?” March 5, 2008, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!4449>.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, “Coexistence or the Erez Crossroads as an Enemy,” March 8, 2004, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5984>.

Ibid, “Karni Attack Directed at Palestinians, Not at Israel,” January 15, 2005, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!5854>.

Ibid, “Increasing Palestinian Suffering for Islamist Gains,” April 10, 2008, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!4447>.

“Main Terrorist Attacks Carried Out at Gaza Strip Crossings,” *Israel Foreign Ministry*, retrieved August 30, 2011, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Main%20terrorist%20attacks%20carried%20out%20at%20Gaza%20Strip%20crossings%2016-Jan-2005.aspx>

<sup>62</sup> Wage, “Hamas Leaders Enforce Sharia” and “Hamas Parliament Votes for Sharia,” December 24, 2008, *Jihad Watch*, retrieved August 30, 2011, [www.jihadwatch.org/2008/12/hamas-parliament-votes-for-sharia-in-gaza](http://www.jihadwatch.org/2008/12/hamas-parliament-votes-for-sharia-in-gaza).

inextricably linked with politics and the armed struggle or Jihad. Dawa social welfare activities are not only the foundations of much support for Hamas, but are used as indirect bribery to gain political power. For example in the Bethlehem area during the local elections in May 2005, 35 percent of the electorate claimed “poverty and unemployment” to be the major issues they faced. Hamas food distribution proved vital for their victory in the city council, where they took five of seven seats reserved for Muslims while the Islamic Jihad took a sixth.<sup>63</sup> Although outsiders could claim the Palestinian population was unaware, the Hamas system was “integrative” and “mutational” regarding the fusing of dawa social services and Jihad. It is much more difficult to accuse traditional Muslims of being naive. Islamist ideals were fully re-integrated into what had become a seemingly more secular Palestinian society now forced to mutate into a fanatically violent Islamist entity playing its part in the universal Jihadist struggle—its sector being Palestine/Israel. Full radicalization came side-by-side with welfare activities while frustration amongst youth soared, especially when Israel worked to repress the 2000-2004 LIC with arrests, incursions, firefights, roadblocks and curfews. Palestinian casualties and economic distress mounted and fueled greater motivation for homicide-suicide bombings. Dawa activities obligated many young people to Hamas and its terror. The bombers and their families received full support financially, spiritually and socially, while they became media heroes in a sub-culture of terror reverence.<sup>64</sup>

The positive aspects of social services were the first step in attracting and radicalizing the population. Next was martyr worship and death for the sake of Allah. The sacrificial martyr ideal resonated not only with young men, but with mothers and children as well. Rim Salih al-Rayashi, the first Hamas female suicide-homicide bomber and mother of two recalled wanting to be a “martyr” from the time she was in the second grade. She had this to say before her explosive death, “I have always told myself: Be filled with every possible grudge for the Jews, the enemies of your religion, and make your blood a road leading to paradise. I began to try and do my utmost since the second preparatory grade.”<sup>65</sup>

Hamas often used children to transfer weapons and explosives. Summer camps were built for elementary school pupils where a network of future martyrs, often drafted from the poor, were indoctrinated and trained. Recruitment continued through mosque organizations and higher education, in particular at al-Najah University in Nablus. Potential martyr “shaheed” recruits craved death. Hamas ran its own economy, sponsoring jobs, commercial outlets, education, medical and social services. Of those citizens involved, many showed complete loyalty to these

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<sup>63</sup> Levitt, Matthew, *Hamas: Politics, Charity and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, Yale University Press, USA, 2007, pp. 17-18.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp. 107-108.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, direct quote, p. 110.

fanatical Hamas values, even more than they showed loyalty to their own families. They viewed their economic, physical and spiritual wellbeing as one indivisible whole, all attributable to the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood—Hamas—of dawa and human sacrifice in the name of Allah.<sup>66</sup> Dawa charities were established worldwide to acquire monies for social welfare, but these funds frequently ended up supporting terrorism.<sup>67</sup>

Hamas achieved two major objectives: unbounded commitment and worship from their adherents, coupled with the establishment of themselves as a second and more dominant sovereign than the corrupt, ideologically-devoid Palestinian Authority. From “dual sovereignty,” Hamas would make the move toward grasping full control of Palestinian society through political and military means. Charity for dawa good deeds was a tool used as a tactic to gain overall funding for Jihad. Hamas made no differentiation between its humanitarian and military wings—two sides of the same coin. This point was reiterated by Prime Minister Haniyeh once again in his December 2011 speech commemorating the founding of the organization. Integrated social welfare and educational activities brought about an unswerving loyalty and love for Hamas, Allah and Jihad.

With Hamas rule in Gaza, this dual system of social welfare activities and Jihad remained intact right through Israel’s Cast Lead Operation. Still, a question remained. Could a true Muslim Brotherhood regime such as Hamas administer the Gaza Strip mini-state while simultaneously engaging in the dawa social programs with the accompanying Jihad, and still retain the loyalty of their citizens? The Gaza clash and its ramifications would be a major test for activist Islamist Jihadi values and implementation. It was clear Hamas was at a serious disadvantage when confronting Israel, but when viewed as part of the global Muslim Brotherhood, victory would be theirs even if only at some distant future date.

### **The “Cast Lead” Gaza War and Repercussions**

From June 19, 2008, Egypt arranged a half-year cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, including the supposed halt of Hamas arms smuggling through the 500 tunnels connecting under the border between Egyptian and Gazan Rafiah. The agreement broke down in early November when Israel discovered a Hamas tunneling operation apparently designed to cross into the Negev and abduct soldiers, as had been the case with Gilad Shalit two years earlier. For the next six weeks, there were low-level rocket attacks and Israeli retaliations. On December 19, Hamas refused to renew the cease-fire under its previous terms and declared its official demise. Over the next few days, Hamas fired rockets at Israel intermittently. When Hamas spokesmen openly suggested possibilities for renewing the hudna, but made no commitments, Israel authorized pin-point air

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, p. 111-142.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp. 229-249.

strikes. Escalation ensued and over sixty rockets landed in Israel just two days before the Israeli air offensive on December 27, inaugurating the Cast Lead operation. This was coupled with a ground assault from January 3-18, 2009. What is referred to at times as the “Gaza War” proved to be a serious test and even more so as a turning point for Hamas.<sup>68</sup>

Israel caught Hamas by surprise with its initial air strikes, killing some 140 of its members and, within the week severely damaged Gaza’s infrastructure. By the time ground operations commenced about 400 Palestinians were killed, an estimated one quarter of them civilians. Hamas commanders were targeted and the organization made a systematic effort to defend their leadership by calling on civilians to act as human shields for the military and political echelon. Much of the Hamas leadership took refuge in the basement of Gaza’s Shifa Hospital using patients and medical staff as a guarantee that Israel would not attack or capture them. They proved correct. Israel dropped leaflets and made phone calls urging Palestinians to move from areas slated for attack. Gaza, however, had little in the way of bomb shelters, so there were few options of where to flee. Bombings and shelling from the air, ground and sea attempted as much precision as possible, but some 50 percent of all Palestinian casualties were civilians despite efforts to avoid non-combatant involvement. This was especially true once the battles were enjoined in heavily populated areas such as Beit Lahiya, Beit Hanoun and Gaza City. Hamas responded with intensified Qassam and Grad rocket fire into southern Israel. They reached not only Sderot, Ashkelon and Kiryat Gat, but further to the Negev capital Beersheva and the main port of Ashdod, servicing Tel Aviv and the center of the country. South central Israel faced paralysis and Hamas shelling became a major threat to the country as a million people were within rocket range. Overall, damage was not heavy, but the constant alerts brought much of the Israeli economy in the region to a halt as schools were closed, rockets landed throughout civilian areas and workers stayed home. Facing the IDF Hamas was outmaneuvered and outgunned. Many Hamas fighters melted into Gaza’s civilian zones. According to Israeli estimates based on statements by Hamas Interior Minister Fathi Hamad, 709 Hamas and allied militants were killed out of a total of approximately 1,400 Palestinian dead. Other estimates halve the amount of Hamas combatants killed and do not include in their figures the approximately 250 Hamas police officers who died in the fighting. Israel considers Hamas police armed

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<sup>68</sup> “Gaza War,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved August 30, 2011, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gaza_War).

combatants, while Palestinian and human rights organizations do not. Israel suffered 13 dead, 10 of whom were soldiers.<sup>69</sup>

There is little doubt concerning Israel's military success. Hamas could not match the Israeli military. Hamas lost around 600 men, or over 10 percent of its armed forces, with the usually accepted ratio of two to three times that amount wounded. It spelled paralysis for an organization when 35 percent of its fighting force is put out of action. Hamas miscalculated as badly as Arafat did in September 2000, and as Hezbollah's Nasrallah had in the summer of 2006.

The larger question remained as to what objectives did Hamas have and were any accomplished? Hamas did not expect a major Israeli retaliation for what they considered were only moderate provocations. Similar to Hezbollah, Hamas aggressive condemnations and actions against Israel were broadcast to its own population, thus serving as a unifying factor, one immersed in theological invective. Jews and the Zionist entity were to be constantly harassed and when the time was right, destroyed. It should be noted that upon acceptance of the cease-fire, in its pragmatic moment, Hamas was under attack ideologically and politically by even more extreme Islamist groups for having temporarily jettisoned the Jihad too early.

It must be noted that Israel was accused of "indiscriminate" attacks against civilians. Non-combatants were caught in the crossfire at times, but it was virtually unavoidable when Hamas consciously mixed combatants with civilians, using the latter as human shields. Half of the casualties on the Gaza side were Hamas men under arms. A quick calculation is necessary to determine what is indiscriminate. The Gaza Strip population at the time was about 1,400,000, of which an estimated 6,000 were armed Hamas members, this yielding a percentage of 0.43 percent, or less than one half of a percent of the overall population as Hamas fighters. According to different sources there were approximately 1,400 Palestinian deaths during the conflict. If all of the deaths were the result of indiscriminate or at random killing, taking into consideration Hamas membership made up less than half of a percent of the total Gazan population, that would mean a total of six Hamas combatants (0.43 percent) would die alongside 1,394 civilians, (99.57

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

Chodoff, Elliot, *Mideast on Target*, "Lessons of War," January 5, 2009,

<http://meontarget.org/pws/page!1605>.

Ne'eman, "Egypt vs. Hamas (and the Moslem Brotherhood)," January 8, 2009,

<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1608>.

*Ibid.*, "Hamas Perspectives and Options," January 10, 2009,

<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1609>.

*Ibid.*, "Phase 3: Israel's Military and Diplomatic Options," January 14, 2009,

<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1611>.

*Ibid.*, "Demanded: End Game Scenario," January 16, 2009,

<http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1612>.

percent). Yet by Hamas' own admittance their security forces, including police, made up half of those killed, thereby proving Israel to be over 118 times more accurate than indiscriminate when taking aim at the Hamas militia terrorists. Even if the total number of Hamas fighters killed was in the range of 350 deaths, according to the pro-Palestinian Israeli B'Tselem human rights group, we still notice a rate of accuracy 58 times greater than random. If we add in B'Tselem's Hamas police casualty count, the accuracy rate is overall 100 times greater than random. The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights claims almost 500 were killed if we include the police, who made up a bit more than half the deaths of those under arms, this still leaves us with a low percentage of civilian casualties. But here too, the number of casualties is over 80 times greater in accuracy than random. It is interesting to note that the Hamas military wing never published a casualty count as relates to their own combat and police loses.<sup>70</sup> This raises many questions and more than a few suspicions.

Yet on the media and humanitarian front, Israel was touted as the big loser. Borrowing from the late Yasir Arafat, Hamas played the victim card, as opposed to Nasrallah's Hezbollah style bravado. The Hamas spokesmen highlighted casualties and the major material damage done to infrastructure and thousands of buildings, including numerous homes. Israel did not allow reporters to embed with its troops until the last few days of the conflict when the Supreme Court upheld journalists' suit against the IDF. Because of the lack of reporting, Israel lost valuable first-hand evidence by third parties on the ground, which would endorse the Israeli army evidence of massive Hamas booby-trapping of civilian structures and its mixing of combatants in civilian environments. Despite overwhelming military superiority, there was no final push for total conquest of the Gaza Strip to include the arrest or elimination of all Hamas activists including its political elite led by Ismail Haniyeh. The Gaza population solidified its support around Hamas and Israel lost the information war, an arena considered much less important than the physical battlefield.<sup>71</sup>

The UN-sponsored Goldstone Report was issued in the wake of the conflict. The report claimed Israel used excessive and unnecessary force. Any claim of use of wanton, or indiscriminate fire can be dismissed as shown above. The report released on September 15, 2009 was a tremendous diplomatic and media victory

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<sup>70</sup> "Casualties of the Gaza War," *Wikipedia*, retrieved February 29, 2012, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties\\_of\\_the\\_Gaza\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casualties_of_the_Gaza_War).

<sup>71</sup> "Gaza War," *Wikipedia*.

Ne'eman, "End Game Scenario."

Ibid, "Hamas War and Cease-Fire" January 19, 2009, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1613>.

for Hamas. Most of the accusations concerning human rights violations were against Israel. In particular, the title of the report “Human Rights in Palestine and Other Occupied Territories” already indicated the full delegitimization of Israel’s right to exist, since the “other occupied territories” can only mean Israel proper—areas under Israeli control within the 1949-67 armistice lines prior to the 1967 war. From the outset, the article was creeping dhimmization of Israel by broadly hinting that the Jewish State was an illegal entity, calling any territory under its control “occupied.” By logic, if there is doubt as to Israel’s legality, then any action Israel takes to defend itself is also doubted. An illegal entity has no right to defend its existence because by definition it should not exist.

Beyond the report’s title, Hamas continued to succeed on the diplomatic front. The investigation did not deal with the deliberate Hamas shelling of Israeli civilian areas prior to the mid-2008 cease-fire. Former UN Human Rights Commissioner Mary Robinson refused to head the committee of investigation when asked to do so, declaring the Human Rights Council mandate to be one-sided since it was initially not to include any review of Hamas activities. In the end, South African Judge Richard Goldstone chaired the committee, and did get a broadened mandate to investigate Hamas violations, but the UN Human Rights Council never officially endorsed the extended jurisdiction. Under such conditions, Israel refused to cooperate with Goldstone while Hamas agreed to talk. Investigators interviewed Palestinian witnesses from Gaza and quoted them as “credible sources,” despite the fact that we do not know how credibility was determined. Hamas was cleared of any accusations of using civilian areas for launching rocket attacks against Israel or of allocating civilian structures for military activity even though films of such attacks were extant.<sup>72</sup> Israel’s withdrawal from Gaza in 2005 was not mentioned at all. It was not noted that Israel’s “blockade” was only imposed after the Hamas military overthrow of the Palestinian Authority and the massive rocket fire into Israel intensified, including 8,000 rockets since 2001. Nor was it mentioned that Palestinian tunneling essentially circumvented any “blockade” rendering it ineffective.

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<sup>72</sup> “Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on Gaza Conflict,” *United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner*, retrieved December 28, 2015, <http://search.ohchr.org/results.aspx?k=report%20of%20the%20United%20Nations%20Fact-finding%20mission%20on%20the%20gaza%20conflict>.

“United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved December 28, 2015, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Fact\\_Finding\\_Mission\\_on\\_the\\_Gaza\\_Conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Fact_Finding_Mission_on_the_Gaza_Conflict).

The document is commonly known as the “Goldstone Report.”



Israel was likewise accused of targeting civilians, a charge later recanted by Goldstone himself in an Op-Ed in the *Washington Post* in April 2011. He said Israel did not target civilians and such damages were due to commander errors. Furthermore he admitted that the IDF was investigating charges of illegal behavior by its soldiers toward civilians. He admitted Hamas investigated nothing. The retraction did Israel little good as the other three members of the committee undermined Goldstone and stood by the original report.<sup>73</sup> As far as the Goldstone committee was concerned the conclusions were completely logical as evidenced by the title of the report.

Despite the Hamas military failure during Cast Lead, their victory cannot be overstated in political and diplomatic terms. Media constantly highlighted Israel as the criminal and barely mentioned Hamas. The UN, including quite a few European countries, endorsed the Goldstone Report although the Americans refused to do so. In the immediate aftermath of the conflict, Israel enjoyed a momentary solidarity visit by EU leadership who clearly understood the threat of Islamic extremism, but there was no real implementation of security concepts.

As seen by Israel the UN Human Rights Commission was and is a deeply flawed organization itself, having housed members from dictatorships such as Qaddafi's Libya. As well, they completely ignored Hamas' vicious antisemitic and genocidal tones against Jews and Israel. The antisemitic diatribes are not only contained in The Hamas Covenant, but constantly repeated in the Hamas media—an active policy designed to rally the masses for a future conflict.

In the aftermath of Cast Lead, Hamas suffered a Jihadi setback, but strengthened its relationship with Khomeinist Iran, its Lebanese ally Hezbollah, and the Sunni Jihadist Sudanese regime, all of whom worked together to ensure military supplies via the tunnels originating in Egypt. In the continuing bid to retain world sympathy the Islamists highlighted their own victimization at the hands of Israeli Jews, portraying them as criminals of the worst type. Anti-Israel and antisemitic demonstrations led mostly by Muslims, but including the far left and the anarchist fringe, swept much of Europe and even parts of North America and Australia. People gathered on the streets in an uproar throughout the Arab world, angry against Israel, Jews, the West and their own governments. No Arab country except for Sudan came to Hamas and Ismail Haniyeh's aid. These same Sudanese killed between two and three million Black Africans, both Christians and Muslims, over the past thirty years. Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood continued their efforts at undermining the Arab secular dictatorships.<sup>74</sup> Militarily Hamas needed a *hudna* - time to recover.

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<sup>73</sup> Goldstone, Richard, "Reconsidering the Goldstone Report on Israel and War Crimes," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2011, retrieved February 29, 2012, [www.washingtonpost.com/...goldstone.../AFg111JC\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/...goldstone.../AFg111JC_story.html).

<sup>74</sup> Ne'eman, "Hamas War and Cease-Fire."

In the meantime the Americans elected a new government. The Bush Republicans were out and the Obama Democrats took office, two days after the Cast Lead cease-fire. Obama, whose father was from Kenya, began his foreign policy initiatives with overtures supporting the Muslim world. Early on he toured the Middle East, beginning in Turkey and proceeding to Cairo, where he addressed issues involving Islam, democracy and peace in the region— most importantly peace between Israelis and Palestinians. He discussed the PA's need to govern through state institutions and admitted Hamas had partial support from the population. He asserted, "Hamas must put an end to violence, recognize past agreements and recognize Israel's right to exist." He further addressed issues of freedom of religion and women's rights.<sup>75</sup> Obama called for a Palestinian State alongside Israel. The speech brought a response from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who made his own proposal at Bar Ilan University, where he spoke of peace with the Arab world and outlined a two-state solution involving a demilitarized Palestinian State. In this vein he addressed the PA/Fatah leadership, not Hamas.<sup>76</sup>

By the summer of 2009, although not openly declared, it was apparent the Obama administration was interested in a two-state solution based on the 1967 lines, expected Jerusalem to be split as the dual capital of Israel and Palestine, was not keen on Israel stationing troops along the Jordan River for security and expected General Dayton's PA police force to handle all potential threats. It was not clear whether Israel would be allowed "hot pursuit" when tracking terrorists.<sup>77</sup> Obama would eventually confirm these policies, in particular his commitment to the 1967 lines, in his speech to the State Department in May 2011. Hamas took no solace from these clear American foreign policy stances, insisting that no compromise with Israel was in the offering and that the only solution was Israel's destruction. For Hamas, the two-state solution discussed between the PA/Fatah and Israel was completely out of the question. Prime Minister Haniyeh made this simple point in December 2011 on the twenty-fourth anniversary of the official founding of Hamas, when he stated, "Today we say it clearly. Armed resistance and armed struggle are the strategic way to liberate the Palestinian land from the

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Ibid, "The EU Contains Obama's Initiative?" January 21, 2009, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1614>.

Ibid, "Anti-Semitism and the Liberal/Extreme," February 1, 2009, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!1617>.

<sup>75</sup>"President Obama's Cairo Speech Text," *USA Today*, June 4, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> "Address by PM Netanyahu at Bar-Ilan University," text, June 14, 2009, *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, retrieved February 29, 2012, [http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2009/Pages/Address\\_PM\\_Netanyahu\\_Bar-Ilan\\_University\\_14-Jun-2009.aspx](http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2009/Pages/Address_PM_Netanyahu_Bar-Ilan_University_14-Jun-2009.aspx)

<sup>77</sup> Ne'eman, "Obama's Emerging Permanent Status Agreement," July 29, 2009, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!2317>.

sea to the river.” He continued to say Hamas would never accept a Palestinian State if it only included the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem, but could consider a temporary hudna should Israel make these concessions. His remarks were directed as much at the PA and President Abbas as they were at Israel.<sup>78</sup>

On the internal front, Islamization of Gaza continued and could be expected to intensify in light of Islamist successes throughout the Arab world during the 2011 Islamic Awakening uprisings. Although commencing in June 2007, Islamization in Gaza deepened by the end of 2008 onward. Women were forced to wear the hijab traditional Islamic dress, were not allowed to ride on motor scooters or dance and could be arrested for immodest dress or even laughing in public, as dictated in the last sentence of Article 19 in The Hamas Covenant. Extremists groups such as “The Swords of Truth” forcibly closed down hip-hop dancing and mixed bathing water parks. The Hamas government denied any involvement and condemned the activities, but they never captured the assailants. Palestinian scholar Dr. Khaled Hroub and Israeli Arab journalist Khaled Abu Toameh viewed Hamas rule as becoming similar to that of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Politically PA President Abbas agreed, insisting Hamas was working to establish an Islamic emirate, an accusation dismissed by Hamas officials.<sup>79</sup>

From the end of the Cast Lead operation and continuing into 2012, Hamas was curtailed in its abilities to attack Israel, although at times there were unprovoked rocket attacks. Israel retaliated and Hamas usually blamed other factions for the escalation while condemning the Israeli response. Attacks originating in Gaza were also less effective as Israel’s newly developed Iron Dome defense apparatus began intercepting some of the longer-range missiles during the winter of 2011-12. Holes remained in the system, as not enough batteries were deployed and it could not intercept short-range projectiles such as Qassam rockets.

As Israel increased its defensive capabilities, Hamas upgraded its international standing by working through the freely elected Sunni Islamist Turkish regime led by three-time Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan while beginning to apparently break with the increasingly isolated Shiite Iranian regime. Hamas effectively played the suffering hero role during the flotilla episode on May 31, 2010, when Israeli commandos boarded a ship sponsored by Turkish Islamists as it attempted to crack the naval blockade on Gaza. The point of the Israeli blockade was to halt further contraband, in particular medium-range rockets, from entering the Strip.

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<sup>78</sup> Akram, Fares, “At a Rally for Hamas, Celebration and Vows,” *The New York Times*, December 14, 2011, retrieved January 20, 2016 from

[www.nytimes.com/.../on-anniversary-hamas-repeats-vows-on-israel-and-violence](http://www.nytimes.com/.../on-anniversary-hamas-repeats-vows-on-israel-and-violence)

Speech in Gaza by Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh, December 14, 2011, excerpts in MEMRI, retrieved March 1, 2012,

[www.memritv.org/clip/en/3247.htm](http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/3247.htm).

<sup>79</sup> “Islamization of the Gaza Strip,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved January 12, 2012,

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamization\\_of\\_the\\_Gaza\\_Strip](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamization_of_the_Gaza_Strip).

Israel offered to allow all non-contraband supplies into Gaza provided the ships were first searched. All supplies would be brought to the Israeli port of Ashdod and what was permissible shipped overland into Gaza. Leading the flotilla was the largest vessel, the Turkish registered Mavi Marmara. Many of the hundreds aboard the ship were IHH activists from the Turkish Muslim Brotherhood. The ensuing high seas clash left nine Turkish civilians dead and dozens injured on both sides as IHH activists put up a well-documented resistance, nearly beating to death several of the commandos. Ankara adopted the Hamas ruled Gaza Strip as a “client-state,” acting as the patron for Hamas in the international arena. Hamas received much-needed support from a country with excellent Western credentials, meaning NATO membership. The Turkish-Hamas bond was cemented and made world headlines for the next month.

The UN-sponsored “Panel of Inquiry of the 31 May Flotilla Incident” known as the Palmer Report, declared Israel’s blockade legal, but was critical of how the navy carried out the boarding operation and the resulting casualties. The report also questioned the humanitarian intentions of the IHH actions. In the aftermath, there was an attempt at Israeli-Turkish reconciliation with no positive results. Diplomatic relations between Jerusalem and Ankara remained severely damaged while Hamas came out the winner with a new ally in Turkey, the most powerful Sunni Muslim nation in the Middle East if not the world.<sup>80</sup> Flexing Turkish muscles, Erdogan’s government leveraged the continuing belligerency against Israel as a springboard to enhance its power in the region. He threatened Greece, Cyprus, Syria, Kurdish insurrectionists and any combination of the aforementioned parties.<sup>81</sup>

### **Sharia Law, Hudnas, and the 2011 Islamic Awakening**

With the Arab Islamic Awakening in full bloom during 2011 Hamas tightened control over Gaza despite the difficult economic situation. Gaza was and is considered impoverished, with an estimated 70 percent of the population living below the poverty line and 40 percent unemployment. Massive tunnel-smuggling operations under the border with Egypt brought some relief. A wide variety of supplies arrived, including weapons, rockets, fuel, animals, food and even vehicles.

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<sup>80</sup> “Report of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Inquiry of the 31 May Flotilla Incident,” September 2011, retrieved January 12, 2012, [http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle\\_east/Gaza\\_Flotilla\\_Panel\\_Report.pdf](http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle_east/Gaza_Flotilla_Panel_Report.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Ne’eman, “The Flotilla: Turkish Move to Lead the Muslim World,” June 4, 2010, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!6111>.  
Ibid, “The New Ottomanism Taps the Palestinian Venue,” September 6, 2011, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!8516>.

A serious class gap was developing amidst a black market economy, a recipe for rampant corruption and more instability.<sup>82</sup>

Still, there was no immediate threat to Hamas control. No real alternative existed, nor did any group have popular support or military prowess anywhere near that of Hamas. There was little opposition to speak of and Islamism was the rising force in the Arab world. Only a Salafist or al-Qaeda type of group was capable of challenging Hamas, not secular or liberal democratic initiatives.

On the internal Palestinian scene there was much discussion over a reconciliation and reunification of forces between Fatah and Hamas in the spring of 2011. Islamist Gaza was failing on the military and economic fronts while the West Bank PA regime was enjoying security and economic benefits, especially from the US and EU for cooperating with Israel and Jordan. The Arab Islamic Awakening suddenly endangered Hamas foreign policy when the organization was caught in a contradiction with its foreign headquarters in Damascus as a show of support for Syria's Assad regime. Assad's secular state was engaged in a civil war against the Muslim Brotherhood where tens of thousands died within the first year. Hamas could no longer be seen as a Syrian ally supporting Assad and his Iranian Shiite allies against Sunni Islam. Hamas relocated to Qatar.

Fatah, on the other hand, promised to declare its state in the UN by September 2011, following the two-state plan devised by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in August 2009, entitled "Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State." The Palestinian State was to be delineated by the 1967 lines alongside Israel with East Jerusalem serving as its capital.<sup>83</sup> The unilateral Fatah initiative did not succeed due to American opposition in the Security Council. The Western powers urged direct negotiations between Israel and the PA to arrive at a permanent settlement of all issues.

Hamas was greatly relieved when the PA move at the UN failed; the last decision they needed was an internationally sanctioned two-state solution with Israel. But they did not need to worry, as it appeared that politically Abbas could not cede any ground on the issue of refugee return. Over the years even parts of the Fatah leadership had become more militant in demanding Israel's total demise,

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<sup>82</sup> "Gaza Strip Economy 2011," from the CIA World Factbook 2011, *Theodora*, retrieved January 31, 2012,

[http://www.theodora.com/wfb2011/gaza\\_strip/gaza\\_strip\\_economy.html](http://www.theodora.com/wfb2011/gaza_strip/gaza_strip_economy.html).

<sup>83</sup> Fayyad, "Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State."

dismissing the two-state solution as irrelevant.<sup>84</sup> Such rejection bolstered support for Israel's own right wing, which was fond of making the argument that there was no reliable partner interested in two-states for two peoples. However in 2010, 71 percent of Israelis and 57 percent of Palestinians still favored a two-state solution,<sup>85</sup> although many believe these numbers to be declining in recent years. In any event, settlements were never a major concern in Hamas thinking, but rather Israel's existence was the issue. Fatah/PLO hardliners were in agreement with the Hamas view. For those supporting the two-state solution, any strengthening of either Hamas or the Israeli right wing worked to their disadvantage.

Hamas scored its own major victory in 2011 when it forced the lopsided Gilad Shalit prisoner swap in October. One thousand Palestinian security prisoners, many of whom were involved in murderous bombings, were released for a lone Israeli soldier. Most of the released prisoners were Hamas operatives, but others were from Fatah and other non-Islamist organizations. Against the backdrop of the Islamist surge throughout the Arab world, Hamas stock rose enormously with celebrations not only in Gaza, but in the Fatah-controlled West Bank. The PA was undermined and Israel humiliated by the deal. Both began to reclaim international standing after peace talks in Jordan and discussions at the yearly economic conference in Davos where Israeli President Peres met Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in January 2012. Hamas, however, remained defiant and Islamist popularity soared throughout the Middle East.

There is much agreement that Israel misplayed her cards, but it is accompanied by a fair amount of controversy as to what should have been done. According to Shlomi Eldar, political Hamas, led by Haniyeh, was surprised when they were notified of the abduction of the Israeli soldier, to be used to barter for Hamas prisoners. The rebellious Izz a-Din al Qassam commander Ahmed Jaabari led the operation to kidnap the soldier in conjunction with Islamist splinter groups and forced the political wing to offer Israel fairly moderate conditions whereby Shalit was to be returned.

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<sup>84</sup> Toameh, Khaled Abu and Keinon, Herb, "Fatah official says two-state solution is over," October 12, 2010, *Jerusalem Post*, retrieved Aug. 18, 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Israel/Fatah-official-says-two-state-solution-is-over>.

This is a continuing trend over the past five years, particularly as concerns the PA education and Fatah youth movement. The Greater Land of Israel settler movement, led by Jewish national religious ideologues and completely opposed to any compromise with the Palestinians, was possibly an unintended beneficiary of the hardening Fatah position and increasing Hamas influence. Hardliners on both sides reject the two-state solution.

<sup>85</sup> "Joint Israeli-Palestinian poll – The Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace," March 17, 2010, retrieved January 31, 2012, <http://www.geneva-accord.org/mainmenu/new-joint-poll-december-2011-supportfor-the-geneva-initiative-significantly-increased>.



Khalid Mashal put together a “non-paper” or unofficial proposal, for “*Hamis-Israel—Peaceful Coexistence*” on September 8, 2006. Previously on May 25, just before the Shalit incident, Hamas and Israel were in contact through a third party to discuss a twenty-five year coexistence arrangement. Hamas first envisioned non-violence and mutual obligations to negotiate a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders and certain agreements as regards taxes and commerce. Issues such as refugees and the final status of Jerusalem would be postponed for a future date.

Eldar writes that the September “non-paper” set out two tracks: one dealt with the narrow issue of prisoner exchange, and the other embraced a broader strategic arrangement. In the first track, Hamas demanded one thousand prisoners in return for Shalit. In the second track the exchange would include less than two hundred prisoners, but included the longer-term coexistence accord. Mashal wanted to tie together the Shalit/prisoner issue with a general halt in hostilities. While Israeli Prime Minister Olmert was willing to work on both fronts, he refused to link them together. Discussions began in May and continued into the autumn of 2006, much of it during the five weeks of the Second Lebanon War against Hezbollah. In the end, Olmert chose neither option and Israel continued military action against Gaza leaving some five hundred Palestinians killed and a thousand injured while Hamas rockets landed uninterrupted in the western Negev. Olmert understood that Izz a-Din al-Qassam and Jaabari were the real decision-makers while Mashal, Haniyeh and political Hamas were developing strategies and making promises they could not fulfill since none lined up with the Hamas reality. Olmert has been criticized for not consulting with other cabinet members, especially Defense Minister Amir Peretz, or even the IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, concerning the proposals. As for Hamas, in the end Jaabari got the upper hand, forced the release of a thousand prisoners in exchange for Shalit and scuttled any possibility of long-term non-violence.<sup>86</sup>

The Hamas proposals were said to be even more moderate than the PA Fatah platform, yet Israel chose to continue its relationship with the latter, putting no trust in the political Islamists’ wide-ranging proposals.<sup>87</sup> Several points must be understood. Most importantly, Hamas never showed intentions of arriving at a permanent status agreement, nor could they. It is clear, as Eldar himself admitted, that Khalid Mashal put himself in direct confrontation with Sharia law concerning the need for a defensive Jihad to re-conquer waqf lands as explicitly stated in Article 11 of *The Hamas Covenant*. Should Israel have agreed to such wide-ranging military, political and religious concessions there is, in essence, more of a guarantee of non-compliance than continued acceptance by Hamas during or after the twenty-five year hudna. Theologically, Hamas is obligated to renew hostilities when sensing victory is on the horizon. Sheikh Yasin was forthright in stating the

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<sup>86</sup> Eldar pp. 236-241.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, p. 239.



Jews would have to concede their state and return to their dhimmi status. There are those who suggest Hamas could change its Covenant. To do so would turn it into a secular national document and bring the wrath of Islamist jurists and the Muslim Brotherhood leadership down on Hamas heads. A weakened Israel without conflict resolution constitutes a major step when implementing the Jihadi final objective to destroy the Jewish State. On the ground, Ahmed Jaabari's military wing included the rulers and enforcers who objected to any moderation. Inviting a tactical overture was in full contradiction to the essence of the Hamas identity, theological understandings and Islamist world-view. When looking beyond the immediate future, and even if Mashal was sincere, Israel could never take the deal.

The Hamas regime was determined to achieve the objectives they made so obvious in their Covenant, as evidenced by their condemnation of and demand for Israeli and Jewish obliteration (HC Introduction-Preamble, Articles 7, 17, 20, 22, 28, 30 and 32). Their next objective was the internal struggle to destroy any possibilities of conflict resolution by moderates as represented by certain Fatah factions willing to accept a two-state solution (HC Articles 1115 and 32). In the process, they would ensure the demise of secularism in the Arab Muslim world, in particular amongst Palestinians (HC Articles 25-27). Over the years, Israel was either dismissive or oblivious of these Hamas objectives. Analysts noted the rise of a deadly antisemitism, but many considered it a temporary phenomenon somehow to be negotiated away, and not a longterm Hamas strategy to achieve its primary objective of Jewish annihilation. By the end of 2011 there was an increasing awareness that Hamas represented mainstream Muslim Brotherhood thinking demanding Israeli and Jewish destruction, and not a permanent peace agreement with mutual recognition on both sides.

Hamas continued to influence the Fatah-dominated PA and not the reverse. Hamas viewed itself as a full member in the Muslim Brotherhood (HC Article 2) within worldwide Jihad, as evidenced by Prime Minister Haniyeh's November 2010 speech in Gaza. He never said otherwise.<sup>88</sup> With the so-called Arab Spring making its stamp as the Islamic Awakening, Hamas rode a wave of popular support within the universal Islamist domain. With the dawn of 2012, Hamas influence was on the rise, eclipsing Fatah and reflecting trends in the Arab world. A Muslim Brotherhood candidate, Mohammed Morsi was freely elected as Egypt's president in early summer 2012. Hamas ideals were in tandem with those prevalent throughout the Middle East. Now there was an ally at the helm in Egypt, not an adversary.

By October 2012, Hamas was working several initiatives on the overall Middle Eastern front and waiting to exploit religio-political opportunities. Egypt fell to the

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<sup>88</sup> "Hamas PM Ismail Haniyeh - We Are a Nation of Jihad and Martyrdom," *MEMRI*, November 15, 2010, retrieved August 20, 2015, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRjc3NsFxF0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xRjc3NsFxF0).

Muslim Brotherhood and the more extremist Salafists through elections less than a year after President Hosni Mubarak's overthrow. On the eastern front, with under-reported increasing destabilization in Jordan, Islamist opportunities for regime change looked possible as their influence was manifest. King Abdullah II was pressured to institute reforms and eliminate widespread corruption. The issue was not exclusively socio-economic but must be viewed in the prism of the secular Arab nationalist and Islamist clash. The Jordanian monarchy had always rested on its Bedouin foundations, but such support was waning. The king initiated reforms, but they were neither fast enough, nor deep enough; even the loyal Bedouin tribal alliances, known as pillars of support, were fraying.<sup>89</sup> Supposedly, they too were seeking Islamic answers. Palestinians constituted over 60 percent of Jordan's population and were always considered the most potentially destabilizing part of society. For years there was a process of "Jordanianization" as a counter to "Palestinianization" in the nationalist sense of the term. Furthermore Hamas influenced Palestinians living in Jordan and should one add in the continuing Islamist inroads among the Bedouin sector, the future of Jordan as an Arab nationalist monarchy might be in doubt. Reading the trend, Abdullah met with Hamas leaders at the beginning of the year in Amman. The meeting was a major rapprochement since the expulsion of Hamas leaders from Jordan to Damascus in 1999. Should Jordan fall to the Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas, it would only be a matter of time before the West Bank followed. Such a scenario greatly increased Israeli security concerns. The Islamization of Jordan, a Hamas policy goal, was within reach.

The turning point began in late October when munitions smuggling through Africa by way of Sinai into Gaza was at an all-time high. The Israeli air force was credited with destroying a major arms factory in Khartoum, Sudan, known for supplying the Hamas arsenal. Hamas responded with rocket fire and Israel replied in kind. Despite attempted ceasefires, the exchanges continued for three weeks. The heightened clash culminated when over 100 rockets landed in Israel, forcing Jerusalem into the "Pillar of Defense" operation on November 14. Mild in comparison to Cast Lead, the eight-day Israeli initiative once again took Hamas by surprise, striking over 1,500 targets in the Gaza Strip. The Gaza regime reported 133 Palestinians killed and 840 injured, less than a tenth the amount killed in Cast Lead. Hamas fired 1,456 rockets into Israel, but this time they fired not only Qassams and Grads, but Iranian Fajr-5s with a range of up to 75 kilometers or 45 miles. Central Israel and Tel Aviv became targets. Israel's Iron Dome anti-missile system was partially successful and took out 421 Hamas rockets. The rockets were becoming a strategic threat to paralyze the country, yet no ground offensive was

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<sup>89</sup> Zahran, Mudar, "Is Jordan's King Losing Control over the Bedouin?" *Gatestone Institute International Policy Council*, June 20, 2011, retrieved August 20, 2015, <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/2209/jordan-bedouin>.

launched into Gaza. Hamas was crippled by Israeli air strikes, yet claimed victory when Israel decided to cancel a ground assault.<sup>90</sup> Realizing Hamas had an ally in Egyptian President Morsi, it is quite possible Israel decided to limit the conflict. A ground assault might have been a litmus test for Morsi's Islamist credentials, possibly forcing a military response even if against the wishes of the Egyptian command. Cairo negotiated a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, but little changed.

Hamas soon suffered two more setbacks. By late November 2012 the Palestinian Authority received non-member state observer status at the United Nations by a vote of 138 in favor, 9 against and 41 abstentions; clearly an overwhelming majority.<sup>91</sup> The Palestinian State was and is within the context of the two-state solution with Israel. To receive full membership the newly "declared" State of Palestine was further in need of Security Council approval, which could only happen with US approval. Washington demanded a negotiated settlement to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. The two sides were to recognize each other and solve the major outstanding issues of security, borders, Jerusalem and refugees before the US would support an independent Palestinian State. Recognition of Israel would mean a defeat for Hamas.

The second setback for Hamas came in early July 2013. The Egyptian military overthrew Hamas' newfound sponsor Morsi after a year in office. Egyptian relations with Hamas quickly soured. General Abdul Fattah a-Sisi and the Egyptian army claimed they were dealing with Islamist terrorist infiltrations sponsored by Salafist and al-Qaeda affiliates in Sinai. There were suspicions of an Islamist-inspired Bedouin rebellion, and reports of other radicals bringing supplies into Gaza. It is not clear whether Hamas was cooperating with or simply not purging these fanatics. Hamas influence flowing out of Gaza into Egypt by way of Sinai was a fear turned into reality. From 2011 to 2013, Israel suffered increased attacks on its Negev border from terrorist cells in Sinai, the origins of many being Gaza. The Egyptian military sought to reassert state authority in Sinai and believed the Muslim Brotherhood administration was responsible for the deterioration. Morsi was arrested and accused of aligning himself with Hamas and Islamic terror.

In the summer of 2013, the Egyptian military began work to halt operations in the 1,200 tunnels connecting Sinai to Gaza, apparently taking action to close them down. Not only did this affect freedom of movement for terrorists, but the Gazan economy took a heavy hit. Consumer goods no longer arrived. According to Hamas, the Gaza economy lost \$450 million toward growth, the improved 32

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<sup>90</sup> "Operation Pillar of Defense," *Wikipedia*, retrieved January 6, 2014, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Pillar\\_of\\_Defense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Pillar_of_Defense).

<sup>91</sup> "General Assembly Votes Overwhelmingly to Accord Palestine "Non-Member State Observer State Status in United Nations," retrieved January 6, 2014, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/ga11317.doc.htm>.

percent unemployment rate was expected to rise to 38 percent, and construction would seriously slow down. In early 2013, Gaza was still recovering from the Pillar of Defense operation damages. Officially, trade had to be conducted literally above ground, and overseen by Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as stipulated in the Oslo Accords. Fuel was in short supply and the Gaza power plant functioned intermittently or not at all, leaving sewage to flow freely in the streets as pumps idled.<sup>92</sup> The official explanation was the refusal to pay the PA taxes, which the people saw as excessive. One might also consider the ideological angle. Why would Hamas agree to work with Israel—their sworn Jewish Zionist enemy? As for the PA, why would Hamas help them make money, when they were the compromised secular nationalist regime responsible for concessions to Israel and the West? Hence there was no reason to cooperate with either Israel or the PA, unless the situation became dire and then any arrangement would only be short-term.

Trying to remedy the situation, Hamas officials continued turning to many countries for aid, especially seeking reconciliation with Iran. Relations cooled when Hamas closed its Damascus office and implied support for the Sunni Jihadist rebels battling the Tehran-sponsored Assad regime. Hamas regularly broke up demonstrations thwarting any attempt by opposition forces to organize. The siege mentality brought social cohesion and Hamas continued to enjoy popular support.

On the PA/Fatah side, negotiations with Israel's Netanyahu government resumed. The US originally planned for a permanent status agreement by the following May, but the possibility of a far-reaching interim agreement was thought more attainable. There was a growing gap between the PA West Bank leadership and its constituency. Many saw the PA as detached from reality in trying to reach an agreement with Israel, especially concerning the demand for full refugee return. During his reign Yasir Arafat refused compromise on the refugee point, knowing Israel could never allow such a condition. Hamas demanded full refugee return, while the PA/Fatah was accused of betrayal by implying far-reaching compromise on this issue. Life was and is difficult in Gaza, but despite economic gains made by the Fatah/PA in the West Bank, the Abbas administration continued to be perceived as selling out its people for material gain. Support for Hamas in the West Bank was substantial and held solid in the refugee camps across the river in Jordan.<sup>93</sup> Hamas was on the defensive economically and militarily, but not out of the game. Ideologically, the Palestinian public supported the Islamists and blamed all others—in particular Israel, Egypt, the PA/Fatah and the US—for their suffering.

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<sup>92</sup> al-Mughrabi, Nidal, "Egypt tunnel blockade takes toll on Gaza business," *Reuters*, December 9, 2013, retrieved January 7, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/palestinians-gaza-business-idUSL5N0JK1UZ20131209>.

<sup>93</sup> Yehezkeili, Zvi, *London and Kirshenbaum*, Israel Channel 10 Television, December 9, 2013.

Extending beyond the immediate region, Hamas foreign policy played Khomeinist Shiite Iran against Erdogan's said-to-be moderate, but increasingly Sunni-Islamist Turkish regime. Hamas sought financial and diplomatic support from both, as evidenced by Prime Minister Haniyeh's February 2012 visit to Tehran. His visit came at a time when many believed a full realignment was in the works with the Sunni regimes led by Ankara. Turkey and Iran were increasingly at loggerheads over Middle East influence regarding the Sunni-Shiite clash in Iraq, the northeast Saudi Arabian oil producing region, the Arab Persian Gulf states, Yemen and Hezbollah influence in Lebanon. The Syrian civil war pit the Iranian supported pro-Shiite Alawites and other minorities against the majority Arab Sunni community. The Syrian Sunni rebel forces contained Islamist activists supported by Erdogan's Turkey and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and elsewhere. Hamas attempted to retain both as allies. Haniyeh expressed general support for Iran during his visit while other Hamas officials lined up with their Brotherhood allies. Hamas sought an alliance with both regional powers, but in the end may be forced to choose one side. They can be expected to support their Sunni brethren. However in its conflict with Israel, Hamas simultaneously anticipates support from the Iranian Shiites and Arab Sunni fundamentalists.

Among Gaza's population it is difficult to gauge satisfaction or rejection of Hamas leadership. Free speech does not exist in the Sharia-dominated society. Certain Western analysts, such as Jeroen Gunning, believe Hamas commitment to Islam may be interpreted as a commitment to democracy, since the people want Sharia law. In this sense, "democracy" is in the form of a double contract between the Hamas leadership and its dedication to Sharia law, and the need for the political elite to ensure constant popular support. Free will is to be respected, but obviously is not defined in the Western liberal sense. Sheikh Yasin himself understood all freedoms to emanate from submission to Allah, meaning no secular political representation can be allowed as far as Hamas is concerned, hence secular democracy cannot exist.<sup>94</sup> Gunning concluded Hamas is not anti-democratic, nor anti-West or anti-modern, but rather draws on Western concepts originating with John Locke and integrates them within Islamic law and the people's will. He acknowledged that from a religious standpoint, Hamas cannot compromise, yet pragmatism does exist—the proof being the acceptance of hudnas with Israel. He admits the contradiction, but takes up a secular, as opposed to Islamic, interpretation of Hamas actions and future policies. He expects socio-economic factors to dominate and lead to democracy.<sup>95</sup> This partially explains support for Hamas if one reviews the need for popular support, yet democracy is nowhere in

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<sup>94</sup> Gunning, Jeroen, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence*, Hurst & Company, London, 2007, pp. 53-75.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, Chapter "Conclusion," pp. 263-274.

sight. There is no platform for opposition views or elections. Rather we are seeing tyranny by the Islamist majority.

In addition to the Islamic-secular Arab nationalist split there were large gaps between the rich and poor. Until late 2014 Gaza was not under siege due to the Israeli naval blockade, as many believe. The underground tunnels between Egyptian and Gazan Rafiah served as a passageway for imports deemed necessary to at least maintain material satisfaction among the population at large. Financing for imports was and is obtainable from outside sources, whether from the wealthy Persian Gulf Arab States, Iran and/or Turkey. On the military front, Hamas freely imported weapons and particularly medium-range rockets through the tunnels rendering the Israeli blockade far from effective. Building supplies meant for civil projects were redirected for tunneling activities into Israel's western Negev border region, where soldiers and civilians would be abducted and/or killed in future Hamas operations. The best example is the thousands of tons of cement earmarked for civilian construction projects, which were appropriated for building offensive tunneling instead. Periodically the IDF discovered the tunnels once they came close to penetrating under the Israeli border.

Hamas rules Gaza since 2007. Even in the best of times, from mid-2011 to mid-2013, democratization did not take place. Before being overthrown, even the Islamist Morsi began increasing tunnel blockages on the Sinai side of the border. President a-Sisi initiated massive tunnel destruction by late 2014, and, to ensure full security, the Egyptian army began clearing a 500-meter wide swath of land on the Rafiah border. The objective was to disconnect Hamas from its Muslim Brotherhood allies battling Egyptian government forces in Sinai. By winter 2015 even PA President Abbas supported the tunnel crackdown.<sup>96</sup> In the earlier 2013-14 stage, Hamas felt serious economic and political pressure forcing them into a more prudent position in relation to Fatah. This was exacerbated due to the large economic gap between Gaza and the West Bank.

There were constant talks and attempts at an internal Palestinian rapprochement between Fatah and Hamas since the last parliament took office in 2006. An agreement was signed for the third time in April 2014 calling for a national unity

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<sup>96</sup> "Egypt Floods Gaza's Smuggling Tunnels," *Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East*, February 19, 2003,

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/02/egyptfloods-gaza-tunnels.html>.

"Egypt's military says it destroyed 1370 Gaza smuggling tunnels," *The National World*, March 12, 2014,

<http://www.thenational.ae/world/palestinian-territories/egyptian-military-says-it-destroyed-1-370-gaza-smuggling-tunnels>.

"Abbas backs Egyptian crackdown on Gaza tunnels," *Al-Arabiya*, December 12, 2014, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2014/12/12/Abbas-backs-Egypt-crackdown-on-Gaza-tunnels-.html>.

All articles retrieved December 28, 2015.



government and elections, which never took place. Abbas encountered problems almost immediately because peace talks with Israel implied recognition of Jewish national existence. Within days of the Palestinian reconciliation there were calls rejecting Fatah's approach. Should Hamas accept Israel's right to exist, they would be absorbed into the secular nationalist Fatah, but with a more Islamist veneer, rendering them hypocritical. The Hamas alternative must include a rejection of Israel, although a hudna can be considered for short-term tactical necessities. Hamas cannot agree to a permanent status accord with an entity considered illegal on theological grounds.

Once again the game changed quickly when the Gaza border heated up in June and July 2014, and Israel responded with the Protective Edge operation. The causes were numerous, beginning with Hamas military and economic weakness as a result of the continuing Rafiah tunnel closings, the demand for elections, and the strengthening of the West Bank PA through US, EU and moderate Arab State support. Israel and the PA policing forces continued security cooperation, this translating into repression of Hamas activities on the West Bank. The Israeli naval blockade and Egyptian tunnel closings severely restricted military contraband entering Gaza. With less civilian goods arriving, Hamas suffered from decreased tax revenues as well. A violent Hamas response was calculated to attain increased aid, especially from the Arab and Muslim world.

In June 2014, two Hamas operatives abducted and murdered three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank. The terrorists were eventually killed in a firefight in Hebron three months later. In retaliation Jewish extremists abducted and brutally murdered an East Jerusalem Palestinian teenager. Police apprehended the perpetrators within a month and the three accused murderers stood trial, were found guilty and are awaiting sentencing as of late 2015. The event spurred riots in Jerusalem's Arab neighborhoods, particularly in the north of the city where the teen lived. Tensions were extremely high on both sides.

Hamas rocket fire into the Negev renewed in June, apparently with some connection to the West Bank and Jerusalem events, although certainly in support of Palestinian Arabs living in those regions. At the beginning of July it appeared Israel's Kerem Shalom region adjacent to the southern Gaza Strip was in immediate danger. Rocket attacks intensified, yet the Likud led Netanyahu-Lapid government (2013-15) held back, waiting for the right moment to unleash large-scale aerial bombardments. The air campaign began on July 8, 2014 and a week later Israeli ground forces entered Gaza, first to confront Hamas along the border and then to destroy the tunnels.

During the fifty-day conflict, between 2,100 and 2,200 Palestinians died, and another 10,000 to 11,000 were wounded. As in previous operations Israel was accused of targeting civilians and indiscriminate bombings. According to Palestinian sources there were approximately 1,600 civilian deaths, and only 500



Hamas combatants and other Islamists killed. Israeli army statistics claim 1,170 civilians and 957 Hamas fighters died, including affiliates. The discrepancy comes when counting young men of combat age who were not immediately identifiable as armed militants. According to Palestinian sources, slightly less than 24 percent of those killed were armed Islamists. Using Israeli statistics, almost 45 percent killed were from the Islamist groups, and 55 percent were civilians. Palestinian sources claim the Gaza population to be around 1.8 million. An estimate of Hamas strength and support is said to be about 20,000 or 1.1 percent of the population. Some claim the number of Hamas members to be as high as 40,000, but that number appears greatly exaggerated. Using Palestinian statistics in the former and Israeli stats in the latter, one realizes Hamas and associates took 22 to 41 times greater casualties than they would have had the bombing been at random. Israel pursued pinpoint bombings, with over 5,200 airstrikes, yet casualties remained low due to evacuation warnings given by the military when attacking embedded Hamas positions located in civilian neighborhoods. Warnings greatly limited casualties, resulting in less than half-a person killed and two wounded per air strike.

Israel accused Hamas of again using its own people as human shields and of almost exclusively targeting Israeli civilians, a charge supported by PA President Abbas. Abbas further castigated Hamas for murdering 120 Palestinian youths who were said to have violated curfews, and condemned the Hamas execution of another thirty Palestinians as “collaborators” supposedly aiding Israel.

Hamas fired some 4,500 rockets out of an estimated arsenal of 10,000. Others were destroyed in ammunition depots and an estimated 30 percent remained in the aftermath. These were directed almost exclusively at Israeli civilian targets, but many fell in open areas or were taken out by the Iron Dome missile defense system. During combat Israel discovered that Hamas dug at least 32 cross border tunnels with the intent of abducting Israeli soldiers and civilians and bringing mayhem to the northwestern Negev. Border battles and Israel’s incursion into Gaza to destroy these tunnels resulted in 72 killed, over 90 percent of which were IDF soldiers. Both sides suffered population displacement, hundreds of thousands of Gazans left their homes, and thousands of Israelis headed north out of rocket range.<sup>97</sup>

Both sides claimed victory from the 50-day battle, but neither won outright. Israel caused Hamas vast material damage, but politically Hamas enjoyed increased support from the Palestinian public, recovering from those pressured weary days leading up to the conflict. Had elections for president been held at the beginning of October 2014, the Palestinian Center for Policy and Research reported that Hamas leader Haniyeh would have defeated the Fatah PA incumbent President

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<sup>97</sup> “2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict,” *Wikipedia*, retrieved October 6, 2014, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014\\_Israel-Gaza\\_conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2014_Israel-Gaza_conflict).  
Ne’eman, “Some Gaza Conclusions,” August 25, 2014, <http://me-ontarget.org/pws/page!12724>.

Abbas by 55 to 38 percent in an overall ballot. In Gaza it was 50 to 47 percent, and in the West Bank 57 to 33 percent. A month previous Haniyeh polled an overall 61 percent, indicating there was serious slippage. Hamas retained solid support from the population and could be expected to take legislative elections by similar margins. In a repeat performance paralleling previous Israeli strikes, Hamas lost military and economic strength but gained politically. Mahmoud al-Zahar reiterated the Hamas demand for Israel's destruction by declaring the need to build an Islamic State in "all of Palestine."<sup>98</sup>

In the spring of 2014 Hamas was on the defensive, exercising prudence to assure survival. This did not imply an ideological reversal, but rather a delay in implementation. Before and after Operation Protective Edge, Hamas retention of power in Gaza itself was a matter of how much opposition they faced, how well their opponents were armed, and most importantly, the level of force and the speed in which the Hamas regime would impose its heavy hand on whatever challenges arose. As of mid 2015, Hamas continued enjoying majority support leaving little room for the opposition. Hamas applies the Iranian Ayatollahs' regime template to retain power. The use of firepower against demonstrators commenced in 2007, continues into the present, and is expected to persist in the future. As long as a sizable part of the population is Islamist and the security forces support the regime, Hamas will rule in Gaza. Egypt is hostile but has little impact on Hamas Islamist ideological influence in the Palestinian arena and beyond. The greatest threat to the Hamas regime comes from the fanatics on the Islamist al-Qaeda influenced right, including Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) types. Knowing Fatah stands no chance of taking power in Gaza, Israel almost paradoxically supports a continuation of a militarily-weakened Hamas rule.

Overall, Hamas held up well despite the Israeli and Egyptian economic squeeze, the internal Palestinian political challenge led by PA President Abbas, and the fanatical military threat of al-Qaeda and Islamic State-type organizations in Gaza. The *dawa*, calling both for social works and Jihad, retains its allure and Hamas survives despite massive difficulties. As of 2016, Hamas continued to advocate the Islamization of the PA, the destruction of Israel and Jews, and supported world Islamic domination. They have not succeeded with any of these goals, but they remain intact within future policy objectives. Hamas declared a *hudna* after Israel's 2014 Protective Edge operation, but none should expect it to last more than a few years. Instead of working on economic development through an alliance with the more moderate Arab nations, we can expect a Hamas re-ignition of the border conflict with Israel in the future.

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<sup>98</sup> "Hamas: Ruling West Bank it could destroy Israel with speed that no one can imagine," *Palestine Media Watch*, e-mail release October 5, 2014, <http://www.palwatch.org/pages/aboutus.aspx>.

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