The Foreign Policy of Hamas

Muhammad Muslih

Foreword

Understanding and dealing with "Islamic fundamentalism" has been one of the more difficult foreign policy challenges for the United States in the last decade. Few policymakers seem to comprehend the ideology behind so-called fundamentalist groups or the rationales behind their actions. While some analysts call it the successor to the Red Scare and have dubbed it the Green Menace, others contend that these groups are essentially social movements with a religious emphasis. Whichever view is correct, there is broad agreement that the topic of "Islamic fundamentalism" requires further attention, and the papers from the Muslim Politics Project hope to address this issue.

The goal of the Muslim Politics Project, which began in 1994, was to counter the misperceptions that prevail in influential circles and to present Islamic intellectual and political agendas in all their complexity and diversity. One of its several undertakings was to commission papers on Islamist foreign policy in order to better understand the international political attitudes and policies of various Islamist groups. This resulted in papers on the following movements: Jama'at-i Islami, Hamas, Hizballah, the Taliban, the Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party, as well as an analysis of U.S. policy toward Islamism. Each of these papers goes into detail not only about the movements themselves, but also about how they affect U.S. foreign policy. We believe that they provide insights on a topic that challenges policymakers and will help prevent future misunderstandings.

Lawrence J. Korb
Maurice R. Greenberg Chair, Director of Studies
Council on Foreign Relations

Acknowledgments

The Foreign Policy of Hamas

Muhammad Muslih

INTRODUCTION

Hamas is not a monolithic organization. Hamas is not a fundamentalist movement. Opposition to Oslo and subsequent Israeli-Palestinian agreements, violent attacks on Israeli targets, challenges to the Palestinian Authority (PA), and anti-American polemics, all have fed the belief that Hamas is a militant movement on a collision course with the West and with the forces of moderation in the Arab world. This view must be reassessed. As the peace process moves forward with the signing of the *Sharm el-Shaykh* agreement between Israel and the PA in September 1999, the foreign policy of Hamas becomes more important to understand because it may have a direct bearing on the Arab-Israeli peace process. At least in this sense, Hamas' policies are extremely relevant for U.S. policymakers.

Hamas' presence in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as in Arab countries that neighbor Israel, makes it particularly relevant to America's efforts to forge regional peace and stability. The Palestinian territories and the Arab countries that neighbor Israel are at the heart of the peace process. Political developments in these areas also have a direct bearing on the policies of the Gulf governments. In addition, Hamas is a major voice of dissent against U.S. policies in the Middle East. Hence, the future course of Hamas may promote or hinder peace and stability in the region.

Hamas' political activism, especially its acts of violence against Israel in the mid-1990s, coincided with the rise of the

United States to a position of unchallenged preeminence in re-
gional and international politics. The confluence of these two
currents has challenged America's two declared foreign policy
goals: promoting political pluralism and containing radical Is-
lamic movements. For many in the West, it is axiomatic that
Hamas is a combative, ideological monolith that poses a direct
threat not only to the peace process but also to Western interests
in the region. American policymakers, like the public in general,
see Hamas solely in terms of extremism and terrorism. While
this is understandable in light of the violent actions of Hamas, it
fails to take into account the diversity of the movement and the
multiple and complex manifestations of its policies.

Hamas should not be viewed as the monolithic enemy of
America and the Middle East peace process. Its policies do not
reduce to a rigid doctrine of religious reassertion. Equally im-
portant, Hamas proved that it can change and adapt to new de-
velopments. The dynamic of the peace process is placing
tremendous strains on the movement. The pressures of the PA
and of other parties involved in the peace process have added to
these strains weakening the infrastructure of Hamas and forc-
ing it to reevaluate its policies and its modes of action.

This paper analyzes the foreign policy of Hamas and the di-
versity of its multiple manifestations. It also discusses the inter-
national ramifications of this policy and concludes by suggest-
ing practical measures the United States can take to encourage
the inclusion of Hamas in peacemaking and nation-building in
Palestine. This paper assumes that a policy of inclusion will
broaden the base of Palestinian support for the peace process. It
will also encourage more moderation on the part of Hamas.

EMERGENCE AND IDEOLOGY

The Arabic word *hamas* (zeal) derives from the verb *hamisa*,
which in a philosophic sense denotes the idea of throwing one's
self wholeheartedly behind a cause. It was in the early stage of
the Palestinian intifada that erupted in December 1987 that the
word *hamas* acquired a distinctive meaning—that of military

activism against Israel. The word *hamas* is an acronym for *harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya* (the Islamic Resistance movement). Hamas was established in Gaza in the fall of 1987. It served as a political and military arm of the Muslim Brotherhood Society, a society that was originally founded in March 1928 in Isma'iliyya, Egypt, and which later established branches in Palestine during the Palestinian revolt of 1936–39.

The creation of Hamas is often attributed to the mood of active resistance, created by the intifada, to Iran's successful Islamic revolution, to the Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) loss of political initiative during the 1983–87 period, and to the military activism of Islamic Jihad, which was established in 1979 by disaffected members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Islamic Jihad was declared operative in 1980 under the leadership of Fathi Shiqaqi and Abd al-Aziz Audeh.[1]

This is the obvious way of explaining the emergence of Hamas, but in fact it has gone deeper. The 1980s saw important changes in the structure and outlook of the Muslim Brotherhood, a society whose traditional leadership has emphasized societal reform and religious and moral education in the fight against Israeli occupation. Young and action-oriented brotherhood members began to challenge the approach of the traditional leadership. Their new approach may be summarized in one phrase—armed resistance against Israeli occupation. Coming under increasing pressure from its younger members for its policy of patience and limited involvement in politics, the brotherhood gradually became more political around the mid–1980s, and when the Palestinian call for armed resistance became loud and clear in December 1987, the society was ready to take up the challenge through its separate political wing—Hamas. Hamas transmitted its message of armed resistance through an expanding network of mosques, student bodies, professional organizations, charitable societies, as well as underground cells and command centers.

Ironically, Israel did not try to impede the growth of Islamist bodies both before and at the beginning of the intifada, motivated on the one hand by a desire to increase divisions in Pales-

tinian ranks and on the other by a policy aimed at creating a rival to the secular-nationalist PLO. "Many Israeli staff officers believed that the rise of fundamentalism in Gaza could be exploited to weaken the power of the PLO," wrote Israeli observers Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari. "Any damage that fundamentalism might cause, the prevailing theory held, would be more than offset by the good it would do in finally neutralizing the PLO."[2] Later, when the intifada developed its own momentum and when armed Islamist elements resorted to violent tactics against Israeli targets, leading Israeli security officials came to realize that Hamas was a fiercer enemy to Israel than the PLO.[3]

The emergence of Hamas also threatened the PLO. In June 1974, the PLO embarked on a peace strategy that in November 1988 culminated in the acceptance of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, not as a transitional stage but as a point final. Between 1974 and 1988, the PLO's strategy had been to concentrate on diplomatic efforts at the expense of military efforts, to contact moderate Israeli groups and individuals directly, to insist on PLO participation in a Middle East peace conference, and to affirm the PLO's readiness to open a direct dialogue with the Israeli government. In November 1988, the Palestine National Council (PNC), the highest and most authoritative PLO policymaking body, explicitly recognized Israel not only as a de facto entity but as a legitimate state, accepted U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as the bases for convening an international peace conference on the Middle East and the Palestine question, and called for the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital. In December of the same year, PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat publicly accepted the right of Israel to exist and renounced terrorism. The U.S. government responded by authorizing the opening of a "substantive dialogue" with the PLO.[4]

Israel refused to reciprocate, thus putting the PLO on the defensive vis-à-vis its constituency in Gaza and the West Bank. The Palestinians in these territories wanted an end to Israeli occupation and an Israeli recognition of their right to self-deter-

mination and statehood. This played into the hands of the Islamic camp, particularly Hamas. Thanks to its political activism, the movement almost doubled the size of its pre-Intifada constituency.5 It also challenged the PLO to adopt a more proactive strategy. While the PLO concentrated on diplomatic efforts at the expense of military efforts, Hamas opted for armed resistance as the preferred course of action. This enhanced Hamas' credibility and expanded its base of support.

Hamas' attitude toward Israel and the PA, indeed toward a variety of political and social issues, raises two questions: Is Hamas a revolutionary movement? Is it a fundamentalist movement? The answers to these questions have a variety of implications for American foreign policy. First, they suggest that the United States may have to reevaluate its image of Hamas. Hamas is not necessarily anti-Western, anti-American, antipeace, or antidemocratic. In this case, the challenge is to better understand the reality of a principal Islamic movement.

Second, recognizing the reality of Hamas counters the American image of a unified Islamic threat to the peace process. The politics of Hamas are marked by debate and by competing visions and interests. Understanding this diversity lessens the risk of creating self-fulfilling prophecies about the battle of radical Islam against a democratic, peace-loving West. Finally, de-emphasizing old assumptions about Hamas should encourage the United States to adopt a more imaginative policy toward the movement. As the peace process appears to be back on track, and as nation-building has become the vehicle for fulfilling Palestinian expectations, this may be the time for the United States to encourage the inclusion of Hamas in the twin process of peacemaking and nation-building. To begin, let us simply define revolution as a complete overthrow of the established political order in any society or state; a radical change in the existing pattern of socioeconomic relations; and a forcible substitution of a new form of government. If we accept this definition, there appears to be very little to suggest that Hamas is a revolutionary movement. First, Hamas neither challenged the PLO legitimacy nor sought to take its role in negotiations with re-

spect to the Palestine question. Furthermore, Hamas did cooperate with PLO bodies in Gaza and the West Bank during the intifada. True, Hamas adopted its own charter, called "The Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement-Palestine," and presented itself as a separate, independent political and ideological force by issuing its own statements and maintaining its own network of social and political institutions.

Moreover, Hamas did not aim at overturning the social system in which the PLO is rooted in Gaza and the West Bank, a system based on the exercise of patronage, the manipulation of primordial loyalties and allegiances, the support of security services, and a relatively small middle class composed largely of merchants, developers, and professionals. In terms of the social background of its leaders and its constituency, there appears to be no significant difference between Hamas and the PLO. For example, Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, a leader and the main founder of Hamas, hails from a relatively prosperous middle-class land-owning family. Other prominent Hamas leaders, including Dr. Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi, Dr. Musa Abu Marzuq, and Ibrahim Ghusha, also hail from middle-class origins.

If we extend our definition of revolution to include expressions of religious faith and practice, as well as expressions of a conservative or traditional social code, then there appears to be prima facie revolutionary elements in the program of Hamas, revolutionary in the sense of finding fault with secular modernizing tendencies and wanting to establish the authority of the Qur'an and the Sunna, i.e., the sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad. The following elements come to mind: the call for the creation of an Islamic state in Palestine; the introduction of societal reform on the basis of Islam; emphasis on the Quran as the movement's constitution; and the proclamation of jihad (holy war) as the movement's instrument of action.

As soon as we look at this list of principles outlined in Hamas' charter of August 1988, another question arises. Is Hamas a fundamentalist movement? To answer this question, it is best to begin with a simple fact: the program of Hamas has a pronounced rootedness in Islam. Article I of the movement's

charter reads as follows: "Islam is its [Hamas'] system. From Islam it derives its values, its concepts and its views of life, the universe and man; it appeals to Islam in all its actions; it resorts to Islam for guidance and directions."[6]

Hamas also adopts Islamist positions toward a number of social issues: objection to the dress of "westernized" Muslim women; emphasis on prayer and dignified behavior; attacks on co-education; incessant calls for the propagation of moral teachings in the mass media; and a general emphasis on applying the Islamic tradition to the cultural and social spheres.[7] It is worth asking whether the charter of Hamas or its positions with respect to the social code give it a fundamentalist character, in the sense that it is a movement that has emerged out of the matrix of religion and that wishes to restructure Palestinian society on the basis of Islamic history, laws, customs, traditions, and moral obligations.

The attempt to answer this question must include the following points. First, there are two roles for Hamas, and the movement's political life springs from a complicated relationship between them. There is the role of constructing a politicized religion; this takes the form of propagating a social code that is Islamic as well as nationalist. There is also the role of mobilizing and directing Palestinian public energy around a proactive form of resistance to Israeli occupation. These two roles are not neatly separated, and their forms of expression, as well as the instruments of action used to perform them, do not constitute a single political type. In the realm of the social code, Hamas always has maintained that proper Islamic behavior would strengthen the Palestinian national struggle because going back to God would be the first and most important step along the true path of liberation.[8] In the sphere of resistance to Israeli occupation, Hamas advocated violent tactics, and for this purpose it created *Kata'ib Izz-al-Din al-Qassam* (The Brigades of 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam).

This mixture of religious and nationalist fervor, with emphasis on how religion should be employed in the service of nationalism, suggests that the religious text is not simply a guide to spiritual life, but is also a powerful force that gives a "spin" to

the nationalist cause. Second, the leaders of Hamas did not act in the tradition of Iran's Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini[9]—who radicalized Islamic ideology and proclaimed the religious right of the *faqih* (Islamic jurist) to rule the nation—or Muhammad Taqi Shari'ati, an Iranian scholar-politician who revolutionized the religion of the pious faithful by resurrecting the old Shiite spirit of revolt and martyrdom and by writing about the need for an "Islamic Protestantism" that would abolish the dark age and bring the age of the renaissance.[10] Nor does Hamas have a leader with purist hard-line Islamic views similar to those of Mullah Muhammad Umar, the leader of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan.[11]

To take some examples, it is highly doubtful whether most of those who acted as leaders of Hamas, including Shaykh Yasin, really viewed politics as something totally centered on an unbending religious doctrine that excludes cooperation or bargaining among individuals or groups with different preferences in society, or whether their aim was to rally support in order to enhance the position of their group vis-à-vis the PLO and other secular forces. In 1988, Shaykh Yasin received at his home in Gaza scores of Palestinians who sought his help to arbitrate problems and give counsel on a variety of personal and social issues. These Palestinians were from all walks of life, religious and nonreligious, poor and wealthy, educated and noneducated.[12] Also Hamas' willingness to coexist with the Palestinian Authority[13] cannot be explained only by Hamas' bowing to superior force. There have always been Hamas leaders who believed in the possibility of political bargaining and of a conditional temporary arrangement with Israel, including Shaykh Yasin, Dr. Mahmud al-Zahhar from the Gaza Strip, and Shaykh Jamil Hamami, an ex-leader of Hamas in the Jerusalem/Ramallah area.

In interviews with the press, Yasin put forward his theory of such an arrangement. It was first and foremost Israel's duty to acknowledge the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and to return to their land; Hamas would be prepared to end violence against Israel and enter into a ceasefire agreement if there were an end to the Israeli occupation and control of all of the

West Bank and Gaza.[14] True, Yasin's statements might have been tactical, but the language that he used—cryptic and conditional as it was—can, as conditions change, take on unintended meanings, leading to unforeseen consequences. For example, the idea of a "ceasefire" with Israel can in the long run have the effect of making a situation of permanent truce acceptable to Hamas. The fact that a leader with religious credentials used such political language has the potential of giving popular legitimacy to the principle of permanent peace with Israel.

To take another example, we may look at Hamas' position toward elections for a Palestinian Legislative Council in Gaza and the West Bank, elections that took place in January 1996 as scheduled.[15] Although several Hamas figures nominated themselves—Shaykh Jamil Hamami in Jerusalem and Isma'il Haniyyah, Khalid Hindi, and Sa'id al-Namruti in Gaza—they later changed their minds, thereby enabling the Hamas leadership outside the Palestinian territories, particularly in Amman, to boycott the elections and avoid a split in the movement.

Why did Hamas boycott the elections? Can we speak of such a thing as a Hamas concept of political authority, and if so, how did this influence the movement's position toward political participation and political pluralism? To provide answers to these questions, three points are useful. The first is that the leadership of Hamas decided to boycott the elections mainly because they were based on the September 1993 Declaration of Principles (DOP) between Israel and the PLO. Hamas did not want to legitimize the DOP. Second, perhaps Hamas leaders inside the Palestinian territories feared that the movement would perform poorly should it decide to take part in the elections. Their fear, if it really existed, was confirmed by the fact that the only Hamas member to win a seat on the Legislative Council was Imad al-Faluji, who won primarily because he was on the Fatah list, in addition to a Hamas supporter from the wealthy Masri family of Nablus, who won mainly because he was a person of high birth.

Third, the concept of "sacred authority" did not appear in the political language of Hamas before and during the elections. This kind of authority is not necessarily predicated on the indi-

visibility of religion and politics, but it is based on the premise that the religious and political spheres do intersect and overlap according to context. As Dale Eickelman and James P. Piscatori have pointed out in their discussion on Islamic movements in general, the interaction "occurs when groups or states vie to manipulate religious language and symbolism to induce or compel obedience to their wishes."[16] In the case of Hamas, some of its principal figures in Gaza and the West Bank provided a conception of participatory politics that was not based on the institutionalization of the normative order of Islam. Their conception can be summarized in the following way.

Without wishing to predicate the principle of participatory politics on a conception of democracy that is based solely on *shura* (consultation), Shaykh Jamal Salim, a Hamas figure from Nablus, stressed that the *shura* system in Islam gives individuals the right of *ijtihad* (independent judgment in a legal or theological question) in matters that have to do with elections and personal freedoms. He also argued that Hamas only boycotts elections for a legislative council that has only executive powers, but would take part in elections for a council that would have wide-ranging powers, including the power to legislate. Another Hamas figure, Shaykh Jamal Mansur (also from Nablus), stressed that participation in elections springs from a complicated relationship between *shura* and the interest of Hamas and the Palestinian masses. The *shura*, he argued, does not prohibit elections, but the interests of the Palestinians should make them boycott the elections because elections would be conducted in a manner that would promote the interests of the stronger party, in this case Israel, and the elections would legitimize the DOP's fragmentation of the Palestinian people in the sense that only those Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank would be allowed to vote; also, the elections would not be completely free in the shadow of a balance of power that decisively favored Israel, thus enabling it to dictate the conditions.[17]

Seen in this light, Hamas hardly can be regarded as a fundamentalist movement for three reasons. First, the term "fundamentalist" exaggerates the centrality of religion in the politics of

Hamas. Religion and nationalism combine in the theory and practice of Hamas. Also, Hamas did not seek to inject divine injunctions into all political spheres. True, Hamas' leaflets and statements contained Quranic verses and made references to Islamic practices. They also endorsed jihad and called for the establishment of an Islamic state in a liberated Palestine. But it is also equally true that Hamas engaged in tacit bargaining with Israel regarding a ceasefire following the release of Shaykh Yasin from Israeli jails in September 1997 and with the PA concerning the stabilization of the situation in the self-rule areas. This tacit bargaining brought about rules for a modus vivendi between Hamas and the PA, particularly in Gaza, where the PA exercises total control over all political forces.

Second, the emphasis on fundamentalism inadvertently perpetuates "Orientalist" assumptions that Hamas politics were never guided by power considerations and interest-based calculations. Strict adherence to a religious doctrine is not the defining characteristic of Hamas' political and social life. As will be shown later, Hamas did not exclude the possibility of coexistence with an enemy or a political rival, at least for an interim period.

Third, the institutions of Hamas, including the mosques, the Islamic schools, the clinics, and the *majlis al-shura* (consultation council) are not components of sacred authority. Rather, they are institutions with shared but identifiable functions related to religious and social services, to the struggle against Israeli occupation, and to Hamas' desire to expand its political turf at the expense of Fatah and the PA.

HAMAS AND ARMED STRUGGLE:
AN "IDEOLOGICAL" OR "RATIONAL" POLICY MODEL?

On the basis of the argument presented here, one should not expect ideology to be the sole determinant of Hamas' behavior. Clearly, other variables related to capabilities have been decisive. The resources of Hamas—both absolutely and relative to Fatah and the PA—figure heavily in the equation. The internal organization and the size of the constituency affect Hamas' orientation

and the possibilities for action. Also, the momentum of the peace process does impact Hamas' way of playing politics. Finally, the degree of tolerance shown by the host states, Syria and Jordan, influences the chances for organizing and for political action.

Each of the case studies to follow examines the foreign policy of Hamas with focus on how it has been transformed by the internal configuration of power, the dynamic of the peace process, and changing local and regional conditions. The argument throughout the case studies will center around the concept of the "ability to adapt" as shaped by the constraints of the domestic and external environments. The individual studies are then followed by a section that examines the implications of the "ability to adapt" for U.S. policies toward Hamas.

Some observers employ the "ideological model" to analyze Hamas' instruments of action. According to this view, the strategy of Hamas is almost virtually restricted to violence against Israel. This perspective is the product of three factors: Hamas' calls for armed attacks against Israeli targets; its emphasis on continued jihad; and the wave of suicidal bombings in Tel Aviv in October 1994, in Ramat Gan and Jerusalem in July and August 1995, and in Jerusalem, Ashkelon, and Tel-Aviv in February and March 1996. These acts, carried out in the name of Islam and the Palestinian cause, earned Hamas a reputation for violence and radicalism. However, a closer look at the spectrum of Hamas' activities suggests a more varied pattern of behavior than such an unnuanced negative image implies.

True, the Hamas movement has been involved in violence. Since its inception in 1987, Hamas has resolved that the wrongs of Israeli occupation must be righted, but the corrective means used by the movement were not restricted to one kind of activity. Indeed the emphasis on armed attacks did not prevent Hamas from adapting to new situations or from modifying its policies and its modes of action. This point may be elucidated by an examination of Hamas' political language, with special emphasis on the degree of consistency between theory and practice.

Some of the most common words used by Hamas are those associated with the notion of holy war, in the sense of armed

struggle ordained by God. The Arabic word is jihad, with the literal meaning of "effort," "striving," or "struggle." The word jihad should be understood in a military as well as a moral and spiritual sense.[18] The notion of jihad is expressed as follows in Article XII of the movement's charter: "Once the enemy sets foot on Muslim land, jihad and resistance against the enemy become a compulsory duty (*jihad 'ayn*) on every Muslim man and woman." Also, the motto of Hamas, expressed in Article VIII of its charter, highlights the centrality of jihad: "God is its [Hamas'] goal, the prophet is its example, the Quran is its constitution, jihad is its path (*sabiluha*), and death in the path of God is its most exalted wish (*asma amaniha*)."[19]

The basis of the obligation of jihad is the universality of Islam. God has commanded every adult Muslim to exercise jihad to uphold and spread God's message. In the case of Hamas, there is intertwined with that an equally compelling reason for jihad, which is the belief that the land of Palestine is Islamic *waqf* (endowment). To quote Hamas' charter again,

> The Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas] believes that the land of Palestine is Islamic waqf bequeathed to Muslim generations until the day of final judgement. It is not permissible to forsake it in whole or in part . . . No Arab state or states, no Arab king or president, no assembly of all the Arab kings and presidents, no organization or organizations, Palestinian or Arab, possess the right to forsake Palestine, or give up any part of it because the land of Palestine is an Islamic waqf bequeathed to Muslim generations until the day of final judgement.

The leaflets and statements of Hamas all contain direct or indirect references to jihad, and in many of them the military meaning predominates.[20] Yet, as common as the concept of jihad is, there are significant differences between Hamas' theory and its practice. Let us take as an example the obligation of jihad within the context of the universality of the Muslim revelation. In Islam, this obligation is without limit of time or place. A Muslim must fight the occupier of Muslim land wherever the occupier might be until total liberation has been achieved. Until that happens, jihad must continue and could be terminated only by a

final Muslim victory. Although Hamas leaders have pronounced views on this matter, their actual policies and some of their statements do not exactly correspond to this conception of jihad.

An early example of this can be found when Shaykh Yasin stated the following in April 1989, in answer to a question about negotiating with Israel: "Yes," he said, "if Israel acknowledges our full rights and recognizes the right of the Palestinian people to live in its homeland in freedom and independence. I do not want to destroy Israel. We want to negotiate with Israel so that the Palestinian people inside and outside Palestine can live in Palestine. Then the problem will cease to exist."[21]

Another example was Shaykh Yasin's offer of a conditional truce to Israel following his release from Israeli detention in September 1997 in the aftermath of Israel's aborted attempt to assassinate Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas' political department in Amman, Jordan before he was deported to Qatar in November 1999. According to Azzam Tamimi, a Hamas member who serves as the director of the London-based Liberty for the Muslim world, Shaykh Yasin proposed the following conditions: the truce will have a limited duration and will not entail the recognition of Israel, Israel should agree to withdraw from the territories it occupied in June 1967, Israel should dismantle all Jewish settlements built on Palestinian land since 1967, Israel should free all Palestinian prisoners, and Hamas will agree to stop all military operations against Israel during the truce period.[22]

A third example can be cited to demonstrate the shifts in Hamas' political discourse and practice. In theory, the universality of the Muslim revelation makes it incumbent on every Muslim to strive (*yujahid*) unceasingly to liberate occupied Muslim land and to uphold and propagate the message of God. According to Islamic law books, this obligation is without limit of time or space. This means perpetual war against the enemy wherever that might be. Since its emergence in 1987, Hamas has taken a position that places limits of time and space on the obligation of jihad, as seen in the case of the conditional truce and the conditional readiness to negotiate with Israel proposed by Shaykh Yasin. We also can see this limitation on jihad in Hamas'

definition of the spatial dimension of the conflict with Israel. This was clearly expressed in an undated explanatory memorandum issued by the movement. The memorandum states, "The arena of confrontation with the enemy is Palestine. The Arab and Islamic arenas play a supporting and helping role for our Palestinian people."[23]

The same idea was also expressed in statements made by high-ranking Hamas officials. For example, in response to a question about whether or not Hamas intended to transfer the battle with Israel outside Palestine, Khalid Mish'al, the chief of Hamas' political bureau in Amman, said the following: "The arena of conflict between us and the Zionist occupation regime is occupied Palestine. Hamas is still adhering to its policy of confining the conflict to occupied Palestine."[24]

Thus we seem to be faced with a paradox. How is it that Hamas constructs, in sections of its charter and leaflets, an ideological paradigm that stresses the obligation of jihad until final victory without limit of time or space, when in other sections it de-emphasizes the paradigm and envisions alternative ways of dealing with Israel? Should we explain this by the realpolitik concept of political expediency? It is tempting to do so but it may be misleading. We must at least ask whether there are other explanations, both military and political: for example, the balance of power which favors Israel; the predominant power of the Palestinian Authority, which has opted for peace with Israel; the lack of support for suicide attacks against Israel among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza; or the American pressure on Arab governments and groups that support or give shelter or training to Hamas.

But when all this has been said, there still remains a question that may be explained by putting Hamas' ideological paradigm in the specific context of the movement's institutional structure and evolution. With regard to structure, Hamas was created by the Muslim Brotherhood as a decentralized body consisting of administrative, charitable, political, and military divisions and subdivisions in Gaza and the West Bank. The leading members of Hamas fall into five categories—the shaykhs (religious lead-

ers), the Islamist intellectuals, the professionals, the younger leadership candidates, and the activists in the secret cells and the regional command centers.[25] When Hamas was created, the shaykhs were responsible for directing it and formulating its policy: For example, Shaykh Yasin was *al-mas'ul al-'amm* (director-general) of the movement, while Shaykh Jamil Hamami, a brotherhood member in the West Bank, was the liaison between the Hamas leadership in the West Bank and the brotherhood's command in Jordan.

In a literal sense, the Arabic word *shaykh* means an "older man," but it also connotes dignity and the right to make decisions. A shaykh, if he has religious training, can position himself as the voice of authority in religious, political, and social matters. In many Islamic lands, shaykhs occasionally have challenged established authorities and their policies. Sometimes they did so in subtle ways, and at other times they used direct, confrontational ways. At the time of the appearance of the Hamas charter in August 1988, the West Bank and Gaza were on the verge of explosion, when despair and anger created both an opportunity and a need for active resistance against Israeli occupation.

A mood of defiance was prevalent in these territories and the defiance was most pronounced in Gaza, where the threat of civic disintegration was looming large, and where Hamas shaykhs and supporters were most active and most combatant. Common to those shaykhs who were dominant in Hamas at the time of its founding was a marked tendency to be fiery and inciting, motivated by the need to organize Palstinians for resistance and mobilize recruits for Hamas. The dominance of the shaykhs explains to a great degree why the charter of Hamas and its early communiques were inundated with Quranic verses and fiery statements.

Later, as Hamas acquired political experience through its dealings with secular Palestinian groups and outside actors, Islamist intellectuals gradually gained more influence inside the movement. Also non-Brotherhood Islamists were allowed to join the movement. Moreover, Hamas expanded its network of connections in neighboring Arab and Islamic countries. This necessitated the creation of what is known as *qiyadat al-kharij*,

Hamas' leadership outside the Palestinian territories, and *qiya-dat al-dakhil*, or Hamas' leadership inside the territories.[26]

Because of these organizational changes, the power of shaykhs was somewhat counterbalanced by intellectuals, professionals, and other members who were able to play a more active part in decision making. In tandem with these changes, an ambitious Hamas, in need of communication with the outside world, set up offices in a number of Arab countries, thus enabling the leadership outside Palestine to give press conferences and to explain the positions of the movement to the outside world. The Hamas leadership came to pay more attention to public relations. In this way, the movement had to be accommodative by showing either a willingness to bargain or a desire to abide by the rules of the game—which meant a willingness not to challenge the status quo in the Arab countries where it had offices.

To illustrate this point, two examples can be cited. First, Hamas' offices in Jordan and Syria did not interfere in the domestic affairs of these states. On the contrary, Hamas has encouraged dialogue between Arab governments and domestic forces that opposed them, even if these forces were Islamic. Second, Hamas threw its influence in support of the democratization process in Jordan.[27] In general, the political conception underlying Hamas' policies toward the Arab states was that of a direct and similar relationship between the movement and each of the Arab and Islamic governments with which it had relations. This enabled Hamas to establish relations with governments having different political orientations, such as Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, Iran, and Syria.[28]

The exercise of *shura* also encouraged pragmatism on the part of Hamas. Behind the upholding of this Islamic principle there lay something else, namely the preservation of Hamas' decentralized system of operations. Hamas has a unified consultative council (*majlis shura*) that makes policies and oversees the work of the administrative, charitable, and military subdivisions of the movement. It is for this reason that there is no single leader for the movement. Decisions are made collectively and through consultation, as called for by Shaykh Yasin in his letters to the leading

figures of the movement.[29] On many occasions, *shura* worked in favor of those who wanted more pragmatic policies, including leading members of Hamas' political office in Jordan until it was shut down by the Jordanian government in September 1999, e.g., Dr. Musa Abu Marzuq, Dr. Muhammad Siam, Ibrahim Ghawsheh, and 'Imad al-Alami. Being responsible for Hamas' contacts with foreign officials and journalists, these members, as well as members of the information office, favored, in the interest of the movement, pragmatic over ideological approaches on a number of issues that will be explained later in the analysis.[30]

The general conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis presented here can be articulated as follows. The likelihood of any particular action results from a combination of Hamas' achievable values and objectives, perceived alternative courses of action, an evaluation of consequences that will follow from each alternative, and an assessment of each set of consequences. This yields two propositions: first, an increase in the cost of a course of action can reduce the likelihood of that course being chosen. Second, a decrease in the cost of a course of action can increase the likelihood of that action being chosen. The explanatory power of this rational policy model can be tested by examining Hamas' policies toward Israel and the United States, on the one hand, and the modes of interaction between Hamas and the PA, on the other.

HAMAS AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD: CHANGING FOREIGN POLICY HORIZONS

The organizational structure of Hamas and the ups and downs of the peace process were critical to the development of Hamas' foreign policy. To a degree, the foreign relations of Hamas exhibit some of the characteristics of the rational policy model. Despite the primacy of ideology in certain situations, Hamas was inclined to place some of its actions within a value-maximizing framework. Hence, the foreign policy of Hamas toward regional and international actors has not always been shaped by ideological considerations.

Indeed, given certain constraints imposed by the domestic and external environments, Hamas did modify some of its goals and instruments of action. Such modifications permit the analyst to recognize more variety in Hamas' foreign policy record than might be suggested by the "pure" paradigm of those who consider Hamas to be exclusively or primarily driven by ideology.

IDEOLOGY AND REALPOLITIK:
A DELICATE BALANCING ACT

From the time of its emergence in 1987 until roughly three years later, Hamas viewed the world primarily in terms of the hegemonic policies advanced by the forces of U.S.-led "imperialism" and Zionism. According to Hamas, these forces worked against the interests of the Islamic nation. The idea that emerged from this image of the world was that of a civilizational struggle between the U.S.-led imperialist and Zionist alliance and the world of Islam. Thus Hamas stressed an approach to the Palestine question grounded in religion. The conflict was between Islam and its enemies. Islam was therefore the solution.[31] This belief was reinforced by the killing of around 19 Palestinians and the wounding of more than 100 others by Israeli border-police gunfire at al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem on October 8, 1990.[32] As a response, a Hamas statement declared that the Palestinian battle with the Zionists was a "battle between Islam and Judaism."[33] Another Hamas document, prepared in 1990, strongly articulated the view that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict can be resolved only when the Zionist project, i.e., the settlement of the Jews in Palestine, is totally eliminated through Palestinian-led jihad or the struggle in the path of God, complemented and supported by the Arab and Islamic nations.[34] Within this framework of thinking there was also the belief that Western capitalism was working to ensure its control over the resources of the Arab/Muslim nations using the Zionist movement as an instrument with which to usurp the wealth of the Muslims and paralyze their ability to live in unity, dignity, and pride. Implicit in this way of looking at the world was a deep distrust of America and the West. From the Hamas perspective,

the West was rising and spreading its influence in ways that were incompatible with the interests of Islam. Yes, the West had to be contained, yet Hamas was hesitant to enter in to any confrontation with Western powers or to stage any attacks against their interests and possessions. Too much was at stake. Hamas had to survive and develop in ways that would enable it to expand its base of support. Thus any confrontation with Western powers had to be avoided at any cost.[35]

Another underlying assumption of this policy was that Hamas could not live on its own resources, and the assumption was justified by the scarcity of those resources. Hence, on certain occasions the leaders of the movement could neither appear to depart from their ideology, nor could they jeopardize their relations with useful friends in the Arab world. This was the case during the Gulf crisis of 1990 and 1991. Events in the Gulf following Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 presented one of Hamas' most difficult challenges. The movement's leadership was caught between a Palestinian public opinion favorable to Saddam Hussein on the one hand, and Hamas' need for financial aid from the Arab governments of the Gulf on the other hand.

Although ideologically Hamas portrayed the Gulf crisis as another episode in the fight between Islam and a U.S.-led crusade, and although Hamas stressed the need to solve the crisis within the framework of the "Arab family," on the practical level Hamas' position was far from clear. For example, communiqués issued by Hamas expressed compassion for the Kuwaitis, but on the other hand the same communiqués were ambiguous with respect to the question of an Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

The clearest statement on the future of Kuwait came in Hamas' Communiqué[63] of August 29, 1990, which simply stressed the right of the people of Kuwait to determine the future of their country. However, when the U.S.-led alliance launched war against Iraq in mid-January 1991, Hamas expressed its sympathy for Iraq without aligning itself with Saddam or endorsing Iraqi actions in Kuwait. The Hamas position here was not an expression of support for the Iraqi invasion of

Kuwait but was rather a condemnation of the U.S.-led intervention in an inter-Arab conflict.

In general, as far as the Gulf crisis was concerned, Hamas managed not to alienate its Palestinian constituency or lose the good will of the Arab governments of the Gulf. This helped Hamas score a measure of success in its competition with the PLO, which aligned itself with Saddam, thus weakening its standing internationally and on the Arab level. Several Gulf governments, particularly the government of Saudi Arabia, quietly welcomed the position of Hamas during the Gulf crisis because they believed that it would allow them to manipulate intra-Palestinian differences.[36]

Once the principal of survival had been recognized as a strategic goal, it could not be achieved solely through reliance on internal resources. Arab and Islamic countries were too important to be alienated or ignored. Henceforth, the ability of Hamas to thrive and expand could be significantly augmented by striking alliances, or at least by establishing proper relations with Arab and Islamic actors.

Hamas' handling of the second Gulf War was a case in point. From the outset, Hamas realized the need to make some adjustment to the far-reaching effects of the Gulf War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Hamas vision was antithetical to that of communism and to that of secular Ba'thism, the official ideology of the Iraqi state. Yet the devastation visited on the military and civilian infrastructures of Iraq caused every Arab, regardless of political persuasion, to feel a greater measure of weakness and fear. With Egypt out of the Arab military equation because of its peace with Israel, and with Iraq totally devastated, the potential Arab deterrence of Israel was virtually eliminated. Meanwhile, the collapse of the Soviet Union led to the creation of a new unipolar configuration that enabled the United States to become the uncontested power regionally and internationally. These developments allowed Israel to reign supreme in the Middle East region.

It was this regional and international environment that prompted Hamas to draw closer to movements and states that

subscribed to an Islamic agenda. This was, in an important sense, a natural choice for a movement that attached so much weight to Islam—both as a system of values and as an instrument of mobilization. However, the marginalization of the Arab states after the Gulf War and the new unipolar post–Cold War configuration of power provided Hamas an additional and equally compelling reason to move in that direction. In this regard, Hamas' relations with Iran stand out because of their peculiar and complex nature. In the first place, Iran was a revolutionary Islamic state with an activist Islamic agenda opposed to pro-Western governments in the region, and to the corrupting impact of foreign influences.

Second, Iran supported the Palestinian cause and its support took several forms: the closing of the embassy of Israel and the inauguration in its place of the embassy of Palestine immediately after the overthrow of the shah in March 1979; the creation of governmental and nongovernmental institutions for the collection of donations for the Palestinian people; and the expression of concern over Palestinian issues, particularly Jerusalem.

Third, Iran and Hamas had in common an opposition to the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace process. Both strove to build a rejectionist front by holding a special conference comprising the forces opposed to the process in Tehran on October 22, 1991. Iran even gave preferential treatment to Hamas by organizing the Palestinian opposition forces within the framework of a convocation named the "International Conference for the Support of the Islamic Revolution of the Palestinian People," a conference that was held in Tehran on October 19, 1991. The Iranian government also allowed Hamas to open an office in Tehran.

Yet, despite their relations, there always was a consciousness of the differences between Hamas, a Sunni movement, and Iran, a Shiite state. There also were differences with respect to realpolitik issues: Hamas' concern with maintaining its independence both organizationally and ideologically; and its interest in maintaining good relations with Egypt, Jordan, and the Arab states of the Gulf, these being countries with which Iran did not always have cordial relations. But these differences were not so

deep as to destroy what Hamas and Iran had in common as protest forces opposed to a number of issues: U.S. hegemony, Israel, the peace process, and the secularism of the PLO.

In a polarized Middle East region in which Iran was viewed as a destabilizing force, Hamas' relations with Tehran were viewed with deep suspicion by a number of states. Even the PLO itself was unhappy with the Iran-Hamas relationship accusing Iran of providing Hamas with $30 million each year.[37] This figure may be exaggerated but Hamas did get financial support from Iran, especially following Israel's expulsion of approximately 400 Hamas members and sympathizers into Marj al-Zuhur, in southern Lebanon, in December 1992. The expulsion into southern Lebanon, an area where Iran had direct access to supporters and sympathizers, brought Hamas activists from Gaza and the West Bank into direct contact for the first time with Iranian representatives who visited Marj al-Zuhur and provided the Hamas deportees with financial support, thus setting the stage for more direct relations between the two parties in the future.[38]

Hamas' relations with the Sudan, the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut) in Algeria, and Afghanistan were equally interesting. In the case of the Sudan, Hamas' relations with the government of Brigadier Umar Hasan al-Bashir, who overthrew his predecessor Sadiq al-Mahdi on June 30, 1989, were woven from two factors. To begin, the military regime of al-Bashir, guided as it was by radical Islamic principles, followed policies that isolated it and made it search frantically for aid and allies. Many of al-Bashir's policies were a function of domestic instability.[39] This made Hamas a welcome addition to the short list of Sudan's friends, especially because Hamas is part of the larger, global Muslim Brotherhood Organization, which inspires the National Islamic Front, Sudan's ruling party. Behind this Sudanese situation lay Hamas' desire to consolidate relations with an Arab community that could offer military training and a relatively secure Arab base of support, thus enhancing the movement's capabilities. This reciprocity of interests helps explain

why of all the Arab states Sudan's relations with Hamas were perhaps the most stable.

With respect to Algeria, Hamas greeted with enthusiasm the success of the dominant Islamic group of Algeria, the FIS, in the December 1991 first round of parliamentary elections. When the success of FIS precipitated a political crisis that brought the intervention of a military-backed government intensely hostile to FIS,[40] Hamas called on the Algerian military to opt for reconciliation and restraint.[41] Hamas offered the same counsel to the Tunisian government of President Zayn al-Din Ben Ali who cracked down on *Hizb al-Nahda* (The Renaissance Party), formerly the Movement de Tendance Islamique, which was led by Rashid al-Ghannushi.[42] If we look at non-Arab areas, we find that Hamas had supported the cause of Islamic movements, for example in Afghanistan against Soviet occupation, in India and Kashmir, as well as in Chechnya, an Islamic community that was once part of the former Soviet Union and which was attacked by Russia in 1994 and again in 1999.[43]

In the process of expanding its network of Islamic connections, Hamas was careful not to alienate itself from other political actors. For example, Hamas extended a warm welcome to the detachments of PLO police that arrived in Jericho in May 1994 to prepare the ground for Palestinian self-rule in accordance with the Oslo agreement, even though Hamas was against the agreement and even though it was competing with the PLO for influence in Palestine. The agreement also prohibited any military attacks against Israel, which meant that the PLO police would prevent Hamas from exercising one of the basic tenets of its ideology, namely armed struggle. Eager to avoid a confrontation with the PA, Hamas quieted Gazans who tried to eject Arafat from the funeral of Hani Abid, a leader of Islamic Jihad in Gaza who was killed on November 2, 1994, in a car bombing blamed on Israel by Palestinians in Gaza and elsewhere.[44] The protesting Gazans criticized Arafat's leadership and his laxity in security matters.[45] Some Hamas members accepted official posts in the PA, the first two being Hamid Bitawi and Mahmud Salameh, both of whom became deputy justices

to supreme religious courts in Arafat's administration on November 13, 1994.[46] Other Hamas members, including Shaykh Jamal Hamami, who withdrew from Hamas in early 1999, and Husayn Abu Kuwayk, went as far as suggesting the opening of a dialogue with the Israeli government.[47] Most likely, this suggestion was a response to Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Yose Beilin's earlier statements that official talks with Hamas were possible, if Hamas was truly interested in reducing tensions.[48]

Hamas' relations with Jordan and the Islamic movement in that state showed a similar picture. Here we find a keen interest on the part of Hamas to stay on good terms with the Hashemite monarchy. For Hamas, Jordan has been a political center almost as important as Gaza and the West Bank. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (East Bank) has the largest number of persons of Palestinian birth or descent. Nearly half of the four million residents of the East Bank are of Palestinian origin. No accurate figures exist because no census was conducted in the East Bank with a view to elicit information on Palestinian and Jordanian places of birth and descent, owing to the politically sensitive nature of this distinction.[49] Thus from the standpoint of Hamas, Jordan has been an important source of sympathizers who could serve as a counterweight to the supporters of the PLO.

These factors explain why violent acts were not carried out by Hamas in Jordanian territory, and why Hamas welcomed the democracy experiment in Jordan encouraging Jordan's Islamists to participate in the country's parliamentary elections in 1989 and 1993.[50] Support for democratization stemmed from the belief that Islamists, if included in the political process, would have the power to influence policy from within the system.[51] Yet despite the interests that Hamas and Jordan shared, their relations did have certain complicating factors. For example, Hamas' suicide attacks against Israeli targets in the spring of 1994, 1995, and 1996 forced the Jordanian government to round up Hamas activists. But the Hamas response to the arrests was low key, partly out of a desire not to provoke a confrontation with the Jordanian state, but also partly out of a strong wish not to create a

precedent that would encourage other Arab parties, especially the PA, to follow an already-existing example.[52]

Yet the seeds of a conflict between Hamas and the Jordanian government were there, and the conflict could have occurred at any time. And the conflict did break out in August–September 1999, when the Jordanian government closed down Hamas' offices and detained a number of its principal figures on grounds that they belonged to an illegal political organization. In November 1999, the Jordanian government deported four Hamas leaders to Qatar.

How did this come about? It is easy to explain in terms of the different policy orientations of the two parties: the propeace policies of the Jordanian state, and more specifically King Abdullah II's keenness on maintaining good relation with Israel and the United States, and Hamas' traditional opposition to the peace process and the U.S. policies in the region. But Hamas has been in Jordan for many years. Its policies toward Israel and the United States were known to the Jordanian authorities. Hence to explain why the conflict did not break before August 1999 we must look to other factors.

The first of these factors was the Jordanian government's fear of the radicalizing effect of Hamas on the more moderate East Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. This indeed might be regarded as a logical explanation in view of the fact that King Abdullah II wants to consolidate his rule and raise his and his peoples' profile in regional politics, as is evidenced in his attempts to forge closer relations with a number of Arab countries, including Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and the Gulf, including Kuwait, a country that viewed his father (the late King Husayn) as a collaborator with Saddam Hussein against the state of Kuwait.

The second factor had to do with timing. It happened that key Hamas leaders went from Amman to a conference in Tehran at a time when Israel and the PA were on the verge of concluding an accord on the implementation of the Wye Plantation agreement of October 1998 with U.S. and Egyptian help. The Jordanian government was suspicious of the Iran visit. As viewed from Amman, a country trying to create new relations with key

Arab countries that support the peace process cannot afford to make itself a staging ground for possible antipeace activities.

There was one more factor. Israeli and U.S. pressure against King Abdullah II was mounting. From the perspective of the two countries, and indeed from the perspective of the PA, the weakening of Hamas in Jordan would guarantee the strengthening of moderate elements in the Hamas leadership in Gaza and the West Bank. To a great extent, this would prevent the launching of violent attacks against Israeli targets.

THE POLITICS OF ESCALATION AND ACCOMMODATION

The Oslo agreement created much tension between Hamas and Israel on the one hand and Hamas and the PA on the other. After the agreement went into force in the spring of 1994, this tension affected the peace process itself. The problems accompanying the implementation of the agreement asserted themselves at once. This came about as a result of the new political changes that took place in Gaza and the West Bank after 1994: the spread of Palestinian self-rule under the leadership of Arafat over scattered sections of these territories; the almost-total legal and political subordination of the self-rule areas to the Israeli occupation regime; the creation through elections of a Palestinian Legislative Council in January 1996; the dominance of Arafat's group (Fatah); the increasing American and Israeli pressures on Arafat to dismantle the infrastructure of Hamas; the polarization between Palestinian political forces supporting and opposing the peace process; the continuing underdevelopment of the Palestinian economy, mainly as a result of the closures imposed by Israel on the Palestinian self-rule areas; Israel's escalating settlement and expropriation activities; the depoliticization of Palestinian campuses; and the shift of focus of the debate in Gaza and the West Bank from the peace process to domestic concerns, such as problems of governance, the quality of life, human rights, and the heavy-handedness of Palestinian security forces.

These changes were taking place in a society in the process of rapid change, where the balance of forces between political

elites was shifting to the advantage of political bosses who came with Arafat from Tunisia, and where the PA was becoming a buffer between the Palestinian population and the Israeli authorities. The reach of the PA in the self-rule areas was becoming greater, and while this made for more stability and satisfaction with the disappearance of the visible signs of Israeli occupation, it also created resentment and unease among large numbers of Palestinians.

The corruption, the heavy-handedness, and the autocratic tendencies of the PA gave rise to criticism from many quarters, particularly members of the literate class. And the peace process, limping along confusing turns and windings, was becoming the channel through which regional and international players tried to win influence and pursue their competing interests. A small, weak Palestinian society, positioned in the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, lay open to influences from Israel, America, western Europe, and the Arab world lying all around.

The complexities of these issues presented Hamas with unprecendented dilemmas and challenges. These issues were interrelated but they did constitute intelligible and unified subject matter. How did Hamas respond to these situations? To provide an answer, an attempt will be made to examine the way in which Hamas conducted its policies with respect to three issues: the peace process, Hamas' relations with the PA, and Hamas' policy toward the U.S. government. As for the peace process, it can be described as follows: it is incomplete, it disregards deadlines stipulated in signed agreements between Israel and the PA, and it contains Israeli security demands that have the real potential of undermining the viability of any future Palestinian entity.

As far as Hamas-PA relations are concerned, two points should be taken into consideration: the divergent views of both parties with respect to the path of peace and the new changes outlined above brought to the fore the issue of whether Hamas should stick to a maximalist position of rejection or whether it should strike a fair balance between the "bad" and the "less bad" in a fluid environment in which the balance of forces is decisively in favor of Arafat and his internal and external supporters.

HAMAS AND THE PEACE PROCESS

Let us first look at Hamas and the peace process. There is no need to address this question in detail here. Some of the main lines of an answer are clear. The literature of the movement tells us that Hamas oppose the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, but it also tells us that this opposition is tempered by an awareness of the social and economic hardships facing the Palestinians in the occupied territories. A Palestinian observer wrote that,

> Despite vocal opposition, the organization [Hamas] does not wish to project itself as an obstructive force when there might be a chance, however slim, of finding a solution. Hamas' opposition to the talks is further tempered by lack of available alternatives and awareness that the internal Palestinian balance of power still favors the PLO. More important is the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, its patron, whose opposition to Jordanian government policies cannot be allowed to reach the point of alienating the king.[53]

In situations in which more powerful participants determine the course of events, it is not usual for weaker players such as Hamas to find themselves more deliberative than doctrinaire. The function of ideology can be relegated to a secondary status, and the search for practical, nonideological formulations may flourish. Such change, which was in an embryonic form before Oslo, began to acquire a more definite form after Oslo. The trends that crystallized inside Hamas after 1993 give us a clear idea about the emergence of aims and methods different from those of earlier ideological formulations. The trends, though not totally new, may be an indication of Hamas' ability to adjust to an unfolding process of change inside and outside Palestine.

The first trend was represented by those who were unswervingly opposed to any settlement except on the basis of a totally liberated Palestine. Jihad, they believed, is the means by which liberation should be achieved. Any negotiation with Israel was totally rejected. Some shaykhs, as well as some Hamas members in Syria, the Sudan, and Egypt, shared this perception of a set-

tlement, a perception initially conditioned by the Hamas charter
and the high expectations created in the early days of the intifada.

Hamas' centrist figures, such as Dr. Mahmud al-Zahhar
(Gaza), Muhammad Nazzal, and Musa Abu Marzuq
(Amman), were representatives of this trend. They were predis-
posed to accept the idea of stages, or in other words two solu-
tions—one immediate (*'ajil*) and the other "delayed" (*mu'ajjal*).
The immediate solution called for the creation of a Palestinian
state in Gaza and the West Bank, not as a final point but as a
transitional stage. A burgeoning tendency to employ diplomatic
means to achieve this goal also appeared. The loudest advocates
of this proposition were al-Zahhar, a practicing physician in
Gaza, and Muhammad Nazzal, once Hamas' representative in
the Jordanian capital. Al-Zahhar's proposals can be summarized
as follows:

1. The Oslo agreement is a fact, or to use al-Zahhar's expression
made in private to this author, it is a "poisoned meal which the
Palestinians will be forced to swallow."

2. Israel should be prepared to withdraw from the territories it
occupied in 1967, specifically Jerusalem.

3. The occupied territories would be entrusted to the custody of
the United Nations.

4. The Palestinian people would choose their representatives
from "inside" and "outside" the occupied territories, without any
Israeli intervention or objection.

5. Negotiations would start between Israeli and Palestinian rep-
resentatives with respect to all outstanding issues.54

6. As for Nazzal, he simply expressed Hamas' readiness to ac-
cept a peaceful settlement if Israel agreed to withdraw from the
territories it had captured in June 1967. However, he ruled out
the recognition of Israel by Hamas.55

A third trend, whose advocates proposed a truce (*hudna*)
with Israel, also crystallized during this phase. The seeds of this
idea can be found in the earlier proposals of Shaykh Yasin and
al-Zahhar. As has already been noted, Shaykh Yasin expanded
on the idea of a truce after his release from Israeli detention in
September 1997, a release that represented an Israeli concession

to Jordan following Israel's botched assassination attempt against Khalid Mish'al, a Hamas leader in Jordan. A more explicit version of the *hudna* idea was put forward by Dr. Abu Marzuq who suggested a legal religious basis (*madkhal shar'i dini*) for the acceptance of a temporary settlement with Israel. This basis was *hudna*, whose root word means "calm" or "tranquility."

According to Islamic jurists, truces are acceptable temporary arrangements, and for this they found precedent in the Quran and the tradition of the prophet,[56] especially the Hudaybiyyah treaty of 628 A.D. according to which the prophet allowed the Quraysh a ten-year truce during which their trade would be unhindered and there would be no hostilities.[57] What is more significant in Abu Marzuq's proposal is that it did not call for an open or latent war with Israel, even after the expiration of the truce. A revealing excerpt from an interview with Abu Marzuq sheds light on this point:

> The strategic and fateful choices of the Palestinian people must be decided on the basis of a free plebiscite, and unrestricted, representative legislative elections. These choices include all proposed political settlements, as well as an elected representative leadership. Once this situation obtains, Hamas would accept the choice made by the people, whether the people accept or reject the proposed political solutions. Hamas also would accept the leadership chosen by the people, and would implement the program on the basis on which the leadership was elected.[58]

Other trends emerged within Hamas after Oslo. Once offered the opportunity to join the PA administration, some Hamas members gladly accepted. Two examples can be cited: Imad al-Faluji (Gaza) served as the minister of transportation, and Shaykh Talal Sidr (Hebron) was appointed minister of sports and youth. Some Hamas members also ran as candidates in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections of January 1996. Wajih Yaghi, Musa al-Za'but, Imad al-Faluji, and Sulayman al-Rumi ran as a candidate for the Gaza district; and Mu'awiya al-Masri ran as candidates for Nablus.[59] The choices made by these individuals were dictated more by a desire to find new con-

duits to political power than by an urge to turn themselves away from Hamas.

<div align="center">HAMAS AND THE UNITED STATES</div>

Hamas took great pains to avoid confrontation with the United States. True, Hamas continued to stress in its leaflets and statements that the aim behind the U.S.-led new world order was to undermine Islam and the Islamic movements. Hamas believed that to the extent which the U.S. government was able to shape the new world order, it did so with the destruction of Iraq and the launching of the Middle East peace process. The basic agreement between America and the other Western powers that joined its hegemonic schemes was about the way in which the new world order should subordinate the Arab and Islamic worlds and enhance the position of the American-European-Israeli triangle.[60]

However, the role of Hamas' ideology seems to be subordinate to realpolitik considerations. In practical terms, when it came to dealing with America, Hamas found itself operating on the basis of a different system of values. It was a system that relegated ideology to a secondary status. This was revealed by a conscious Hamas' decision not to engage in any acts of violence against American targets, even though the American government had tried to contain Hamas by putting it on the terrorist list, by pressuring Arafat to take stricter measures against the movement's infrastructure in the Palestinian territories, and by promoting antiterrorist coordination on regional and international levels. In practical terms, this coordination meant the introduction of measures aimed at preventing Hamas from engaging in recruitment and acquiring arms. It also meant identifying and determining the sources of financing for Hamas.[61]

Hamas had every reason to avoid a confrontation with the U.S. government. For one thing, this would be compatible with its policy of narrowing the circle of enemies and keeping the energy of the movement focused on Israel. Hamas also feared that an attack on American targets would force Arafat to ruthlessly squash the movement, causing in the process a Palestinian civil war—a prospect that

Hamas did not relish.[62] Hamas' cautious behavior toward the United States also manifested itself in the way the movement reacted to the U.S. missile strikes against Afghanistan and the Sudan on August 20, 1998. Hamas condemned the attacks and, like the rest of the Arab world, was particularly outraged at the U.S. destruction of a Sudanese factory that produced around half of a desperately poor country's pharmaceuticals and veterinary medicines.[63]

But Hamas' protests were mere words. The movement did not lift a hand on behalf of a country with which it had special ties. A senior Hamas representative privately asked why the movement should avenge for the Sudan when other Islamic movements in other Islamic lands have more resources and more power to do that. He added that they should easily assume that the U.S. attack would revolutionize the Muslim masses because, from his perspective, the U.S. attack targeted the Sudan because it has an Islamic government.[64]

Why was it, one might ask, that such a nonconfrontational approach toward the U.S. government did not stop Hamas from trying to undermine a peace process that is so important for U.S. interests? Why was it, for example, that Hamas launched its most violent attacks against Israeli targets at one of the most delicate moments of this process, namely in February and March 1996, when a dovish government led by Shimon Peres was in control in Israel? One can give too simple an answer by saying that Hamas wanted to destroy the Oslo process because it was opposed to any kind of accommodation with Israel, and that it was committed to the liberation of all of Palestine "from the river to the sea," as the movement's charter stipulates. There is no doubt that Hamas' opposition to the Oslo process was a major factor. But there were other equally important factors at play. To understand these factors we have to look at several developments that took place in the few months preceding the Hamas bombings of February and March 1996.

The summer of 1995 was full of active resistance by Hamas. On July 24, 1995, a Palestinian suicide bomber killed 5 Israelis and injured 33 others near Tel Aviv.[65] Barely a month later, on August 21, a Palestinian detonated a suicide bomb on an Israeli

bus, killing himself, one American, three others, and wounding 106 individuals.[66] Hamas claimed responsibility for both attacks, saying that its primary aim was to bring down the Labor-led government of Yitzhak Rabin.[67] In response, Rabin suspended the talks with the PA and imposed a three-day closure on Gaza and the West Bank. Throughout Jerusalem, thousands of right-wing Jewish demonstrators calling for Rabin's resignation clashed with the Israeli police.[68] In light of Hamas' claim of responsibility for the two attacks, the PA arrested a number of Hamas activists, including Abd al-Majid Dudin and Rashid al-Khatib.[69]

Hamas attacks had other serious repercussions. They put Arafat on the defensive vis-à-vis Israel, which accused him of laxity in fighting terrorism. But equally important, they caused resentment and disapproval among the vast majority of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. This last point needs emphasis for two reasons. First, it shows widespread support for the peace process among the Palestinians—72.1 percent, according to a Palestinian public opinion poll.[70] Second, it also demonstrates that the Palestinians were not willing to suffer the consequences of Hamas' attacks, particularly Israeli closures that wreaked havoc on the social and economic life of the Palestinians.

Equally significant was the impact of the attacks on Hamas itself as well as on its relations with the PA. Coming under intense pressure from Israel, but at the same time exploiting the widespread public disapproval of Hamas activities, Arafat was successful in engineering splits within Hamas. A number of Hamas activists started to break away from the organization, either because Arafat succeeded in courting them or because the attacks and their impact had alienated them from the movement. In August 1995, a newly formed Hamas group called the Islamic National Path Movement emerged. This group, funded by the PA, accepted Oslo as a fait accompli and called on Hamas to end its attacks. This was the 17th Palestinian political grouping to be formed in 1995 following the agreement between Israel and the PA in June 27, 1995, concerning the holding of Palestinian elections in Gaza and the West Bank.[71]

But as Hamas took a more radical stance, some of its members began to reconsider their positions. For example, when Hamas decided to boycott the Palestinian elections scheduled to take place in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, in January 1996, some of its leading members switched sides and opted to take part in the elections, as has been noted earlier in the essay. And looking for more ways to weaken Hamas, the PA sponsored the establishment of the Islamic Jihad al-Aqsa Brigades and Palestine's Islamic Salvation Front in the latter half of 1995.[72] These were PA measures designed to win over Hamas' sympathizers. Thus by the end of 1995, Hamas barely had a chance to catch its breath and get rolling. Pressures on the movement were coming from all directions, namely Israel, the PA, and outside actors. The Hamas strategy of measured confrontational activities came up for reconsideration.

Now Hamas felt compelled to reach a modus vivendi with the PA. On December 13, 1995, eight Hamas members (including Abd al-Khaliq al-Natshe, Muhammad Abu Shama'a, and Mahmud al-Zahhar) traveled from Gaza to Khartoum, Sudan, for four days of talks with diaspora Hamas leaders in preparation for negotiations with the PA in Cairo. Immediately afterward, Hamas and the PA concluded four days of talks in the Egyptian capital (December 17–21,1995). Press reports indicated that the talks were positive but they failed to reach an accord because Hamas refused to sign a pledge to participate in Palestinian elections and cease attacks on Israeli targets.[73] However, my discussions with senior Hamas members in Gaza and the West Bank revealed that the result of these and previous Hamas-PA meetings was a commitment by Hamas to refrain from attacks against Israel. The PA relayed the understanding to the Israeli government long before the Hamas-PA Cairo talks.[74]

This explains why relative quiet prevailed for about two months before the Cairo meeting. But this quiet did not last for long. On October 26, 1995, Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shiqaqi was assassinated in Malta, en route to Damascus from Libya. Hamas and other Islamists blamed the Israeli Mossad and

protested the assassination in Gaza and Hebron. While Israeli officials neither affirmed nor denied the Mossad's responsibility, they welcomed the killing, thus leading Hamas and other Islamists to conclude that the Israeli Mossad was behind the assassination of Shiqaqi. The assassination of Shiqaqi strained Hamas nerves, but the movement did not respond.

An event with more far-reaching consequences took place almost two months later when on January 5, 1996, the number-one Hamas man on Israel's most-wanted list, Yahya Ayyash, (nicknamed the engineer, or al-muhandis) who was thought to be behind many of Hamas' major bombings, was killed in Gaza when his booby-trapped cellular phone exploded. Kamal Hamad, a Gaza entrepreneur who was allegedly an accomplice of the Mossad, gave the booby-trapped telephone to Ayyash and later fled to the United States with Israeli help.[75] Hamas blamed the Mossad and accused Israel of not respecting ceasefire understandings. More than 100,000 Palestinians attended Ayyash's funeral in Gaza and hundreds of Jordanians visited the home of Hamas' leader in Amman.[76]

Hamas always believed that in situations involving Israeli attacks on its activists, a response in kind had to take place. Shiqaqi and Ayyash were no ordinary members. They were high profile individuals active in the cause of the Islamist movement. True, Shiqaqi was a leader of Islamic Jihad, but Hamas interpreted his assassination as an Israeli attempt to deliver a devastating blow to the Palestinian Islamists in general. As to Ayyash, a Hamas activist who had a talent for bombmaking and who was guided by the idea of sacrifice and devotion, his spectacular bombing activities against Israeli targets made him a mythical hero in the eyes of many Palestinians. Thus Hamas felt that it had to take action in response to the assassinations. The question, of course, was what sort of action?

There had been some signs of vacillation among members of the political leadership over this matter. This was a result of two factors. One factor was the different orientation of the Gaza-based Hamas organs, the West Bank based organs, and the diaspora-based organs. The second factor was the leadership

vacuum that resulted from the detention of a most senior Hamas member, Musa Abu Marzuq, by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) on his entry into the United States at John F. Kennedy Airport on July 25, 1995. Abu Marzuq, a permanent U.S. resident who had lived in Virginia for 14 years, was placed on the INS terrorism list on suspicion of being a principal decision maker and fund raiser for Hamas.

In the absence of Abu Marzuq, local Hamas leaders in Gaza and the West Bank could not determine whether the return to bombings was useful or not. They also were unprepared to take a clear position on how to respond to the holding of Palestinian elections which were scheduled to take place on January 20, 1996. For example, the Hamas leaflets distributed in the first half of January 1996 called on the Palestinians to boycott the elections. By contrast, Hamas members, most notably Shaykh Sayyid Abu Musamih, a leading Hamas figure in Gaza, denied that Hamas had anything to do with those leaflets and insisted that his organization would honor its agreement with the PA and refrain from urging Palestinians to boycott the elections.[77]

The participation of several Hamas affiliates as candidates in the elections caused further confusion, and by the end of the election day Fatah won by a landslide garnering not only the presidency, which was won by Arafat, but also 71 of 88 Palestine council seats.[78] Besides the nonparticipation of Hamas in the elections, one interesting aspect of the election results was that Fatah candidates returning from exile (the so-called imported leadership) won without exception. By contrast, many local Fatah members lost. One possible explanation for this development is that candidates comprising the "imported leadership" relied on the PA's institutions, including the security apparatus.[79]

Over the next few weeks Hamas leaders, both inside and outside the Palestinian territories, were debating what to do by way of a response to the assassination of Ayyash. Two perspectives surfaced from the debate. First, there were those who wanted to stick to the truce with Israel and follow a wait-and-see policy. Advocates of this view, including Mahmud al-Zahhar of Gaza, Amin Maqbul of Nablus, and Jamil Hamami of the

[37]

Jerusalem-Ramallah area, seemed to believe that a bombing campaign in retaliation for the Ayyash assassination would invite a disproportionate Israeli response, thus hurting Hamas and providing a confrontation between the movement and the PA. However, advocates of the second view, most of whom were affiliates of Hamas military wing *Kata'ib Izz-al-Din al-Qassam* (the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades), opposed the idea of restraint on several grounds: it would reflect weakness and vacillation on the part of Hamas, it would embolden Israel, and it would compromise Hamas' credibility in the eyes of its supporters. [80]

In the end, advocates of the latter view prevailed. Indeed, I privately witnessed signs by Israeli and PA official sources that the military wing of Hamas was going its own way. The decentralized organizational structure of Hamas facilitated the ascendance of the Qassam Brigades. Hamas, it should be noted, is run along hierarchical regional lines with local leaders in different primary and secondary regions throughout Gaza and the West Bank. These local leaders report to more senior supervisors, who in turn report to a collective leadership scattered inside and outside the Palestinian territories.[81] Another factor that encouraged the radicals to press for a more confrontational policy toward Israel was the absence of Abu Marzuq, an influential leader reportedly able to infuse the movement with moderation and provide direction in moments of crisis. Hamas' retaliation was almost a certainty that was lost neither on Israeli leaders nor on foreign observers. *The New York Times* reporter Serge Schmemann wrote from Gaza on January 6, 1996, that the assassination of Ayyash had "created a potentially serious problem for Arafat by raising the profile of the Hamas opposition and the expectation of retaliation."[82]

Thus by January 1996, Hamas radicals, most notably the Qassam Brigades, appeared to be in charge of the situation. Their underground cells, scattered in different areas in Gaza and the West Bank, particularly in Israeli-controlled areas, were filled with busy preparation for military strikes of proportions never witnessed before by Israel. On February 25, 1996, two suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Ashkalon killed twenty six Is-

raelis, prompting the Israeli government to impose an immediate and strict closure of Gaza and the West Bank, not even permitting food to move in or out. Another suicide bombing in Jerusalem claimed eighteen lives. On March 4, a fourth suicide bombing in Tel Aviv left another fourteen Israelis dead.

These attacks shook Israel, making Israelis feel that their personal safety was at risk. In response, the Israeli government arrested some 1,000 Palestinians and took additional closure measures restrictive enough to hold 1.3 million Palestinian Arabs under town arrest. Palestinians, including PA officials, were prevented from moving between the West Bank and Gaza, or from village to village in the West Bank. Besides paralyzing the Palestinian territories, the closure measures impoverished an already fragile Palestinian economy, causing a sharp rise in unemployment and shortages of essential foodstuffs and medical supplies.[83]

HAMAS AND THE PA

Against the conditions created by the cycle of action and reaction between Hamas and Israel, the PA could not afford to be an unconcerned actor. [84] The PA was now open to waves of relentless pressure from Israel and the United States. The message was clear and simple: uproot the infrastructure of Hamas or face the consequences.

The PA's biggest fear was that Hamas' activities, if not restrained, might jeopardize the entire peace process. This fear assumed two dimensions. Above all, Arafat and his closest aides feared that any flexibility toward Hamas would alienate the forces of peace in Israel, whose backing at this time or at some later date were indispensable for finalizing negotiations with the Israeli government over the final status of Gaza and the West Bank. The PA also feared that a soft approach toward Hamas would complicate its relations with the U.S. government. The United States was, after all, the most influential foreign power in the Arab world. It was also the only power capable of bringing the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations to a successful conclusion. Therefore, the PA leaders were keen on not burning their bridges

[39]

with the United States. Moreover, the PA had staked its future on the success of Oslo and on good relations with Washington.

Thus the PA actively tried to clamp down on Hamas. Arafat's approach was a mix of heavy-handedness, cooptation, and direct control over many of Hamas' activities in the social sphere. Against a balance of power weighted heavily in favor of the PA, Hamas could not mount any opposition. Hamas' activism receded into the background. The paralysis that afflicted the peace talks following Likud's assumption of power in Israel in the summer of 1996 discouraged even the radicals in Hamas from carrying out any military attacks.

The question, as explained to me, was what sort of action should Hamas take at a time when the peace talks were stalled? Hamas' leaders found the option of armed attacks against Israel unattractive for two reasons. First, military escalation would provide Israel with the opportunity to squeeze concessions from Arafat, who would be put on the defensive and therefore would be blackmailed by the new Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Second, Hamas military activism would force Arafat to exercise heavier pressure on the movement. From Hamas' perspective, a more measured action was called for. In this regard, Hamas' strategy operated on two levels: the movement tried delicately to regroup its forces while it consciously avoided any confrontation with Israel or the PA. This was the kind of awkward situation in which Hamas found itself from mid—1996 until the spring of 1999, when Ehud Barak, leader of the One Israel coalition, decisively defeated Netanyahu and became the new prime minister of Israel.

Barak's assumption of power created hopes for a new era of Arab-Israeli peace. Barak made public statements promising quick peace on the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese tracks. Arab leaders responded favorably to Barak's pronouncements. At Sharm al-Sheikh in Egypt, Arafat and Barak signed a revamped version of the Wye agreement concluded between Arafat and Netanyahu in Maryland in October 1998.

Joining Arafat and Barak at the signing ceremony in Egypt were U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, Egyptian

President Husni Mubarak, and King Abdullah II of Jordan. All five leaders needed to assert that the agreement would quickly usher in a new era of peace.

With the peace process regaining momentum, Arafat was in an even better position to set the rules of the political game in the Palestinian areas that were under his control. In the case of Hamas, its leaders in Gaza and the West Bank were neither able nor prepared to risk more painful blows in the name of revolting against the peace process. In their estimation, the strategy of violent opposition was a very costly venture with no tangible dividends. Reviving armed struggle would be fundamentally suicidal, both in military and political terms. In July 1999, support for the peace process in Gaza and the West Bank rose from 70 to 75 percent in one month, while support for armed attacks against Israelis dropped from 45 to 39 percent. Also support for Hamas and its leader Shaykh Ahmed Yasin were 11 percent and 12 percent respectively, while Fatah had 35 percent popularity, and Arafat had 38 percent in the West Bank and 53 percent in the Gaza Strip.[85]

In light of these developments and also in light of the Jordanian government's crackdown against Hamas in Amman, the leaders of the movement at the local level in Gaza and the West Bank found themselves required to reevaluate, once more, their policies and their instruments of action. According to Dr. Zahhar, a Hamas leader in Gaza,

> The political thought of Hamas takes every development into consideration. The record shows that Hamas had a role and a say in every change that took place. There is no guarantee that Hamas will ossify and fail to take into account the national changes in Palestine as well as the other regional and international changes.[86]

In lengthy, off-the-record discussions with Hamas politicians in the summer of 1999, the main focus was on organizational continuity—that is, the strategic need to maintain the political and financial position of the movement and preserve its base of support in the face of new trends that were to color Palestinian political life after Oslo.[87] Perhaps the most impor-

tant trend was a gradual but perceptible shift from foreign to domestic issues, most notably the performance of the PA, corruption in PA institutions, economic conditions, and the status of democracy and human rights. If PA malfeasance persists, if human rights continue to be flouted, then Hamas' chances of expanding its base of support will become greater. In this case, Hamas will be in a better position to manipulate public opinion, mobilize more supporters for its anti-Oslo message, and gain more political support both locally and from neighboring Arab territories. A stalled peace process will work in Hamas' favor because it will adversely affect the credibility of the PA.

The concern with organizational continuity gave rise to two suggestions. The first was that of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, with Jerusalem as its capital, without having to recognize Israel. The suggestion was already present in the 1988 statement of Zahhar and the 1993 statement of Muhammad Nazzal, a senior Hamas representative in Jordan.

With the election of Barak and with the hopes that his election revived, a second suggestion emerged—that of Hamas' participation in the institutions of a future Palestinian state that may emerge from the PA's negotiations with Israel. Explicit in this suggestion were the conditions that the state must be truly sovereign and unencumbered by intrusive contractual obligations, and that its creation should not be at the expense of larger Palestinian interests and rights, including the right of return and the right not to recognize Israel.

There is more than one way in which this suggestion could be explained. On the one hand, the idea of participation in the governance of a Palestinian state established on parts of historic Palestine could be a kind of temporary modification of the earlier Hamas' goal of total liberation. The idea here is a transitional solution in which a truce (*hudna*) takes the place of a peace settlement. If this is true, then the Hamas' ideal at this stage is that of a sovereign Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank as a temporary expedient. In other words, this state would be accepted as *titre transitoire*. On the other hand, Hamas' suggestion to participate in the building of a ministate could be seen as a

kind of permanent modification of the goal of total liberation. Implicit in this interpretation is a recognition of a certain degree of realism in the thought and practice of Hamas, a realization that the world including the Arab countries recognize Israel, and a realization that a Palestine conceived simply in terms of Islamic *waqf* cannot be a realistic basis of a settlement in today's world. Or, the same suggestion could indicate a different conception of a settlement. In Hamas there are individuals who came to accept the principles of *hudna* and of a Palestinian state in Gaza and the West Bank, not as a final point, but as a temporary arrangement that would have to be revised when the balance of forces changed to the advantage of those who want to challenge the separate existence of Israel.

It was these suggestions that formed, so to speak, the "new" basis of Hamas' foreign policy on the eve of Barak's election. The events of the previous three years have shown the fragility of the basis of Hamas. The foreign policy reorientation forced on the movement by the successive blows of the PA, the consistent support for the peace process among a majority of Palestinians, the decentralization of the Hamas leadership, coupled with the political insensitivity of some of the movement's leaders who live outside Palestine to the aspirations and needs of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, together with the high state of Israeli alertness produced competing trends within Hamas and convinced some of the movement's leaders to grudgingly accept the principle of a conditional peace settlement and of nonconfrontation with the PA.

The reinvigoration of sustained and serious peace talks on the Syrian-Lebanese tack will further weaken the economic and social foundations of Hamas and force its leaders to adopt a more moderate way of playing politics. Some veteran Hamas activists will continue to resist the much more powerful forces of pragmatic peace. But, after nearly 13 years of accumulated experience in Syria, Jordan, and Palestine, these leaders came to appreciate the need to adapt to the interests and wishes of the Arab states in which they live. A formula of adaptation is what Hamas leaders are searching for today.

CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Hamas politics are too complex to be reduced to a single formula. The movement, although aspiring on the ideological level to Islamic principles, derives its force from the specific context of Palestinian nationalism. On the practical level, there is no ambition to establish a global Islamic *umma*. According to a number of Hamas' leaders in Gaza and the West Bank, the immediate, overriding goal is the creation of a truly sovereign, truly independent state even on a part of historic Palestine, as long as the state is not subservient to Israel. Thus, the fear that the inclusion of Hamas in PA policymaking bodies would create an Islamist-dominated polity is unfounded.

There are different voices within Hamas, not merely those of shaykhs but also of Westernized elites, who debate, argue, and sometimes disagree over important political issues. U.S. academicians and policymakers should recognize that such exchanges are occurring in a movement that is far from being monolithic. Understanding these debates and their settings promises to challenge the presumption that Hamas' relations with others are chiefly hostile. Therefore, relying on a simple paradigm that assumes that Hamas' actual behavior flows from its ideology may inadvertently keep American policymakers from taking a fresh look at Hamas politics with a view of finding more creative ways of dealing with it.

Today, U.S. policy toward the Palestinians is focused on encouraging a political solution to all outstanding issues, especially the final-status issues of Jerusalem, borders, refugees, water, and settlements. Israel and the PA must reach agreement on a framework for settling these issues in the very-near future.

Given the fact that there are moderate elements inside Hamas, U.S. policymakers should encourage the inclusion of these elements in PA institutions. In particular, they should counsel the PA and Israel to find ways to involve moderate Hamas elements in negotiations of final status issues. Indeed, their involvement will likely provide a wider base of support for any agreement on these issues. This will be consistent with the

key American interest of crafting a stable and permanent solution for all aspects of the Palestine problem.

Hamas' policy over the past three years has been essentially defensive, stemming more from a sense of weakness and a desire to survive than from an ideological drive. Hamas has shown that it is not averse to striking a modus vivendi both with the PA and with Israel. When the PA responded with firmness to Hamas military escalation against Israel, Hamas opted for reconciliation to discourage the PA from taking undesired action against the movement.

Today, Hamas' policy is focused on organizational survival. This provides great opportunity for policy innovation. Through strategically timed and well-crafted policies, Washington can encourage more moderation on the part of Hamas. At least two venues are available for putting forth bold polices: the inclusion of Hamas moderates in U.S.-sponsored people-to-people programs, which bring together Palestinians and Israelis for constructive dialogues and joint activities; and public speeches by senior U.S. officials indicating that America will work with individuals or groups, including Hamas members, who renounce violence and support the peace process. The U.S. government should draw a distinction between those members of Hamas who advocate violence and condemn any reconciliation with Israel and those who can be engaged in constructive Palestinian-Israeli discussions.

However, these outlets can backfire, inciting angry responses from Israel or the PA. In such cases, private diplomacy can be an effective tool of reassurance. U.S. diplomats should draw the attention of Israel and the PA to the benefits of engaging Hamas moderates, highlighting the positive link between the gradual inclusion of Hamas moderates and long-term stability in the Israeli-Palestinian theater.

The U.S. government already has engaged at least one prominent former leader of Hamas in a U.S.-sponsored international visitors program aimed at familiarizing Palestinians with the role of religion in the United States. This was Jamil Hamami, who publicly disassociated himself from Hamas, re-

Muslih

nounced violence, and participated in a number of Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation meetings. The case of Hamami suggests that the U.S. should adopt a policy of inclusion toward moderate Hamas members, even if these members do not publicly withdraw from Hamas.

In situations involving a choice between incurring short-term danger to advancing long-term interests or seeking to avoid the former at a risk to the latter, Hamas did not always opt for the second course. This was illustrated in the early 1996 decision to escalate military attacks inside Israel. Yet at the same time, when the PA pressured Hamas, the latter deliberately maintained a low profile and played for time. This tendency was illustrated in the military calm from Hamas since the summer of 1996.

As a corollary of the general disposition of Hamas, the leadership of the movement has pursued over the past three years a political style that was characterized by a preference for caution over maximization of potential gains, if the price of gains was a confrontation with the PA; a willingness to make sharp tactical reversals; and limited concern with adherence of ideological principles.

In its public statements, the U.S. government places great emphasis on establishing the rule of law and building a strong civil society in Palestine, essential prerequisites for a stable democracy. Since its creation, Hamas has played a role in areas as diverse as education, health, and other social services. By helping to facilitate a "culture of participation," these and other activities can foster Palestinian civil society. The work of Palestinian NGOs as well as the work of Hamas should be encouraged.

Since some Hamas activists may be inclined to use civil society organs to promote an antipeace agenda, the U.S. government should coordinate with the PA in applying a system of both incentives and disincentives. Given the fact that the process of nation building is underway in Palestine, the participation in the process of all players who subscribe to a culture of "constructive participation" offers a great hope for a peaceful future.

In brief, rather than advertise Hamas as a movement that is bent on violence and Islamic radicalism, Washington should devote more energy to devising creative policies that would en-

[46]

courage the participation, in both the peace process and in nation-building, of all Palestinian groups that are willing to engage in diplomacy and dialogue for the promotion of the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people.

NOTES

1 See, for example, Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994); Iyyad al-Barghuthi, *al-haraka al-islamiyya al-filastiniyya wal-nidham al-'alami al-jadid* (The Palestinian Islamic Movement and the New World Order) (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1992); Hisham Ahmad, *Hamas: From Religious Salvation to Political Transformation* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1994); Khalid al-Hurub, *Hamas: al-fikr wal-mumarasa al-siyasiyya* (Hamas: Thought and Political Practice) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996); Ahmad Rashad, *Hamas: Palestinian Politics with an Islamic Hue* (Annandale, VA: United Association for Studies and Research, 1993); Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *Hamas: A Behavioral Profile* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, 1997); Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-Development* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996).

2 Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising— Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989): 222–28.

3 Yehuda Litani, "Militant Islam in the West Bank and Gaza," *New Outlook* 32: 11–12 (November-December 1989): 41.

4 For a detailed discussion of the PLO's peace strategy, see Muhammad Muslih, *Toward Coexistence: An Analysis of the Resolutions of the Palestine National Council* (Washington, D.C. The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1990): 23–39.

5 See *The Jerusalem Post*, November 28, 1989, and February 15, 1990.

6 See Charter of Hamas in al-Hurub, *Hamas*, pp. 287–307.

7 See Hamas' statement number 22 (June 1988), number 35 (January 30, 1989), and number 60 (July 1, 1990). See also Jihad Salih, *Hamas-harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya-nadharat fil-fikr wal-mumarasa* (Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement–A Discussion of Its Thought and Practice) (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Manar, 1989).

8 See *al-Da'wa* (The Call) (September 1986): 35. The *al-Da'wa* was published by The Muslim Brotherhood, the mother organization of Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

9 Ayatullah Ruhollah Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, ed. and trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981); Hamid Enayat, "Iran: Khumayni's Concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisconsult,'" in *Islam in the Political Process*, ed. James P. Piscatori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 160–180.

10 Mangul Bayat, "Islam in Pahlavi and Post-Pahlavi Iran: A Cultural Revolution?" in *Islam and Development: Religion and Sociopolitical Change*, ed. John L. Esposito (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1980): 101–104.

11 On the Taliban see Dilip Hiro, "Taliban gain more ground in Afghanistan," *Middle East International* 581 (August 2, 1998): 13–14.

12 Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, pp. 69–70.

13 The Palestinian Authority (PA)was established following the implementation of the Cairo Agreement, originally concluded between Israel and the PLO on May 4, 1994, and the Preparatory Transfer of Authority Agreement signed between the two parties in September of the same year. Upon the insistence of Israel, the transfer of authority from the Israeli occupation authorities to the Palestinians was supposed to take place in stages, and was limited to certain non-political and non-security powers and responsibilities. The PA was to exercise those powers and responsibilities only in certain areas of the Palestinians territories occupied by Israel in June 1967. Initially, the PA's exercise of limited authority was confined to Gaza and Jericho. Later, the areas under the PA's authority were expanded to include major, populated cities in the West Bank. Israel always insisted that the expansion of PA authority was contingent upon the PA's fulfillment of Israel's security needs.

14 *Al-Sha'b*, September 11, 1987 and *Al-Nahar*, April 30, 1989.

15 For a discussion of these elections, see Lamis Andoni, "The Palestinian Elections: Moving Toward Democracy or One-Party Rule?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* XXV: 99 (Spring 1996): 5–17; Khalil Shikaki, "The Palestinian Elections: An Assessment," in ibid., 17–23.

16 Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 57.

17 Jamal Salim and Jamal Mansur, *al-islamiyyun wal-intikhabat* (The Islamists and Elections) (Nablus: Center for Palestine Research and Studies, May 1995): 9–10, 14–15.

18 On Jihad see, for example, Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1955); Qamarrudin Khan, *Political Concepts in the Qur'an* (Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1982); Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988): 71–91.

19 All quotations from Hamas' charter are translated by the author. The charter is reproduced in al-Hurub, *Hamas*, pp. 287–307.

20 Some of the earlier Hamas leaflets were published in Zachary Lockman and Joel Beinin *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising against Israeli Occupation* (Boston: South End Press, 1989).

21 An interview with Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, *Al-Nahar*, April 30, 1989, as cited in Abu-Amr *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, p. 76.

22 See paper presented by Tamimi at the seventh annual conference of the Center for Policy Analysis on Palestine, Washington, D.C., September 11, 1998, in *Palestine Times* (London), October 6, 1998.

23 See text of memorandum in al-Hurub, *Hamas*, pp. 308–317. The quotation in the text is from p. 312.

24 See interview with Mish'al in *al-Quds al-Arabi* (London), September 10, 1998.

25 Ahamd Rashad, *Hamas: Palestinian Politics with an Islamic Hue* (Annandale, VA: United Association For Studies and Research, December 1993): 7–9; Abdulaziz I. Zamel, "The Rise of Palestinian Islamist Groups," unpublished Master's thesis, University of South Florida (August 1991): 177–232.

26 Nur al-Din al-Tahiri, *al-islamiyyun al-filastiniyyun: tandhimatuhum, muntalaqutuhum, istratijiyyatuhum* (The Palestinian Islamists: Their Organization, Their Points of Departure, and Their Strategy). Casablanca, Morocco: Dar Qurtuba, 1993): 36ff.

27 See Hamas Leaflet No. 58 (June 14, 1990).

28 See al-Hurub, *Hamas*, pp. 185-188.

29 Some of Shaykh Yasin's letters, written when he was detained by Israel from May 1989 until September 1997, can be found in *al-Wasat* (London): 92 (November 11, 1993).

30 The Political Office and the Information Office of Hamas were born out of the 1991 Gulf War when Hamas needed representatives to explain their position on the Gulf crisis.

31 See Abd al-Sattar Qasim, "*al-fikr al-siyasi li-harakat Hamas*" (The Political Thought of the Hamas Movement) in *al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya* (Nablus), 9: 3 (Winter 1995): 112–128.

32 See *The New York Times*, October 9, 1990, and *The Washington Post*, October 9, 1990.

33 Hamas Leaflet No. 66, (October 31, 1990).

34 See document in al-Hurub, *Hamas*, p. 312.

35 Hamas statement number 107, February 5, 1994; see also Hamas document in al-Hurub, *Hamas*, p. 314.

36 For the position of Hamas on the Gulf war, see Jean-Francois Legrain, "A Defining Moment: Palestinian Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis," in *Islamic Fundamentalisms and the Gulf Crisis*, ed. James Piscatori (Chicago: The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991): 70–88; Barghuthi, *al-haraka al-Islamiyya*, pp. 69–77.

37 See *al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), October 18, 1992, and *al-Dustur* (Amman), March 3, 1993.

38 Author's interviews with Hamas' leaders who do not wish to be identified in Ramallah, Nablus, and Gaza in August 1998.

39 See Ann Mosely Lesch, "Sudan's Foreign Policy: In Search of Arms, Aid, and Allies", in Sudan: *State and Society in Crisis*, ed. John O. Voll (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991): 43–68. For an Islamic perspective on the Sudan, see Muhammad Taha Muhammad Ahmad, "thalathat a'wam ala thawrat al-inqadh fil-Sudan" (Three Years Since the Salvation Revolution in the Sudan), in *Filastin al-Muslima* (Islamic Palestine) [London], 10: 7 (July 1992): 30ff.

40 See Mona Yacoubian, *Algeria's Struggle for Democracy* (New York: Council On Foreign Relations, 1997): 10–11; Ammar Belhimer, "Les groupes armes de l'opposition islamique," *Les Cahiers de l'Orient, Algeria: La descente aux enfers*, no. 36/37 (1994/1995).

41 Musa Zayd al-Kilani, *al-harakat al-islamiyya fil-urdun wa-filastin* (The Islamic Movements in Jordan and Palestine). (Amman: Mu'assasat al-Risala, 1995): 204–207; Hamas statement No. 83, February 4, 1992.

42 Hamas statement No. 90, September 5, 1992; Al-Hurub, *Hamas*, p. 187.

43 Hamas statements of November 25, 1993, December 9, 1992, and December 14, 1994.

44 *The Washington Times*, November 3, 1994; Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report, Near East and South Asia (FBIS), November 4, 1994.

45 *Mideast Mirror* (London), November 3, 1994.

46 FBIS, November 15, 1994.

47 *The Washington Times*, November 3, 1994.

48 *Mideast Mirror*, October 24, 1994 and October 25, 1994.

49 On the Palestinians in Jordan, see Laurie A. Brand, *Palestinians in the Arab World: Institution Building and the Search for State* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

50 It should be noted that the Islamists in Jordan, represented by *kutlat jabhat al-amal al-islami* (The Coalition of the Islamic Action Front), have boycotted the elections of November 1997. For a study of these elections, see Hani al-Hawrani, "*intikhabat al-urdun al-niyabiyya al-akhira: qira' fi-intikhabat majlis al-nuwwab al-urduni al-thalith 'ashar,*" (The Latest Jordanian Elections: A Study of the Elections of the Thirteenth Jordanian Parliament) in *al-Siyasa al-Filastiniyya* (Palestinian Politics) 5:19 (Summer 1998): 6–41.

51 On Hamas relations with Jordan, see Barghuthi, *al-haraka al-islamiyya al-filastiniyya*, pp. 102–103; al-Hurub, *Hamas*, pp. 185–187.

52 Musa al-Kilani, *al-harakat al-islamiyya*, pp. 204–207.

53 Ziad Abu-Amr, "Hamas: A Historical and Political Background," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22:88 (Summer 1993): 13.

54 Author's discussion with al-Zahhar in Gaza in August 1995. For the earlier views of al- Zahhar, see Zakariyya Ibrahim, "*mashari' taswiyat qadiyyat filastin min 'amm 1920 hatta nihayat 1991 miladiyya*" (Projects for the Settlement of the Palestinian Cause From the Year 1920 Until the End of the Year 1991 AD) (Gaza: no publisher, 1991): 108–111.

55 See Nazzal's interview in *al-Ra'y* (Amman), January 31, 1993.

56 For a discussion of truces and armistices, see Donald R. Hill, *The Termination of Hostilities in the Early Arab Conquests A.D. 634–656* (London, 1971); Khadduri, *War and Peace*, pp. 133–137.

57 On the Hudaybiyyah Treaty, see Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History In a World Civilization*, vol. 1, *The Classical Age of Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974): 193–194.

58 This quotation is from an interview given by Abu Marzuq to al-Hurub. See al-Hurub, *Hamas*, pp. 86–87.

59 *Mideast Mirror*, February 12, 1997; *Palestine Report*, January 24, 1997.

60 'Adil Mahdi, "*al-nidham al-'alami al-jadid wa-atharuhu 'ala al-wad' al-'arabi al-islami*" (The New World Order and Its Impact On the Arab-Muslim Situation), in *Qira'at Siyasiyya* (Political Readings) 1:2–3 (Spring/Summer 1991); Muhammad 'Ubaydat, "*ard amrika min al-nidham al-'alami al-jadid*" (America's View Of the New World Order), in *al-Wa'y* (Consciousness) 5:55 (November 1991): 10ff.

[61] These steps were adopted at the "Conference of the Peacemakers," a one-day antiterrorism summit co-chaired by President Bill Clinton and held at Sharm al-Shaykh, Egypt, on March 13, 1996, in the aftermath of a wave of terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israeli targets in February-March 1996.

[62] Author's off-the-record discussions with Hamas representatives in Nablus and Ramallah in August 1998.

[63] For Arab reactions to the U.S. military strike against the Sudan, see Najm Jarrah, "Sudan: Seizing the High Ground," *Middle East International* 582 (September 4, 1998): 4–5.

[64] Author's off-the-record discussion with a Hamas representative in Ramallah in August, 1998.

[65] *The New York Times*, July 26, 1995.

[66] *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1995.

[67] FBIS, August 21/22, 1995.

[68] FBIS, August 25, 1995.

[69] *Christian Science Monitor*, August 28, 1995.

[70] The poll was conducted October 13–15, 1995, by the Nablus-based Center for Palestine Research and Studies (CPRS). Data excerpted from the poll can be found in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXV: 98 (Winter 1996): 107–108.

[71] FBIS, August 24, 1995.

[72] FBIS, January 2, 1996; *Christian Science Monitor*, January 4, 1996.

[73] *al-Quds* (Jerusalem) December 22, 1995; FBIS, December 21, 1996.

[74] Author's off-the-record discussions with Hamas representatives in Gaza, Nablus, and Ramallah in July 1996.

[75] FBIS, January 11, 1996.

[76] *The New York Times*, January 7, 1996; *Jordan Times* (Amman), January 9, 1996.

[77] See report written in the Palestinian territories by Ruba al-Husari and Asya Abd al-Hadi in *al-Hayat*, January 18, 1996, p. 1.

[78] *Palestine Report*, January 24, 1996; *Mideast Mirror*, February 12, 1996.

[79] See Lamis Audoni and Khalil Shikaki; "On the Palestinian Council Elections," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXV: 99 (Spring 1996), p. 15.

[80] Author's off the record discussions with Hamas representatives in Gaza, Ramallah, and Nablus in the spring and summer of 1996.

[81] Ahmad Rashad, *Hamas*, pp. 7–8; Ganor Boaz, "A Cancer Called Terror: The Islamic Resistance Movement–Hamas," *Matara* 20 (1991). Matara is the Israeli magazine for intelligence and security.

[82] *The New York Times*, January 7, 1996.

[83] See "Death Toll Rises to Five as Direct Result of the Siege," *Human Rights Alert* 4 (Jerusalem) (March 13, 1996). See also *Human Rights Watch* (Middle East), "Israel's Closure of the West Bank and Gaza," (New York) July 15, 1996.

[84] This section of the study draws on an earlier paper prepared by the author and presented at a colloquium sponsored by the Department of Political Science and the von Grunebaum Center for Middle East Studies at UCLA in November 1997.

[85] Center for Palestine Research and Studies, Nablus, West Bank, Survey Research Unit, Results of Poll #42, (July 15–17, 1999): 1, 5.

[86] Quoted in *al-Ayyam* (Jerusalem) July 4, 1999, p. 19.

[87] Author's discussions with Hamas leaders in Gaza and the West Bank in the spring and summer of 1999.

Muhammad Muslih is a professor of Political Science at C.W. Post College, Long Island University.

Also published by the Muslim Politics Project

The Foreign Policy of The Taliban
BY WILLIAM MALEY

International Relations of an Islamist Movement:
The Case of the Jama'at-i Islami of Pakistan
BY VALI NASR

Hizballah of Lebanon:
Extremist Ideals vs. Mundane Politics
BY AUGUSTUS RICHARD NORTON

The Foreign Policy of the
Central Asian Islamic Renaissance Party
BY OLIVIER ROY

U.S. Policy Toward Islamism:
A Theoretical and Operational Overview
BY ROBERT SATLOFF