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The Islamization of the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict: The Case of Hamas

MEIR LITVAK

‘The Palestinian cause is not about land and soil, but it is about faith and belief.’¹ This statement by the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya*, or Hamas, its acronym) reflects an important development in the Arab-Israeli conflict, that of Islamizing it. Taking Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion as a symbolic structure that generates meanings for people, a world view capable of providing answers to human problems, and an ethos telling people how they should act,² the Islamization of the conflict, then, entails several consequences: a certain conceptualization of the conflict’s causes and sources through religious-Islamic lenses; a perception of the desirable solution; and the provision of the motivation and justification for a specific mode of conduct in order to achieve that goal.

The Arab-Israeli conflict has gone through several phases, each adding a different dimension to it. It began as a conflict between two national movements – Zionism and Palestinian nationalism – which claimed possession of one land, but since the 1936 Palestinian rebellion it came to encompass the various Arab states. From the 1950s it was perceived as a struggle between Israel and pan-Arab nationalism, which regarded Israel as a bridgehead of western imperialism, designed to splinter Arab territorial integrity and prevent Arab unity. In addition, it became an arena of the Cold War between the West and the Soviet Union. The decline of pan-Arabism and the growing power and legitimacy of the territorial states in the Middle East have transformed the conflict from a zero-sum game between rival national movements into a conflict between states, subjected to the rules of *raison d’état*, and, therefore, capable of being managed or resolved. The Islamization of the conflict, on the other hand, portrays it as a battle between two rival religions, Islam and Judaism, or between two opposing absolutes.

The religious idiom has always played an important role in the evolution of Palestinian nationalism and in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In the past, however, it was mostly the nationalist Palestinian élites – the notables during the British Mandate and the Fatah movement since the early 1960s – that employed Islamic symbols and themes in order to mobilize popular support for the national cause, whose aims were largely political

and secular.³ Various Arab rulers have also used Islam as an instrument for their policies in the conflict.

The rise of political Islam in the Middle East and particularly within the Palestinian national movement represents a change from past patterns. Based on Geertz's analysis, the purpose of this article is to show how this process has led to a new perception of the root causes and essence of the conflict as a war of religion. In addition, the religious perspective as articulated by Hamas provides a motivation for a new type of struggle and the rejection of opposing approaches and solutions.

Hamas was founded as the underground wing of the Muslim Brethren movement in the Gaza Strip at the beginning of the Palestinian uprising (the *Intifada*) in December 1987. Through Hamas the Muslim Brethren hoped to play a major role in Palestinian politics during that crucial period.⁴ Thus Hamas formulated its ideology in rivalry with the secular national Palestinian forces within the PLO, and in order to refute Zionist-Israeli claims to the land. Like most other local Muslim Brethren movements in the Middle East, Hamas drew the bulk of its ideology from the teaching of Hasan al-Banna, the founder and leading ideologue of the Egyptian mother movement. However, the centrality for the Palestinians of the conflict with Israel and the unresolved question of Palestinian nation formation have placed these issues at the centre of Hamas' ideology. Consequently, it has drawn practical conclusions going beyond those reached by earlier Islamist thinkers.

At the heart of Hamas' ideology is the emphasis on the 'Islamic essence' of the Palestinian cause (*Islamiyat al-qadiyya al-Filastiniyya*) and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Hamas, therefore, criticizes the PLO for portraying the conflict as one between Palestinian nationalism and Zionism. Such a characterization, Hamas argues, misconstrues the problem and the way to its solution. The Palestinian predicament, declares the Hamas Charter – the movement's canonical text – was caused by the absence of Islam from the realities of life. The failure to regain 'our usurped holy land' is the fault of those who kept Islam away from the battlefield with the Jews and who fought under misguided, feeble human banners. In contrast, the liberation of Palestine can only be accomplished from a religious Islamic point of departure, since Islam is the only ideology that can mobilize the full potentials of the people, and 'only Islam will break the Jews'.⁵

The religious essence of the conflict means that it is first and foremost a 'war of religion and faith'. It is a clash between faith and unbelief, between the true religion which supersedes all previous religions, i.e. Islam, and the abrogated superseded religion, Judaism. The struggle is being waged between Islam and Judaism and between Muslims and Jews, rather than between

Palestinians and Israelis or Zionists. This is so because the Jews themselves, upon arriving in Palestine, launched their struggle in the name of religion. This belief in the promised land, one writer says, had preoccupied the Jews for hundreds of years before Zionism achieved what they had yearned for, and it had motivated them in their war against the Muslims.⁶

More important, Hamas regards the struggle against Israel and the Jews as part of a broader religious war waged between the Islamic and Western civilizations. It is the latest and most fateful phase of the relentless onslaught waged by Western imperialism and culture against Islam since the time of the Crusades. Both the capitalist West and the Communist East are regarded as one entity in this context because of their support for Zionism. Thus Hamas depicted the 1991 Gulf War as a war of the 'crusaders [Western] coalition' against Islam in order to complete what Zionism had been unable to do.⁷ In addition, the Jews were sometimes portrayed as instruments of the West, or alternatively as the power which controls and manipulates the West. The US, for instance, was described as a servant of Israel and as seeking to subjugate the Arabs according to the Jewish plan.⁸

Such a view had been formulated by the Egyptian Muslim Brethren already in the 1930s, and it is shared by most modern Islamist movements. Hasan al-Banna described Zionism as a threat and a challenge to the Muslim world, but also as a beneficial experience (*manha*), which exposes the decadence in the Islamic world and offers it a chance of self-purification.⁹ While rejecting Zionism, al-Banna and other Muslim thinkers regarded it primarily as the symptom of the deeper ills of Muslim society. For Hamas, however, this broader Islamic perspective is accentuated by the direct confrontation with Israel.

The symbiosis between the Jews and the Western threat is manifested in numerous instances. A major outcome of Muslim subjugation to Western ideas, particularly effecting the Palestinians, was the spread of nationalism (*qawmiyya*) which undermined the Ottoman Empire and Ottoman Caliphate – 'the unifying framework' for the Islamic nation. The Jews, who according to the Hamas Charter stood behind the outbreak of the First World War, thus succeeded 'in eliminating the state of the Islamic Caliphate'. Worse still, the breakdown of Islamic unity, and the division of the Muslims among small territorial states opened the way for the establishment of 'the Zionist entity' in Palestine.¹⁰

The religious essence of the struggle against Israel and the Jews leads to perceiving it as an unbridgeable dichotomy between two absolutes. This is a struggle 'between truth and falsehood', between good personified by the Muslims who represent the party of God against 'evil incarnated', 'the party of Satan' represented by the Jews. As such, it is an 'existential battle and not just a question of borders' (*ma'rakat wujud wa-la hudud*).¹¹

The dichotomy between Islam and Judaism portrayed by Hamas also applies to the character of the two warring parties. While Hamas depicts the Palestinians as a 'living people, creative with unrivalled honour and generosity', it portrays the Jews in almost demonic terms explaining that one of its major aims is to inform the whole world of the true nature of the Jews and their 'corruption on earth'.¹² Anti-Jewish feelings have been rampant among most modern Islamic movements, and have spread during recent decades owing to the confrontation with Israel.¹³ However, because of its direct involvement in the conflict, Hamas seems to give greater emphasis to this point. Its hostility draws inspiration from anti-Jewish utterances in the Qur'an as well as from European anti-Semitic literature.

The Hamas Charter, for instance, provides a picture of the Jews and Judaism which is based on, if not directly taken from, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. Article 22, for instance, describes how the Jews control the world media with their money and have established secret organizations throughout the world – such as the Freemasons and Rotary Club – 'for the destruction of societies and the fulfilment of the goals of Zionism.' They have 'caused revolutions all over the world in order to fulfill their goal.' Likewise, 'with their money, they seized control of the imperialist powers and pushed them to subdue many countries in order to squeeze their resources and spread their corruption.'¹⁴

In many of its publications Hamas uses harsh derogatory descriptions of the Jews, often taken from the Qur'an, such as 'blood suckers', 'brothers of apes', 'killers of the prophets', 'human pigs', and 'butchers'. The Jews do not recognize honor and generosity outside their group, as 'deceit and usury are stamped in their nature.' The reason for their crimes is their attitude towards the others as *goyim* [gentiles] i.e. as animals.¹⁵ Hamas also makes frequent equations between the Jews and the Nazis, arguing that Israel's actions exceed those of the Nazis, and that 'The Jews represent Nazism in its most criminal form'.¹⁶

More important in this context is the extensive resort to Qur'anic exegetes in order to demonstrate the depravity of the Jews and the roots of their enmity to Islam and to show that the present conflict is the direct continuation of the struggle the Jews waged against the Prophet. The Jews, according to these writings, opposed the Prophet from the moment he arrived in Medina, in a desperate effort to prevent the spread of Islam; they rejected his generous offers, and distorted his message.

Ibrahim Quqa, one of Hamas' founders, explains Israel's conduct toward the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories as revenge for Muhammad's victories over the Jewish tribes in Medina. Arguing against the 1993 Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, Hamas' official spokesman Ibrahim Ghawsha warned that 'the Jews are planning to return to Khaybar'.

‘Actually, by this accord, they will go there ... They will ask for the houses of their grandfathers,’ he added.¹⁷

Salah al-Khalidi, a frequent contributor to *Filastin al-Muslima*, the Hamas official organ, explains ‘Surat al-Baqara’ (the Cow) of the Qur’an, as seeking to ‘analyse the Jewish personality’. Its purpose is to ‘explain the secret of their perversion, to warn the Muslims against them’, and to ‘awaken the Muslims to confront and fight’ the Jews.¹⁸ Interpreting ‘Surat al-Isra’ (the Night-Journey), al-Khalidi contrasts the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven from al-Aqsa mosque, demonstrating the close links between Islam and Jerusalem, with the corruption of the Jews as described in that chapter. The modern Jewish presence in Palestine, he argues, is the manifestation of the ‘second corruption’ of the Jews, foretold in the *sura*, as the elimination of the ‘Jewish entity’ is predetermined in the wording of the chapter.⁹

God has gathered the Jews in Palestine, Ibrahim Quqa says, ‘not in order that it would be a home and land for them, but to serve as their graveyard, so that he would free the whole world from this pest. Just as pilgrims atone for their sins by offering a sacrifice in Mecca, so would the Jews be sacrificed in al-Aqsa [mosque] by hands pure as those of the pilgrims.’²⁰

This strong anti-Jewish stance distinguishes Hamas from the PLO organizations. The latter have directed their attacks at Zionism and the Zionists, claiming to differentiate between Zionists and Jews in general. Hamas, on the other hand, does not see any significant difference between Jews and Zionists. Rather, it sees ‘Judaism as a religion, whose literature is filled with racism and aggression against others as well as a sedition to usurp Palestine under the slogan of the land allegedly promised by God’. Zionism is simply a racist entity responsible for translating the aggressive Jewish idea into a belligerent reality.²¹

This attitude toward Judaism goes much further than the traditional Islamic one. Although Muslims have always viewed Islam as a superior religion, superseding Judaism, they did not consider Judaism as a heresy which required eradication as long as it did not challenge Islam’s rule. Historically, Muslims regarded Christianity as a greater challenge than Judaism, and devoted greater attention to it in their polemical literature.²² However, owing to the conflict with Zionism, Judaism rather than Christianity has become the prime enemy for the Islamist organizations.²³

Ironically, Hamas sees one positive, and perhaps even enviable element among the Jews which is missing in the present-day Muslim world: their devotion to their religion. Whereas the Islamic movements have been persecuted by the Arab regimes, the religious trend in Israel is growing more powerful. Thus while the Muslims have become weaker, religion has enhanced the internal solidarity and strength of the Jews.²⁴

The struggle between the Muslims and the Jews revolves around the Islamic (rather than Arab or merely Palestinian) identity of Palestine. As a concrete example of this struggle, Hamas argues that the Jews seek to destroy al-Aqsa mosque in order to build their 'so called temple'.²⁵ Likewise Israel, 'the Jews' and the various international organizations which serve as a cover for them, seek to eliminate and denigrate Islam, 'since the Jewish scheme has no limits', and it seeks to expand ceaselessly.²⁶

The importance of the Islamic essence of the conflict and the Islamic identity of Palestine, stem according to Hamas from the sanctity of Palestine for Islam and the Muslims. Palestine, says 'Abd al-Hafiz 'Alawi, a frequent contributor to *Filastin al-Muslima*, is 'the epitome of Islam and its symbol in the world'. Without its heart, i.e. Palestine, the Islamic nation would be dead historically and culturally. God has chosen Palestine as the land of divine missions, particularly Islam and Christianity.²⁷

The Islamic sanctity of Palestine is based on several pillars, the most important of which is God's choice of al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem as the place for the ascension of the Prophet Muhammad to heaven (*al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*) and as the first qibla (direction of prayer) for the Muslims. The sanctity of al-Aqsa, 'the pearl of Palestine' and of Jerusalem is extended to Palestine as a whole, which is repeatedly called the 'land of *al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj*'. The *Isra'* and *Mi'raj*, Hamas states, distinguished Palestine from all other Islamic lands and made it the inheritance of all Muslims. God chose al-Aqsa for Muhammad's ascension to heaven 'in order to tie between this blessed land and the Prophet', since he is the heir of this land from earlier prophets.²⁸

The second major component in Palestine's sanctity, according to Hamas, is its designation as a *waqf* by the Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab. When the Muslim armies conquered Palestine in the year 638, the Hamas Charter says, the Caliph 'Umar b. al-Khattab decided not to divide the conquered land among the victorious soldiers, but to establish it as a *waqf*, belonging to the entire Muslim nation until the day of resurrection.²⁹

The depiction of Palestine as a *waqf* constitutes an 'invention of tradition', since it has no legal basis in the *Sharia*. Lands conquered by the Muslims were considered *dar al-Islam* (the abode of Islam), that is a place where sovereignty belongs to the Muslims, and therefore the *Sharia* prevails, but not as *waqf*. In addition, Palestine contained state (*miri*), private (*mulk*) lands as well as religious endowments (*awqaf*). Legally, therefore, the entire land could not be a *waqf*. A similar attempt to endow Palestine with special religious significance was made by the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin al-Husayni, in a 1935 ruling (*fatwa*) which described Palestine as a trust (*amana*) entrusted by God and all the Muslims to the Muslims of Palestine.

The sanctification of Palestine is not unique to Hamas as a Palestinian movement; it is shared by most Muslim Brethren movements in the Middle East. However, it does seem to be a recent development. While Hasan al-Banna and other Islamist writers had spoken of Palestine as the ‘heart of the Arab world and the knot of the Muslim peoples’, they did not use the same sanctifying terminology as Hamas does.³⁰ Moreover, for most other Islamic movements this issue is secondary to their own domestic agenda, whereas for Hamas it has become a central pillar of its ideology.

The threat of Palestinian concessions over parts of Palestine as part of a political settlement with Israel, and possibly also counter claims by radical Jewish groups concerning the sanctity of the land have prompted Hamas to elevate Palestine from a trust to a *waqf*.³¹

The almost inevitable conclusion from this depiction of the conflict is that any negotiation with the enemy, as the Hamas Charter states, is a ‘concession of principle, and granting recognition to murderers and usurpers on rights which are not theirs over land in which they had not been born’. Since Israel enjoys unlimited American support, any solution obtained under Israeli obstinacy and American bias would never benefit the Palestinian cause, and would eventually lead to the renunciation of Muslim rights in Palestine. All initiatives, ‘and so-called peaceful solutions’, it adds, are illusions and a waste of time, and are merely an additional way for the infidels to impose themselves over the believers. ‘Since when did the infidels treat the believers justly?’ it asks.³²

Israel only understands the language of force and does not believe in negotiations. Therefore, Palestinian peace overtures or concessions to Israel only lead to greater Jewish intransigence and arrogance. The Arabs are not so weak that they have to run after peace, and the Jews are not so strong as to enforce their will. Recognizing Israel would mean giving up the idea of Arab unity, as well as accepting Arab division and decline.³³

Hamas rejects the argument that in view of their military weakness and under the prevailing international circumstances in which the US supports Israel, the Arabs should ‘face reality’, compromise with Israel, and give up their rights. Such an argument, it contends, fails to grasp the long-term time-frame of the conflict and of the Palestinian struggle, which should be measured in decades and not in years. The road to victory is long, but its outcome has been predetermined by God. Time is part of the solution, and it requires three components: Islam, going along the right path and forbearance (*sabr*).³⁴

The calls for concessions ignore the overall potency of the Arab and Islamic worlds, which can mobilize all their resources for the struggle against Israel. Israel is now young and powerful, but it will grow old and decline, whereas the Islamic world will change. In the longer term, Israel

will not be able to confront such power. Just as the Muslims defeated the Crusaders and Mongols who in the past invaded Palestine in order to destroy Islam, so will they defeat Israel. Hamas points to the collapse of the Soviet Union as a sign of the inevitable decline of seemingly mighty powers, and as a warning to those Arabs who lay their hopes on the US and its power.³⁵ Ahmad Yasin, Hamas' founder and first leader, cites the weakness of the Jews themselves *vis-à-vis* Pharaoh, but reminds the reader that they eventually managed to leave Egypt thanks to God's help; the same would occur with the Muslims. Belief in God will liberate the Palestinians from Israeli occupation.³⁶

Hamas couches its opposition to a peace settlement in Islamic terms, proposing the sanctity of Palestine as a *waqf* assigned to the Muslims until the day of resurrection as its major argument. As a Muslim *waqf*, Palestine does not belong exclusively to the Palestinians, but to the entire Islamic nation. Consequently, according to this view, neither the Palestinians nor the Arabs, neither the present generation nor any generation in the future, have the right to give up even an inch of land or to accept an alien entity in Palestine. Recognition of Israel is a betrayal of future generations of Muslims, and of the martyrs who have died for Palestine from the time of the Prophet to the present. This principle, Hamas declares, has been approved by numerous verdicts of the Muslim *ulama* and by Islamic conferences in the past.³⁷

Consequently, the Hamas Charter states that giving up even a bit of the land means giving up part of religion. Hamas' 'document for history' addressed to the Fatah movement takes a harsher tone, saying that recognizing the 'false Jewish entity,' is tantamount to a 'betrayal of God, his messenger and of the faith.' Citing the Qur'anic passage 'Until the day of judgement He will send enemies (Sura 7 passage 167),' one Hamas Handbill argues that God did not predestine the Jews to live peacefully in the land.³⁸

Rejecting peace with Israel, Hamas formulated its own concept of peace, based on Islamic principles, which means the complete 'liberation of our entire usurped lands and living on our land under our own government'. The only solution to the conflict, according to the Hamas Charter, is the establishment of an Islamic state in all of Palestine, in the full sense of the word as far as the dominant role of Islam in legislation and custom are concerned. Only under the shadow of Islam can followers of all religions live in peace and security for themselves, their property and their rights. Jews born in Palestine will have full civil rights in the Islamic state, 'just as they lived in the past with full rights under Islamic rule'. Members of the other religions, therefore, 'should cease fighting Islam for sovereignty in this region'.³⁹

In other words, Hamas offers the Jews two options, in accordance with Islamic law. If they surrender peacefully, and become a 'protected minority' in the Palestinian Islamic state, they will enjoy cultural and religious autonomy as they had in the past under Islamic rule. However, if they refuse, the only course is holy war until final victory.

The struggle against Israel, then, is a jihad for the sake of God, which should never be abandoned. Hamas' position resembles the PLO's National Covenant which regarded the armed struggle as the sole strategy for the liberation of Palestine. Unlike the PLO, however, Hamas endows its jihad with religious meaning, declaring that it is fighting not only for the liberation of the homeland, but equally important in order to defend 'the Muslim person, Islamic culture, and Muslim holy sites, first and foremost among them al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. It seeks to establish the 'state of Islam', and 'hoist Allah's flag' over all of Palestine.⁴⁰

The idea of jihad and martyrdom for Islam has always been highly regarded by the Muslim Brethren. The major difference between the Brethren and their political rivals was the relative importance of the various kinds of jihad - spiritual, social or military - as well as the right time and authority to declare one. While advocating an uncompromising line against Israel's existence, the traditional Muslim Brethren position since 1948 gave precedence to tackling the internal problems of Islamic societies. The stress on military jihad as the way to liberate Palestine in the immediate present represented a major departure from the traditional position of the Muslim Brethren. It came about only with the outbreak of the Palestinian Intifada against Israel in 1987.⁴¹

Hamas concedes that its own jihad cannot destroy Israel, and contends that the cause of liberating Palestine is related to three circles: the Palestinian, the Arab and the Islamic. Each has a role and an obligation to fulfil, and it would be a grave error to ignore any of these circles. Ordinarily, an offensive jihad is a *fard kifaya*, i.e. a collective obligation upon the community as a whole rather than on each individual. However, when enemies usurp an Islamic land, Hamas contends, the jihad becomes a personal obligation (*wajib 'ayn*) upon every Muslim. On the day the Palestinian cause will be approached in this way, when all the resources of the Arabs and Muslims will be deployed, liberation will draw nearer. Within this jihadist course for the liberation of Palestine, the Palestinian people serve as the vanguard of the Islamic nation, while the various Islamic movements should take the lead of the Arab and Islamic circles of jihad.⁴²

The ramifications of the Palestinian jihad, according to Hamas, go far beyond Palestine. History from the times of the Crusades has shown that the Islamic nation unites only around Palestine, writes Abd al-Hafiz 'Alawi, a frequent contributor to *Filastin al-Muslima*. The Palestinian cause is the

common denominator of all popular movements in the Muslim world. The loss of Palestine was the beginning of the nation's collapse and disintegration, and the liberation of Palestine is a necessary precondition for the nation's cultural revival and progress. Moreover, humanity everywhere, which is oppressed by American imperialism and Zionism, looks forward to the defeat of these forces as the first step towards its liberation. There is no future for this nation and this region, he concluded, except by liberating Palestine and by removing the Zionist state which constitutes the obstacle to Arab and Islamic revival.⁴³

With Jerusalem and al-Aqsa mosque as the rallying point for the Muslim world, the jihad for Palestine would become an essential phase in the restoration of Islamic unity and the Islamic Caliphate. Furthermore, the jihad against the Jews is a prerequisite for fulfilling God's promise to establish his rule over the earth. Citing the tradition (*hadith*) of the Salt-bush the Hamas Charter states that the final hour will not come until the day when the Muslims will fight the Jews and kill them.⁴⁴ On this point, Hamas accepts, to a certain degree, the argument raised by the Islamic Jihad organization, which regards the elimination of Israel as a necessary precondition for healing the malaise of the Muslim world.⁴⁵

The present jihad is the last link in a long chain of holy wars for the sake of Islam dating back to the beginning of Islam. Of particular importance among these wars were those conducted between Muhammad and the Jews of Medina and Khaybar.⁴⁶ These wars serve as a model of the deeply-rooted conflict between the two religions and a proof of the treachery of the Jews, as well as a source of inspiration and hope for the Muslims in their present struggle. Ahmad Yasin, for instance, compared the Palestinians to the *muhajirun* (emigrants) in the days of the Prophet Muhammad, who had been unjustly displaced from their homes and land because of their belief in God. Concurrently, he urged his fellow Muslims to remember the fate of the Banu Nadir, who owned fortresses and weapons at the time of the Prophet's material weakness. Yet, with God's help, the Muslims prevailed. Various handbills called upon Muslims to transform the 'memory of the conquest of Khaybar to a new bloody battle against the occupier'. The call 'Khaybar Khaybar O Jews, the army of Muhammad will return' (*Khaybar Khaybar ya yahud, jaysh Muhammad sa ya'ud*) was most popular in Hamas wall graffiti and rallies.⁴⁷

The first phase in the long-term jihad, according to Hamas, has been the Palestinian uprising (*Intifada*) against Israel, which broke out in December 1987. The uprising, Hamas asserts, was first and foremost an Islamic revolution, which started from the mosques under the divine will, in order

to foil all attempts to impose capitulationist settlements on the Palestinian cause, and restored the Islamic dimension of the conflict to its rightful central place.

Trying to justify the Muslim Brethren's inaction against Israel beforehand, Hamas contends that it launched the *Intifada* only after twenty years of Israeli occupation, but following a prolonged period of building cadres, establishing Islamic institutions and inculcating the right Islamic consciousness among the masses. The older generation, Hamas spokesmen explain, was both affected by defeat and excessively influenced by Western ideologies, undermining its ability to wage a proper jihad against Israel. In contrast, the new generation, 'the generation of *takbir* (chanting *Allah Akbar*) and stones' has been imbued with firm Islamic consciousness.⁴⁸

Equally important, the *Intifada* served as a crucible and as a spiritual revolution that would restore the Palestinian people to its true self, its original Islamic affiliation. The *Intifada* also released hidden energies among Palestinians, and rallied Muslims all over the world behind the Palestinian struggle and behind Islam.⁴⁹

The combination of these two elements – war against the enemy and spiritual revolution – is manifested in the multiple dimensions of the *Intifada*. In addition to confrontations with Israel, Hamas Handbills described the chanting of the call '*Allah Akbar*' and the reading of the Qur'an, as well as observing the Ramadan fast and the hoisting of Islamic black flags as part of the Palestinian struggle.⁵⁰ Imposing 'Islamic dress' for women, particularly the scarf (*hijab*), was also described as a symbol of commitment to the Palestinian struggle and of respect for the martyrs of the *Intifada*. Women who dressed modestly were helping to 'foil the enemy's schemes', and those who refused were denounced as flimsy and even anti-patriotic. Occasionally, Hamas activists even resorted to violence against such women.⁵¹

In addition, Hamas launched a campaign to execute criminal elements, and those suspected of immoral conduct. These people deserved death, was the contention, since they corrupted Palestinian society and prevented it from living according to the laws of Islam, thereby collaborating with Israel, which seeks to destroy Islam from within.⁵²

An important aspect of the *Intifada*'s religious essence is the glorification of martyrdom and martyrs based on the Qur'anic passages saying that those who die for the sake of God go to heaven. Hamas' casualties were equated to the martyrs from the time of the Prophet, who had fulfilled their purpose in life. Hamas issued posters with pictures of the martyrs adorned with passages from the Qur'an, and poems praising their deeds.⁵³ In addition, it published books narrating the exploits of the leading fighters killed in battle with Israeli troops in which it stressed their religious motivation and their reward in heaven.⁵⁴

Particularly important was the glorification of martyrdom through suicidal bomb attacks on Israeli targets by Hamas activists.⁵⁵ In response to doubts raised by 'simple-minded people' that such actions contradicted Islamic law, *Filastin al-Muslima* published a series of articles extolling suicidal acts as the epitome of martyrdom. Citing passages from the Qur'an, the *hadith*, and from Muslim jurists, the writer differentiated between ordinary suicides and the martyrs who died for the sake of God in the war against the infidels, and elaborated on God's love for them.⁵⁶

Like every ideological movement, Hamas faced the need to reconcile the discrepancies between pure ideology and political realities. It attacked the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DoP) signed in September 1993 as a 'treasonous ... surrender of Palestine at the cheapest price', articulating its total rejection of any solution that yielded 'even one inch' of Palestinian land. In addition, it called upon the Muslim *ulama* to articulate the Islamic legal and religious position *vis-à-vis* the conspiracy of relinquishing Jerusalem and the mosque of al-Aqsa. Significantly, however, most of Hamas' detailed criticism of the DoP referred to various PLO concessions and was devoid of specifically religious undertones. Presumably, Hamas feared that religious arguments alone would not suffice to rally most Palestinians against the DoP. Hamas rejected the argument that a settlement with Israel would be only a tactical move as part of a phased plan for achieving all Palestinian national goals. Such a tactic, it asserts, might block the way of future generations when they would seek to regain their land. Concurrently, Hamas officials expressed confidence that inherent weaknesses and contradictions in the DoP, as well as frustration over the non-materialization of economic prosperity and over Israel's probable intransigence would eventually set most Palestinians against the accords.⁵⁷

The signing of the Taba accords between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) on the implementation of the Declaration of Principles, and the consolidation of the PNA, forced Hamas to reconsider its positions.⁵⁸ Various Hamas activists acknowledged that the movement's ultimate goals were unattainable in the foreseeable future, since Israel, which enjoyed the support of the Western world, was still too strong. In addition, they acknowledged that the majority of Palestinians in the territories were tired after years of struggle and supported a political compromise with Israel at least in the short run. Nor could these activists ignore the wishes of one important constituency of Hamas supporters, composed mainly of conservative members of the middle classes, who supported the idea of Islamizing Palestinian society and of an Islamic Palestinian state, but were less committed to the notion of an all-out jihad.

Under such circumstances, pragmatist figures in Hamas admitted that a call for a prolonged and difficult jihad could appeal to, or be heeded by, only a select group of dedicated activists rather than the majority of the Palestinian population.⁵⁹

Consequently, on various occasions during 1994 and 1995, proponents of a more pragmatic line proposed a mutual ending of violence between Israel and Hamas, in return for an Israeli commitment to a full withdrawal from the Territories, the release of all Palestinian detainees and the cessation of 'violations of Palestinian rights'.⁶⁰

These ideological constraints were manifested in the unsuccessful dialogue between Hamas and the PNA which was held in December 1995. Hamas insisted on adhering to its basic position of rejecting the Oslo Accords, even though it implicitly gave them de facto recognition. More importantly, it refused to give up the principle of jihad. At the most, Hamas was willing to accept a temporary cease fire from the territories controlled by the PNA, in return for assurances that Israel would not pursue its activists within those territories, but it left the door open for continuing armed struggle in regions which remained under Israeli control. In other words, while the pragmatists have not abandoned the principle of jihad, they are willing to be more flexible in implementing it if circumstances are not favourable.

Already in 1993 as well as afterwards, Ahmad Yasin, the imprisoned leader of Hamas, made a distinction between full-fledged peace (*sulh*) with the Jews, which he regarded as a crime since it meant giving up parts of Palestine, and a temporary armistice (*hudna*). It is lawful for the Muslims, he explained, to accept such an armistice if the enemy is powerful while the Muslims are weak and need time to prepare and recover their strength. Most jurists, he added, believe that such an armistice should not last for more than ten years, the period which the Prophet accepted in his agreement with the people of Mecca at Hudaybiyya in 628. Yasin was willing to accept such armistice provided Israel withdrew unconditionally back to the 1967 borders and gave the Palestinians absolute freedom to determine their fate and future.⁶¹

Likewise, the Association of Palestinian Ulama affiliated with Hamas declared that temporary peace was possible, but in a way which would not preclude future generations from continuing the struggle to regain the rest of the usurped Palestinian lands lost in 1948.⁶² In a way this formula, establishing a compromise between ideological commitment and political constraints, resembled the phased plan adopted by the PLO in 1974.⁶³ Only time will tell if and how it will affect Hamas' political course.

NOTES

1. Handbill No.74, *Filastin al-Muslima* [hereafter FM], June 1991.
2. Clifford Geertz, 'Religion as a Cultural System', *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), p.90.
3. For such uses, see Nels Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism* (London, 1982). The case of Shaykh 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, the preacher from Haifa, who was the first to resort to armed struggle against the Zionists and the British under the banner of a holy war, is closer to a millenarian religious movement than to a secular movement using religion, see Johnson, Chapter Two; Uri M. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Islamic Council: Islam Under the British Mandate for Palestine* (Leiden, 1987), pp.187-9, 240-7; Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian Arab National Movement, 1918-1929* (London, 1977), pp.265-7.
4. For general studies on Hamas, see Ziyad Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: The Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington, IN, 1994); Jean Francois Legrain, 'The Islamic Movement and the Intifada', in Jamal Nasser and Roger Heacock, (eds.), *Intifada at the Crossroads* (New York: 1990), pp.175-90; Hisham H. Ahmad, *From Religious Salvation to Political Transformation: The Rise of Hamas in Palestinian Society* (Jerusalem, 1994).
5. *Mithaq harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya - Filastin (Hamas)* (n.p., 1409h/1988) [hereafter the Hamas Charter], articles 9, 15; Handbill No.1; Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya: Hamas, Khalfiyat al-nash'a wa-afaq al-masir* (Worth, IL, 1989), a, j, 53.
6. Ibrahim Quqa, to *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 Oct. 1988; 'al-Intifada tufajjiru sira' al-khakhamat', *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 Nov. 1989.
7. Hamas Charter, article 15; Handbills Nos.10, 31, 63.
8. Handbills Nos.10, 24, 71, 72; 'al-bayan al-thani lil-harakat al-islamiyya', *FM*, March 1991.
9. For the Muslim Brethren's perception, see Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Oxford, 1969), pp.227ff.; 'Abd al-Fattah al-Uwaysi, *Tasawwur al-Ikhwan al-Mustimin li-qadiyat Filastin* (Cairo, n.d.); 'Filastin fi fikr al-imam al-shahid Hasan al-Banna', *Liwa al-Islam*, 7 Feb. 1989.
10. 'Al-waqi' al-Filastini al-rasmi min al-muwajaha ila al-i'tiraf', *al-Sawa'id al-Ramiyya*, Dec. 1989; the Hamas Charter, articles 9 and 22.
11. Quqa to *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 Oct. 1988; 'Hiwar shamil ma'a qiyadat Hamas,' *FM*, April 1990; 'Shi'arat harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya Hamas,' *Ila Filastin*, Feb. 1990; 'Haqiqat sira'ina ma'a al-yahud,' *Nida' al-Aqsa*, Jan. 1989.
12. Hamas Charter, articles 17, 20; Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Hamas: hadath 'abir am badil da'im* (Worth, IL, 1990), p.21; Muhammad Siyam to *Nida' al-Aqsa*, April 1990.
13. For the spread of anti-Jewish feelings, see Sylvia G. Haim, 'Arab Anti-Semitic Literature', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol.17 No.4 (1955), pp.307-12; Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Antisemites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York, 1986); Rivka Yadlin, *An Arrogant Oppressive Spirit. Anti-Zionism as Anti-Judaism in Egypt* (Oxford, 1989); R. L. Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations: A Muslim Fundamentalist's View of the Jews* (Oxford, 1987).
14. Hamas Charter, article 22.
15. See Handbills Nos.1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 14, 30, 31, 32, 33, 65; *al-Sawa'id al-Ramiyya*, May 1990; 'Hadhihi akhlaqiyat bani Sahyun,' *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 Nov. 1990.
16. Other such statements include: 'the Nazism of the Jews encompasses all of them', 'the Nazi Jews', 'Jewish Nazism', 'Nazi Zionism', see, for example, Handbills Nos. 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 25, and 65.
17. Quqa to *Liwa al-Islam*, 11 Nov. 1988; Ghawsha, to *Jerusalem Post*, 24 Dec. 1993. The Prophet Muhammad had imposed harsh terms on the Jews of Khaybar after defeating them in battle. Subsequently, the Caliph 'Umar expelled them from the Arabian Peninsula.
18. Salah al-Khalidi, 'Hadith surat al-Baqara 'an al-yahud' part. 1, *FM*, July 1995; *idem*, 'Kawashif Qur'aniyya lil-ghawamid al-yahudiyya', parts 1-2, *FM*, Dec. 1993, Jan. 1994; Ibrahim al-'Ali, 'Hakadha tahadatha al-nabi (Sal'am) 'an al-yahud', parts 1-8, *FM*, Jan. to Aug. 1996.

19. Salah 'Abd al-Fattah al-Khalidi, 'Mustaqbal al-kiyan al-yahudi fi filastin kama tuqarriruhu surat Al 'Imran', parts 1-2, *FM*, Feb., March 1991; idem, 'Mustaqbal al-yahud fi filastin kama tuqarriruhu surat al-Isra' parts 1 to 6, *FM*, Sept. 1991-March 1992.
20. Quqa to *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 Oct. 1988; see a similar statement by Muhammad Siyam to *Nida' al-Aqsa*, April 1990.
21. 'Hiwar shamil', *FM*, April 1990.
22. Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, 1981), p.33.
23. 'Uwaysi, *Tasawwur*, p.25.
24. Handbill No.32. For a similar view among Islamic movements in other Arab countries, see Sivan, *Radical Islam* (New Haven, 1985), p.47.
25. The emphasis on al-Aqsa Mosque, explained Shaykh Muhammad Siyam, one of Hamas' founders, was designed to provide the masses with a concrete symbol of identity which is deeply rooted in their cultural tradition. *Ila Filastin*, May 1990.
26. Hamas Charter, article 32; *Nida' al-Aqsa*, Jan. and April 1989, p.2; Handbills Nos. 4, 16, 18, 23, 29 and 65; *al-Sawa'id al-Ramiyya*, Dec. 1989; *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 March 1989. As the proof for Jewish enmity towards Islam the Hamas Charter article 28 states that when the Jews stood on the threshold of al-Aqsa in the wake of the 1967 war, they declared 'Muhammad has died and left after him only girls' [*Muhammad mat wa-khalafa banat*].
27. 'Ali Muqbil, 'Makanat filastin fi qulub al-muslimin', *FM*, Dec. 1994; 'Abd al-Hafiz 'Alawi, 'Filastin: al-thawabit', part I, *FM*, Jan. 1995.
28. Handbills nos. 10, 17, 37; Salah 'Abd al-Fatah al-Khalidi, 'Mustaqbal al-yahud fi filastin kama tuqarriruhu Surat al-Isra'', *FM*, Sept. 1991.
29. Hamas Charter, Article 11; 'Hiwar shamil', *FM*, April 1990, see also 'Bayan al-murshid al-'amm lil-ikhwan al-Muslimin hawla muqtarahat al-taswiyya al-silmiyya lil-qadiyya al-filastiniyya', *FM*, July 1991.
30. Mitchell (note 9), p.267. See also 'Uwaysi, *Tasawwur*; Fathi Yakan, *al-Qadiyya al-filastiniyya min manzur islami* (Kafar Kanna, Israel, 1990); 'Abdallah Nasih 'Alwan, *al-Islam wal-qadiyya al-Filastiniyya* (Amman, 1982); Ziyad Abu Ghanima, *al-harakat al-Islamiyya wa-qadiyat filastin* (Amman, 1985); 'Filastin fi fikr al-imam al-shahid Hasan al-Banna', *Liwa al-Islam*, 7 Feb. 1989; Isma'il R. al-Faruqi, 'Islam and Zionism', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York, 1983), pp.261-7.
31. Kupferschmidt, *The Supreme Islamic Council*, p.242.
32. Hamas Charter, article 13; 'Hamas: A Document to History', *al-Sabil*, 3 Aug. 1989; Handbill No.13; *al-Sawa'id al-Ramiyya*, May 1990; 'Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya Hamas: hadha huwa mawqifuna min al-taswiyya', *FM*, July 1991.
33. Handbills Nos. 1, 18, 28 and 60; Ahmad Yasin to *al-Bashir*, Feb. 1988; the Hamas Charter, article 13; 'Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya Hamas: hadha huwa mawqifuna min al-taswiyya', *FM*, July 1991.
34. Hamas Charter, article 35; Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Ahmad Yasin al-'zahira al-mu'jiza wa-'usturat al-tahaddi* (Amman, 1990), pp.88, 112; Handbill No.77; 'Indama Tushriqu al-Amal was at al-Shada'id', *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 Jan. 1990.
35. Handbills Nos. 28, 77, 79; Muhammad Siyam to *Nida' al-Aqsa*, April 1990; Ahmad Yasin to *al-Ghuraba'*, 1 March 1989; *al-'Alam*, 16 April 1991; Hamas, 'Hadha huwa mawqifuna', *FM*, July 1991.
36. Yasin to *al-Nahar* (Jerusalem) 30 April 1990; Yasin to the *Christian Science Monitor*, 12 Nov. 1987 cited in Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Yasin*, p. 84.
37. Hamas Charter, article 11; Hamas, 'Hadha huwa mawqifuna', *FM*, July 1991; Handbills Nos. 28 and 30.
38. *The Islamic Charter*, article 13; 'Wathiqat lil-ta'rikh', addressed to al-Fatah's Fifth Congress in August 1989 in *FM*, Sep. 1989; Handbill no. 8.
39. *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 Nov. 1989; the Hamas Charter, articles 6, 9, and 31; 'Wathiqat lil-ta'rikh', addressed to al-Fatah in *al-Sabil*, Aug. 1989; Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Hamas: Hadath*, p.111.
40. *Al-Qadiyya al-filastiniyya bayna mithaqayn: al-mithaq al-watani al-filastini wa-mithaq harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya Hamas* (Kuwait, 1990); the Hamas Charter, articles 6, 9, 15 and 33; 'Wathiqat lil-ta'rikh', addressed to the Palestine National Council, Nov. 1988, appendix in Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Hamas: Hadath*, pp.165-6; Handbill No.25.

41. On the Muslim Brethren's concept of jihad, see Mitchell, *The Society*, pp.215-16; on the Palestinian Muslim Brethren position on jihad, see Amnon Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949-1967* (Ithaca, NY, 1982), p.205.
42. Hamas Charter, articles 14, 15; 'Wathiqa lil-ta'rikh', in Ahmad bin Yusuf, *Hamas: Hadath*, pp.120, 165-6.
43. Abd al-Hafiz 'Alawi, 'Filastin al-Thawabit', *FM*, March 1995; Handbill No.82.
44. Articles 13, 9, and 7; Handbill, No.82.
45. On Islamic Jihad, see Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, pp.90ff.
46. The Jewish tribes in Medina, Banu Qaynuqa', and Banu Nadir, and Banu Qurayza, were defeated and expelled by the Prophet. After defeating the third tribe Banu Qurayza, the Prophet had all the men killed while the women and children were sold to slavery.
47. 'Indama Tushriqu al-Amal wasat al-Shada'id', *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 Jan. 1990; Yasin to *FM*, 1 March 1989, Handbills Nos. 13, 14, 16, 22, 29, and 31; 'Min Shi'arat', *Ila Filastin*, Feb. 1990.
48. Yasin to *Time*, 1 Feb. 1988; Yasin to *Ila Filastin*, 25 March 1988; Adham al-Qassam, 'al-Intifada al-mutamayyiza', *FM*, March 1989; 'Imad al-'Alami, 'al-Intifada rasakhat al-bu'd al-islami lil-sira', *FM*, Dec. 1990; *Ila Filastin*, Feb. 1990; Ibrahim Quqa and Ibrahim Ghawsha to *al-'Aham*, 26 Jan. and 26 Oct. 1991 respectively; Ahmad bin. Yusuf, *Yasin*, pp.25, 27, 85; Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism*, pp.60ff.
49. Hamas Charter, articles Nos. 15 and 33; Handbill No.25; 'Hiwar shamil ma'a qiyadat Hamas', *FM*, May 1990. Ibrahim Quqa to *Liwa al-Islam*, 11 Nov. 1988.
50. Handbills Nos. 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 22.
51. Rema Hammami, 'Women, the Hijab and the Intifada', *Middle East Report*, May-Aug. 1990, pp.24-27.
52. *Ha'aretz*, 9, 10 Aug. 1992. Salih 'Abd al-Jawad, *al-mawqif al-nazari wal-'amali lil-harakat al-islamiyya tujah mawdu' al-'umala'* (Jerusalem, 1993), pp.13, 18.
53. Handbills Nos. 12, 18, and 22; *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 March 1989.
54. See Ghasan Da'war, *'Imad 'Aql: Usturat al-jihad wal-muqawama* (London: Filastin al-Muslima, 1994.)
55. During the years 1994-96 Hamas activists carried out several suicide attacks which led to death of 107 Israeli citizens and the injury of dozens of others, see Meir Litvak and Elie Rekhess, 'Palestinian Affairs', *Middle East Contemporary Survey* 1994 (Boulder, CO, 1996), pp.146-9, and 1995 (forthcoming).
56. Ibrahim al-'Ali, 'Learning from the Correct Tradition', parts 1-3, *FM*, Oct.-Dec. 1995.
57. 'A Joint declaration of Palestinian Rejectionist Movement', *FM*, Nov. 1991; al-Wasat, 27 Sept. 1993; *FM*, Oct., Nov. 1993.
58. For details of this process, see Elie Rekhess and Meir Litvak, 'Palestinian Affairs', *MECS* 1995 (Boulder, CO, forthcoming).
59. *Ha'aretz*, 12 Nov., 24 Dec., 31 Dec. 1993; *FM*, Jan. 1994.
60. *Al-Hayat*, 7 April; Reuters, 21 April - USIS, 21 April; *Jordan Times*, 23 April 1994.
61. *Al-Wasat*, 1 Nov. 1993; Yasin to *FM*, March 1995.
62. Ehud Ya'ari, *Ma'ariv* weekly supplement, 1 March 1996.
63. Alain Gresh, *The PLO: The Struggle Within Towards an Independent Palestinian State* (London, 1983), pp.133ff.