



THE SECOND PARTITION OF PALESTINE

HAMAS–FATAH STRUGGLE FOR POWER

Subhash Singh



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This book examines the factors and issues responsible for the intra-Palestinian conflict that has undermined the strength and vitality of the struggle for liberation against the state of Israel. It explores how the ideological incompatibility and competition for political primacy account for the Hamas–Fatah conflict, entailing the risk of partition of Palestine even before it takes shape as an independent, sovereign entity. It analyzes the developments since the signing of the September 1993 Oslo Accord and discusses themes such as the background of Palestinian politics; the role of Fatah; the rise of Hamas as Fatah’s political rival; the Hamas–Fatah struggle for power; and the role played by the international community, including by the US and the European Union. The study deals with the various facets of territorial and political challenges faced by the rival Palestinian factions; the failure of the reconciliation efforts by Egypt and Yemen; the stalled peace process in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; the emergence of the Islamic resistance movement and secular nationalist party; and the political and ideological shifts in Palestinian politics.

Comprehensive and topical, this book will be useful to scholars and researchers of West Asian studies, peace and conflict studies, politics and international relations, foreign policy, political studies, area studies and strategic and defence studies.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ANM	Arab Nationalist Movement
ANO	Abu Nidal Organisation
BSO	Black September Organisation
CEC	Central Election Commission
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DOP	Declaration of Principles
EF	Executive Force
EU	European Union
FEDA	Palestinian Democratic Union
GUPS	General Union of Palestine Student
HEC	Higher Elections Committee
IAF	Israeli Air Force
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIC	Islamic Conference
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCHR	Palestine Centre for Human Right
PDFLP	Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLA	Palestine Liberation Army
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPP	Palestine People's Party
PRC	Popular Resistance Committees
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council
UAR	United Arab Republic
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNLU	Unified National Leadership of the Uprising
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSCOP	United Nations Special Committee on Palestine
USA	United States of America
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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INTRODUCTION

Winning 76 out of 132 seats in the 2006 parliamentary elections for the Palestinian Authority (PA) and 45 percent of the popular vote, the Islamic Resistance Movement, popularly known by its Arabic acronym Hamas, successfully challenged Fatah's political dominance. For the first time in the history of Palestine, a government headed by the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was formed without Fatah, the secular nationalist party that dominated Palestinian politics for decades. Unable to come to terms with the loss of hegemony over the political system, Fatah, aided by the outside players like the United States of America (USA) and the European Union (EU), made systematic attempts to obstruct Hamas's integration into the PA. More than one year later, on 7 June 2007, forces loyal to Hamas launched a military offensive against Fatah in Gaza, taking command of major arteries and assuming control over PA government buildings. Four days into the fighting, after a series of pitched battles, Hamas gunmen clad in black ski masks controlled the dusty streets of Gaza. It would not be long before the fall of the PA's fortress-like security compound, *al-Suraya*. Indeed, Hamas fighters had burrowed a tunnel beneath the building, detonated deadly explosives, and breached it. After six days of armed conflict, the Palestinian Authority (PA) created by the 1993 Oslo Accord split into two separate territorial and political entities called "Fatahland" and "Hamastan." While Fatah remains in charge of the West Bank, Hamas has consolidated its rule in the Gaza Strip since its forcible takeover in June 2007. Hence, it was the second partition of Palestine. In 1947, the United Nations divided Palestine between Arabs and Jews; it's called the "first partition of Palestine," as mentioned in various writings on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Despite several rounds of reconciliation efforts by Egypt and Yemen in past years, that the de facto split between West Bank and Gaza persists reflects an enduring struggle for ascendancy in Palestinian politics. In the backdrop of this dramatic development, this book attempts to identify the factors accounting for the intra-Palestinian conflict and examine the fundamental ideological and political differences between the secular nationalist Fatah and the Islamist Hamas, long considered as a terrorist organization. To discuss all aspects of Palestinian politics, this book is divided into six key chapters, excluding the introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter, "Fatah in Palestinian Politics," is entirely devoted to a comprehensive analysis of Fatah, the most powerful faction within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The discussion will begin with some historical background, the PLO's organizational structure and political goals, and ends with an assessment of its performance under several charismatic leaders. Founded in 1959 in Kuwait, the Fatah movement, or Palestine National Liberation Movement (*Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini* in Arabic) emerged a decade

later as the first Palestinian guerrilla group, which adopted a Palestinian secular nationalist ideology for the liberation of Palestinian Arabs.¹ Its inclusive nature represents different sections of Palestinian society, which made Fatah the embodiment of Palestinian national aspirations. Believing in the armed struggle as the only strategy to “liberate Mandatory Palestine in its entirety,” Fatah also flirted with Islamic symbolism in the initial years of its struggle to attain a mass following, especially after the battle of Karameh. Its doctrine of the “armed struggle” was incorporated into the National Charter of the PLO revised in 1968.²

Fatah became a dominant force in the Palestinian politics after the Six-Day War of 1967. The political effect was the most important factor of Fatah’s popularity, not the military. Its military operation was the basis for the widening of political resistance. At that time, the PLO was the umbrella organization of the Palestinian resistance, which was founded in 1964 with Egyptian backing under Ahmad al-Shukeiri as chairman. It was meant to divert attention from the popular anti-Nasserite Fatah movement. After the Arab war effort collapsed during the June war, Yasser Arafat and the Fatah took over the PLO in 1968. Eventually, the PLO was given UN observer status in 1974 after Arafat’s speech in the General Assembly.³ It was recognized as “the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”⁴ In 1968, the battle of Karameh was fought in the town of Karameh, Jordan, between the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and united forces of the PLO and the Jordanian army. It was planned by Israel as two parallel raids on PLO’s camps, one in Karameh and other in the distant village of Safi. The attacks were in retaliation to a series of raids by the PLO against Israel. At that time, Israel was convinced that the Jordanian army would ignore the incursion, but the latter it fought alongside the Palestinians and inflicted heavy losses upon the Israeli forces. The IDF withdrew at the end of the day’s battle having destroyed most of the Karameh camp and taken hundreds of PLO’s fighters as prisoners.⁵ Both sides declared victory. On a strategic level, the battle ended in Israel’s favor and the target of the mission was achieved. For the Palestinians, however, the battle of Karameh marked the beginning of their national struggle for liberation of Palestine under the charismatic leadership of Yasser Arafat. As the Fatah-led PLO grew in strength and Arab politics centered on the issue of Palestine, Jordanian authorities increasingly felt uncomfortable. Arafat was elected as the Chairman of the PLO’s Executive Committee in February 1969. Consequently, Fatah became the most dominant component of a liberation movement operating without a territorial base and in an often hostile environment.

Moreover, Black September was an era of the Jordanian Civil War which started in September 1970 and ended in July 1971. It was fought between the two major groups of Jordan: the Palestinians, represented by the PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat; and the Trans-Jordanians, represented by the Jordanian armed forces under the leadership of King Hussein. At its core, the civil war sought to determine if Jordan would be ruled by the PLO or the Hashemite monarchy because Palestinians tried to establish a state within the state in Jordan. The war resulted in the deaths of thousands of people, most of whom were Palestinians. Armed conflict lasted until July 1971 with the expulsion of Palestinian Profiteers from Jordan’s territory. After the October War in 1973 and following a series of political and military setbacks, particularly in Lebanon and Jordan, Fatah opted for diplomatic engagement by renouncing “armed struggle” and accepting the UN Security Council Resolution 242 (in effect accepting Israel’s right to exist) and 338 at the November 1988 Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting in Algiers, which eventually culminated in the Oslo Peace Accord, promising a two-state solution. Accordingly, the PLO recognized Israel in exchange for the establishment of a Palestinian self-governing authority under Yasser Arafat.

The organizational structure of the Fatah movement is divided in two parts: one is the highest decision-making body, called Central Committee of Fatah, and the other is the Fatah Revolutionary Council. The Central Committee is the highest decision-making body of the Palestinian organization and political party, Fatah, while the Revolutionary Council is Fatah's legislative body and is better known as the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), headed by Sabri al-Bana (Abu Nidal). The organization since its foundation has considered itself as the real Fatah, accusing the leaders of the original organization of betrayal. Fatah's Revolutionary Council was considered the most dangerous and murderous Palestinian terror organization in the 1980s. It has demonstrated an ability to operate over wide areas in West Asia, South America, and Europe. Fatah has been a most powerful political organization since its creation. Several leaders have played important roles in Fatah's formation and popularity. These are some of the most popular names, like Yasser Arafat, Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), Khalil El-Wazir, Farouq Qaddumi, and Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen).

The second chapter, "The Rise of Hamas as Fatah's Political Rival," will focus on the origin and growth of the Islamic movement in Palestinian politics. It will also examine the political structure: its military wing, its ideology, and its political vision. The Islamic Resistance Movement, popularly known as Hamas by its Arabic acronym (*Harakat al Muqwama-al Islamia*), appeared on the Palestinian political scene in the early months of the first *intifada* in 1987. It was established in January 1988 as the branch of the Muslim Brotherhood under the guidance of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, a Gaza-based cleric, Hamas grew as a potent political force during the first Palestinian uprising inside the occupied territories and outside the nationalist consensus represented by the Fatah-led PLO. When the Palestinian *intifada* erupted, the exponent of the confrontational policy gained a stronger position in which to argue that "Islamists would suffer a great loss if they decided not to take part in the *intifada*, definitively and equally with all the other participating Palestinian factions."⁶

Externally, hard living conditions for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, which had been created and exacerbated by the Israeli occupation, reached an unprecedented condition. Poverty combined with feelings of oppression and humiliation changed the Palestinian atmosphere, with the conditions ripe for revolt against the occupation. The *intifada* was the flashpoint. The explosion reflected the accumulation of past experiences and suffering more than any specific event that triggered on the first day of the uprising, and strategically, it was the golden opportunity for the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood to notice the uprising. It did just so by creating Hamas. Contesting the latter's claim to be the sole representative of the Palestinian people, Hamas refused to join the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) and pursued its own resistance agenda based on its bedrock theme "Islam is the solution." By portraying its struggle as the latest link in the chain of jihad against the Jewish state, the Islamist group sought to command the legitimacy required to direct the Palestinian revolt. In any case, what attracted a growing number of Palestinians to the movement since Hamas first appeared in Gaza was its emphasis on establishing Islamic moral order and social solidarity promoted by a network of charities and welfare organizations.

The ultimate aim of Hamas is to liberate Palestine from occupation by the "Zionist enemy" and re-establish an Islamic state in Palestine. Hamas's aims is spelled out in the charter issued on 18 August 1988, which contains the philosophy of the movement, its rationale, and its positions not only on the central issue of the Palestine problem but also on social welfare and the Palestinian nationalist movement. Hamas seeks the destruction of Israel and holy war, or jihad, in order to establish Palestine as an Islamic state. It views Palestine as a religious trust or *waqf*

that should remain under Muslim control for eternity. Article 36, which spelled out the movement's Islamic orientation it showed its attitude towards Israel to be much more uncompromising than that of the PLO and the nationalist mainstream.⁷

Regarding peace negotiations and initiatives, the Charter's article 13 states,

The initiatives conflict, what are called 'Peaceful Solutions' and 'International Conferences' to solve the Palestinian problem. As far as the ideology of the Islamic Resistance Movement is concerned, giving up any part of Palestine is like giving up part of its religion. The nationalism of the Islamic Resistance Movement is part of its religion, in that it educates its members, and they perform Jihad to raise the banner of Allah over their nation.⁸

According to Hamas, there is no solution to the Palestine problem except jihad: "When an enemy occupies some of the Muslim lands, jihad becomes obligatory on every Muslim." Thus, all peace initiatives are a "waste of time and acts of absurdity." In keeping with this, Hamas protested against the peace conference held in Madrid in October 1991, and it continues to oppose Palestinian participation in the Arab-Israeli negotiations, calling for immediate withdrawal from these negotiations.⁹

Prior to the formation of Hamas, the Palestinian wing of the Muslim Brotherhood had in fact concentrated all its efforts towards building a large, organized social base for a political alternative to the Fatah. Based on grassroots popularity and support, Hamas tried to lever itself into a dominant position in Palestinian politics by steadfastly opposing the PLO's quest for peace in the wake of the signing of the Oslo Agreement in 1993. Believing that the problem of Palestine is a religious problem that "transcends politics" and cannot be settled by political means, Hamas has rejected categorically the concept of coexistence with Israel. Instead, it considers the destruction of the Jewish state as an essential pre-condition for the liberation of Palestine. This is underlined by the charter of the movement, published in 1988; it describes the land of Palestine as an "Islamic trust" consecrated for the future generations of Muslims until the "Day of Judgment," and any negotiations with the enemy over Palestine amount to treason.

Holding on to its rejectionist line, Hamas not only boycotted the 1996 Parliamentary elections of the Palestinian Authority (PA) which bore the Oslo deal, it also tried to undermine the process of accommodation with Israel by unleashing a spate of suicide strikes through its military wing, known as the Izz al-Din Qassam Brigades. While the al-Qassam martyr brigades won admiration for Hamas, particularly among the young Palestinians, the Fatah-dominated PA came under Israeli pressure to suppress the fundamentalist movement which the Israelis had originally nurtured. As the Oslo process began to falter, leading to the outbreak of the second *intifada* in September 2000, Hamas grew in strength, cashing in on popular disillusionment and the dissipating credibility of the PA amidst Israel's assaults on its institutions including the forceful confinement of its chairman Yasser Arafat. Indicative of Hamas's growth as a formidable political rival was its electoral victories, beginning with elections in 2004 and 2005 and culminating with the 2006 parliamentary elections. However, Hamas's ascendancy in Palestinian politics is less due to its rejectionist message or pursuit of its moral agenda than the progressive erosion of popular confidence on the secular nationalists represented by the Fatah.

Grassroots work has always been Hamas's strongest aspect. Its unstoppable rise over the past 20 years and eventual triumph over other Palestinian factions is largely attributed to its success in social work. This work takes the form of providing structured educational, health and welfare

services, and help to the poor. Through powerful pervasive networks of charities, mosques, unions, schools and sport clubs, Hamas's assistance and care of needy people have been felt personally by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians. The provision of these services has also been marked by honesty and transparency, which equally has always been compared with the corrupt performance of other major Palestinian factions, particularly Fatah, which controlled the Palestinian Authority from 1994. The popularity of Hamas and its victory in the 2006 elections is at least partially an outcome of its sustained devotion to helping the poor. Hamas was known to give its monthly help even to people who worked for the Fatah Palestinian Authority when their income was considered to be below the poverty line. Known to be Hamas's major strategic strength, the Islamic charities and institutions run by the movement have always been targeted by Israel. For years, Israeli attacks aimed to close down these charities, block their funds, and mobilize international campaigns against their external donors. Israel has tried to claim that Hamas's social work organizations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip channel funds to Hamas's military activities. However, the real intention behind the continuous harassment and closure of these charities and facilities, either by Israel or later by the Palestinian Authority, was the popularity they bring to Hamas.

Hamas is composed of three interrelated wings. The social welfare and political wings are the public faces of the group's social, administrative, political, and propaganda activities. The military wing is principally engaged in covert activities such as executing suspected collaborators, surveillance of potential targets, procuring weapons, and carrying out guerilla and military attacks. From the start, however, the military wing of Hamas was divided into regional networks and local cells which communicated secretly through coded messages which passed through internal communications channels, especially couriers. The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, named after Izz al-Din al-Qassam, are the military wing of the Palestinian Islamist political organization of Hamas. Created in 1992, under the direction of Yahya Ayyash, the primary objective of the group was to build a coherent military organization to support the goals of Hamas; he was concerned with blocking the Oslo Accords negotiations. From 1994 to 2010, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades carried out a number of attacks against both Israeli soldiers and civilians.

Hamas has always tried to replace Fatah as the pioneer of Palestinian aspirations. There are several leaders who played an important role in the formation and popularity of Hamas since its creation. These include some of the most popular names, like Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, Khaled Mishal, and Mousa Abu Marzook. From the beginning, the leadership structure of Hamas is divided into parallel but straightly dissimilar parts, one inside Palestine and one outside Palestine. The inside leadership has gained the movement via internal elections, a practice that is well established within Islamist movements that have a Muslim Brotherhood background and traditions. The outside leadership evolved differently because Hamas does not have the same sort of membership organization as it has in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This outside Palestinian leadership was originally formed in coordination with the inside Hamas primarily as a backup mechanism at the time when the movement was formed in the latter. It was plausibly thought that Hamas would need external support financially and politically, and this was to be the job of the outside leadership in exile. Hamas's leadership is effectively divided between three geographical areas: the West Bank, the Gaza Strip(both inside Palestine), and exile communities, largely in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria (outside Palestine). It is a matter of judgment which of the three enjoys more powers, and the opinion which is most powerful has strong grounds. In general, the balance of power has always favored the inside leadership. After Hamas

came to power in 2006, the inside leadership was strengthened even further. But it is fair to say that the two branches' inside leadership (in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) control the muscles of the Palestinian movement, while the outside leadership controls financial resources and external contacts.

Chapter 3, "Ideological Roots of Hamas-Fatah Conflict," will trace the ideological differences between the two rival Palestinian factions and explain the extent to which they have contributed to their political hostility. It will also attempt an assessment of the impact of ideology on their strategy for a national liberation project. This becomes imperative for an understanding of Hamas's reluctance to renounce violence as an instrument to achieve its politico-ideological goal of an Islamic Palestinian state. The ideological difference between Hamas and Fatah is one of the main factors of conflict in Palestinian politics. Hamas rose in Palestinian politics as an Islamic organization and brings Islamic ideology. Hamas's ideology is based largely upon the principles of Islamic fundamentalism that were gaining momentum throughout the Arab world. The goal of the founders was to become directly involved in the *intifada* and ultimately gain control of the Palestinian movement and bring it more in line with fundamentalist Islamic thought.

The Fatah movement is based on secular ideology and fighting for Palestinian peoples. An article of the Fatah's constitution mentions that Palestine is part of the Arab World and the Palestinian people are part of the Arab Nation, and their struggle is part of its struggle. The Palestinian people have an independent identity. They are the sole authority that decides their own destiny, and they have complete sovereignty on all their lands (Article 2). Regarding a Palestinian state, Article 12 calls for "complete liberation of Palestine, and eradication of Zionist economic, political, military and cultural existence."¹⁰ The movement also calls for establishing an independent democratic state with complete sovereignty over all Palestinian lands, Jerusalem as its capital city, and the protection of the citizens' legal and equal rights without racial or religious discrimination.

Hamas emerged as a key supporter of the anti-Israeli movement in Palestine. Given its Islamic ideological grounds, Hamas successfully took Arab and Palestinian support inside and outside of Palestinian territory. But the PLO failed to mobilize the Palestinian people. It was obligatory, they claimed, to wage Islamic jihad against the Jewish state of Israel. Almost immediately, Hamas began to challenge Fatah. The Islamist group saw this as trying to "dominate control of the uprising." The first *bayan* bearing Hamas's name appeared on 11 February 1988. The Palestinian Hamas cites that "decision making of Hamas is based on cost benefit considerations." Hamas was "far from being static or simply reverting to an ancient Islamic model, rather it can be characterized as based on traditional Islamic teaching, enriched with modern concepts and ideas of mainly western origin." For the rest of the *intifada*, Hamas and Fatah competed for the hearts and minds of West Bank and Gaza people, distributing leaflets and offering conflicting guidance about ideology, demonstrations, and civil strikes. In the same way, both Hamas and Fatah sought to claim credit for inspiring and guiding the uprising.

The Hamas-Fatah conflict is a subplot of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which itself is a subplot of the larger Arab-Israeli conflict. The Hamas-Israeli conflict especially has a complicating prospect of peace between Palestinians and Israelis. According to Hamas, Israel is an enemy state and has never been at peace with Palestinians. Hamas wants total destruction of Israel through Islamic jihad. Hamas doesn't recognize Israel's right to exist. Unlike Hamas, the Fatah movement has a soft approach towards Israel. The Fatah movement promoted armed struggle to liberate all Palestine from Israeli control. It developed into the largest Palestinian political faction and, after recognizing Israel's right to exist, led efforts towards a two-state

solution with Israel under the 1993 Oslo Peace Accord.

Broadly, [Chapter 4](#), “ Hamas-Fatah: The Struggle for Power” analyzes Hamas’s response to the Oslo accord in 1993. It will also outline Hamas’s role in electoral politics, because Hamas has participated in electoral politics since the 1990s and emerged as the largest party in the Palestinian parliamentary election in 2006. Signed on 13 September 1993, the Oslo Peace Accord is officially called the Declaration of Principles (DOP) on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. The DOP was a milestone in the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, one of the major continuing issues within the wider Arab-Israeli conflict. It was the first direct face-to-face accord between the Israeli government and the PLO. It was proposed as a framework for future negotiations and relations between the Israeli government and Palestinians, within which all outstanding “final status issues” between the two states would be addressed and resolved.¹¹ The Oslo Accord was the framework for the future relations between the two parties, and it provided for the creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA). The Palestinian Authority would have responsibility for the administration of the territory under its control. The Oslo Accords also called for the withdrawal of the IDF from some parts of the Gaza Strip and West Bank. Along with the principles, the two groups signed Letters of Mutual Recognition, in which Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, while the PLO recognized the right of the state of Israel to exist and renounced terrorism as well as other violence and its desire for the destruction of the Israeli state. The aim of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations was to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, an elected Council, for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement.¹²

The Oslo Accords, the mutual recognition statements that formed its prelude have to be considered as well. The PLO was making far greater compromises on its principles than the Israeli government. The latter merely accepted the PLO as the spokesmen of the Palestinian people and agreed to talk to them. The PLO, by contrast, gave up its historic refusal to recognize the existence of Israel and the right to wage an armed struggle to liberate Palestinian land. Furthermore, by committing not to use “terrorism,” it implicitly accepted the long-held Israeli accusation that it was a terrorist organization, rather than a group engaged in a legitimate freedom struggle. The commitment to ensure compliance by all PLO and other personnel would be considered. Turning to the Oslo Accords themselves, the biggest fault in these was that they left so many points of contention to the permanent status negotiations that were to follow. Indeed, they left all the important issues unresolved. These included the status of Jerusalem, the future of Palestinian refugees, of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and, very importantly, the future borders of a Palestinian state. The differences between the Palestinians and Israelis on these issues were almost poles apart. Taking the question of Jerusalem, for example, the Palestinians were quite clear that (East) Jerusalem would be the capital of a Palestinian state. But, around the very time when the DOP was being signed, Prime Minister Rabin made it clear that Jerusalem would remain united and under Israeli control; it would never be ceded to the Palestinians. The Gulf between Israeli and Palestinian positions on the other issues was equally great.

The Oslo Peace Accord came about largely as a result of Hamas’s challenge to the PLO and Israel. The accord has been the great challenge faced by Hamas. The movement has known from the outset that its own success is premised on the failure of Yasser Arafat’s colossal gamble on accommodation with Israel. Hamas boycotted the Oslo Accord as well as the first Palestinian general election held in 1996. If Hamas remains an important player, it is largely because, in the

five years since the historic handshake on the White House lawn in September 1993, the Oslo Accords have yielded so little return to the Palestinians. Not only have hopes of peace and a just settlement been unfulfilled, but Palestinians have had to swallow the bitter pill of an embryonic government riddled with corruption and holding democracy and personal rights in flagrant contempt. With the disappointments of the peace process, Hamas has been able to maintain popular support as the main opposition to Oslo. From its Muslim Brotherhood beginnings, it has emerged as a new Palestinian nationalist movement of Islamic hue. Indeed, it could be said to have followed in the footsteps of Fatah, whose founding fathers were either members of the Muslim Brotherhood or, like Arafat, closely connected to it, and to have taken on the discarded aims and methods of the PLO: the liberation of Palestine and armed struggle. But Hamas has not been able to bring about the official demise of Oslo or to replace the Palestinian leadership. On the contrary, the Palestinian Authority has succeeded through international agreements and other factors in becoming yet more firmly entrenched. Since the Wyes Plantation accord of 23 October 1998, Hamas and the other Islamists have become the target of the US-Israeli global war against terrorism into which Oslo has now been locked, and a serious effort to eliminate Hamas is underway.¹³

In the post-Oslo years, Fatah became a state party with its focus gradually shifting from the liberation agenda to building state institutions, distributing benefits, and guaranteeing security for Israel by reining in the extremists. Consequently, Fatah's organizational structures were neglected, undermining its ability to mobilize supporters and maintain discipline among the cadres. To this organizational weakness was added the PA's reputation for inefficiency and corruption leading to the loss of popular confidence on Fatah. While saddled with a moribund peace process, Fatah failed to revitalize the movement's presence on the ground partly because of Israel's relentless destruction of its institutions and local cadres in the wake of the second *intifada* and, partly, Fatah's internal division following the death of Arafat in November 2004. Indeed, a series of electoral contests since 2004 revealed Fatah's declining political fortunes and the corresponding popularity of Hamas that culminated in its resounding victory in the January 2006 parliamentary elections.

Chapter 5, "The Second Partition of Palestine," will analyze the policy, strategy, and approach adopted by the outside players, notably the United States (US), European Union (EU), Israel, and some Arab states. The extent to which some of them have contributed to moderating or the hardening of Hamas's position as regards the reconciliation with its rival Fatah will be critically examined. This will be, however, preceded by an analysis of the thorny relations between the two major Palestinian factions in the aftermath of Hamas's landslide victory in 2006. The discussion will also cover the difficulties facing the Hamas-led government through the rounds of factional fighting and formation of the national unity government to its collapse with the Hamas takeover of Gaza and its consequences and outside actors' response. On 26 January 2006, Hamas won a stunning victory in Palestinian parliamentary elections that gave it a decisive majority in the legislature. Fatah was out of power for the first time in its history, and many experts claimed it would have to alter its political outlook in order to regain popularity. The current President, Mahmoud Abbas, who won a convincing election victory of his own in early 2005, confirmed that Hamas would form the next government. Hamas officials say they will seek a government of national unity with Fatah and other factions, but will govern alone if coalition talks fail. The movement's nomination for the post of prime minister is Ismail Haniyeh, who is considered by many to be a relative moderate.

In the meantime, Hamas, which had been designated a foreign terrorist organization by the

United States and European Union, prepared to lead the Palestinian parliament. The group had never entered the political dominion prior to its 2006 victory, and in the view of many, Hamas had to be more politically accommodating if it intended to retain its governing authority. Immediately after the election, the West Asian Quartet (the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations) indicated that assistance to the PA would continue only if Hamas renounced violence, recognized Israel, and accepted previous Palestinian-Israeli agreements, which Hamas refused to do. On 7 April 2006, the United States and the EU, which had been the Palestinian Authority's (PA) largest donor since it was created in 1994 under the Oslo Peace Accord, announced they were halting assistance to the Hamas-led PA government. At the same time, Israel began withholding about \$50 million in monthly tax and customs receipts that it collected for the PA. In addition, the PA lost access to banking services and loans as banks around the world refused to deal with Hamas for fear of running afoul of US anti-terrorism laws and being cut off from the US banking system. In 2005, international assistance and the Israeli-collected revenues together accounted for about two-thirds of PA revenues. The resulting fiscal crisis left the Hamas-led government unable to pay wages regularly and deepened poverty levels in the Palestinian territories. By the end of 2006, tensions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were rising as living conditions deteriorated and PA employees, including members of the security forces, went unpaid for weeks or months. Armed supporters of Fatah and Hamas clashed repeatedly, trading accusations of blame, settling scores, and drifting into lawlessness.¹⁴

Despite the debacle, Fatah, wary of losing its control of the Palestinian security apparatus, chose to deny Hamas political space in the PA. As the latter sought to assert its newfound power, fighting between two Palestinian factions broke out that ended with the Mecca accord and formation of a national unity government in March 2007. The Mecca accord was signed between rival Palestinian groups Hamas and Fatah, under the auspices of the Saudi leadership, to stop the armed conflict inside Palestine. It did not say anything about the acceptance of the right of the Jewish state to exist, or for Palestinians to halt their militant activities and implement all previous agreements reached, including the Road Map. The Mecca agreement instead stressed the need for the Palestinians to unify in order to remove the "occupier" from Palestinian lands.¹⁵ Hamas was sure that the accord would bring internal Palestinian reconciliation and enable them to turn their resources to the conflict with Israel and its challenges, but it failed because of the dubious role of outside actors. The ongoing struggle for political supremacy, however, resulted in the resumption of armed clashes in Gaza, leading to the collapse of the national unity government, with Hamas assuming power in Gaza alone after routing its rival forces in June 2007.

Responding to the developments in Gaza, President Mahmoud Abbas dismissed Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas and appointed Salam Fayyad to head the government of the Palestinian autonomous entity based in Ramallah in West Bank. Despite the fact that the new government's claim extended to all Palestinian territories, in effect it became limited to the PA-controlled areas of the West Bank, as Hamas has not been recognized. The Fatah-led new government has won widespread international support. Outside actors argued that the West Bank-based Cabinet formed by Fayyad was the sole legitimate Palestinian government, while the Hamas government has been facing an international diplomatic and economic isolation since 2007. In the following years, while contesting each other's legitimacy to rule, Hamas and Fatah participated in the intermittent reconciliation talks sponsored by Yemen in 2008 and Egypt in 2011 but failed to produce an agreement aimed at establishing a unity government to conduct the Palestinian elections due in January 2010. The outside actors, notably the US, EU, and Israel, played no mean role in contributing to the confrontation between the two Palestinian factions.

The last chapter, “Political Landscape of Palestine aftermath of Arab Spring,” will analyze issues of Palestinian politics after the “Arab Spring” of 2011. The revolutions that had erupted across West Asia and North Africa to create the Arab Spring had left almost no corner of the region untouched. From Qatar and Algeria to Syria and Tunisia, a surge of newfound pride and energy has fundamentally reshaped the political landscape of West Asia and forever altered the course of the region’s history. It was hardly surprising, then, that the dynamic of the region’s universal issue—the question of Palestine—had also been affected. Just a few days after the upheaval of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak following massive popular protests, President Mahmoud Abbas sought to demonstrate that he was aware of the changes sweeping West Asia and the ramifications they could have for the legitimacy of his own leadership.¹⁶ Abbas announced that he was accepting the resignations of all of the members of the Palestinian cabinet and instructing Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to quickly assemble a new cabinet. At the same time, Abbas called for new elections for the PA to take place by September.

After the domestic pressure, Fatah and Hamas finally managed a reconciliation agreement under Egyptian auspices after countless mediation efforts. The agreed document entitled the Palestinian National Reconciliation Agreement, was signed in Cairo on 4 May 2011.¹⁷ Both President Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mishal announced their intention to forge a power-sharing agreement.¹⁸ In the series of unity deals, Hamas, represented by Mishal, and the Fatah Movement, represented by Abbas as its head and Palestinian Authority President, again signed the Doha Agreement on 6 February 2012, where they reviewed the steps that have been taken so far so as to implement the reconciliation agreement’s mechanisms, and the obstacles that stuck its implementation; and the need to overcome those obstacles was stressed.

After the Hamas-Fatah unity deal in Doha, Israeli Defense Forces launched a military operation in the Gaza Strip against Hamas, called “Operation Returning Echo” in March 2012. It was the worst eruption of violence covered by the media in the region since the Israeli “Operation Cast Lead” or Gaza War of 2008–2009. After a few months of Operation Returning Echo, Hamas and Israel again got involved in the war. On 14 November 2012, Israel again launched a military operation against the Palestinians who were living in the Gaza Strip and supporting Hamas’s anti-Israel agenda, which was called “Operation Pillar of Defense” or “Pillar of Cloud.” It was an eight-day IDF military operation in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip, which started with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, chief of the Gaza military wing of Hamas, by an Israeli airstrike.¹⁹

In the history of the Palestinian National Movement, 29 November 2012 was a milestone, when the State of Palestine was recognized by the UN General Assembly with the status of a non-member observer state in the United Nations, which was a step towards recognition of Palestinian statehood. In this voting 138 countries were in favor, 9 were against (Canada, Czech Republic, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Panama, Palau, and the United States), and 41 abstentions.²⁰ After the UN Resolution, Palestinian President Abbas said, “The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: enough of aggression, settlements and occupation.” Indeed, following Israel’s latest violence against the Gaza Strip, the international community now faced “the last chance” to save the long-mysterious two-state solution, he said, adding: “the window of opportunity is narrowing and time is quickly running out.”²¹ In December 2012, in the aftermath of the UN status upgrade of the State of Palestine and end of the Hamas-Israel conflict in Gaza, calls for a unified Palestinian front have increased, and the political leaders of Hamas and Fatah took many steps to reconcile their differences. On 23 April 2014, Hamas and Fatah signed a historic reconciliation deal, nearly seven years after a

schism between the rival Palestinian factions. The reconciliation deal is based primarily on the agreements, which were signed by Hamas and Fatah in Cairo and Doha.

On 8 July 2014, Israel launched “Operation Protective Edge” against Palestinian peoples specially who were living in the Gaza Strip. Israel was trying to punish them because they supported Hamas’s political agenda in Palestinian politics against Israel. Another reason was that Hamas signed a reconciliation deal with its political rival Fatah on 23 April 2014. Consequently, the Palestinian unity government was sworn on 2 June 2014. In response to the Palestinian unity deal, Israel announced it would not negotiate any peace deal with the new government.

On 12 October 2017, Palestinian rival factions Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation deal in Cairo by the Fatah’s leader Azzam al-Ahmad and Hamas deputy politburo chief Salah al-Arouri under Egyptian auspices, as part of an effort to end a decade-long rift. The announcement came after representatives from Hamas and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority convened in Cairo to implement a unity agreement that was signed in 2011 and 2014 but not put into action.²² Consequently, Hamas agreed to hand over administrative control of Gaza, including the key Rafah border crossing, a decade after seizing the enclave in a civil war in 2007.²³

On 6 December 2017, a political earthquake came into Palestinian politics as well as world politics when US President Donald Trump announced that the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.²⁴ During his announcement, President Trump clearly said,

I have determined that it is time for the United States to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This long overdue recognition of reality is in the best interests of both the United States and the pursuit of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.²⁵

After Trump’s declaration in December 2017, there were several demonstrations throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip against the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the moving of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In March 2018, the Palestinians launched six weeks of protests in the Gaza Strip, near the Gaza-Israel border, which were called the “Great March of Return” by the organizers. The demonstrators demanded that Palestinian refugees and their children be allowed to return to the land, which was occupied by Israel in the 1967 war.²⁶

On 13 April 2019, Palestinian President Abbas formed the new government under the leadership of a loyalist of his Fatah party, Mohammad Shatye, with twenty-one members of the cabinet, consisting mainly of ministers from factions linked to the PLO, especially Fatah, but excluding Hamas and the Islamic Jihad movement.²⁷ Hamas criticized the formation of the new Palestinian government dominated by Fatah and said such a government would ease the way for the imposition of the United States’ yet-to-be-unveiled proposal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The political tensions that characterized the Hamas-Fatah power struggle had paralyzed the Palestinian legislature. Therefore, the outside players have adopted a divide and rule policy between Hamas and Fatah. It can be concluded, after the Arab Spring, that Hamas had strengthened by exploiting and dominating the emerging narrative of change associated with the altered ideological environment. On the other hand, it has had negative consequences for Hamas’s enemy in Israel as well as its Palestinian secular counterpart Fatah. After the Arab Spring, it also proved that the outside actors have not been able to play a dubious role between the rival factions Hamas and Fatah.

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1

FATAH IN PALESTINIAN POLITICS

The roots of the Palestine-Israeli conflict can be traced to the 1917 Balfour Declaration that formally paved the way for the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel in May 1948. Since the creation of Israel, Palestinians have been without a state, but not without much of the apparatus that makes up a state, viz. political parties, movements, and militant organizations. The earliest and most enduring of post-1948 Palestinian political parties is Fatah, the Palestinian National Liberation Organization. Since the 1970s it has been the dominant faction of the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Indeed, the Palestinian liberation movement was closely identified with Fatah for decades until the emergence of Islamic Resistance Movement, popularly known as Hamas in the latter half of the 1980s. In the following two decades, especially since the signing of the Oslo Accords with Israel in September 1993, Fatah began to lose ground to its Islamist rival, so much so that the latter's electoral victory in the 2006 Palestinian general elections marked the end of Fatah's political primacy. This chapter presents a brief account of the rise and growth of Fatah in the backdrop of the end of Pan-Arabism in the wake of the June 1967 Arab-Israel War creating conditions conducive to the spread of Palestinian particularist assertions.

First partition of Palestine

After World War II, thousands of Holocaust survivors flooded into Palestine. Insurgent operations took place, as fighting and terrorism increased. In such an atmosphere of suspicion, allegation, sabotage, and murder, it had become clear that the British were not able to solve the problem.¹ Due to bloodshed between Arabs and Jews, Britain decided to refer the issue to the United Nations. On 18 February 1947, then British Foreign Secretary Bevin announced the decision of the British government to submit the Palestinian problem to the United Nations (UN).² The United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) was established to examine the entire situation and all the factors involved.³ The UNSCOP was composed of representatives of eleven states: Austria, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, the Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay, and Yugoslavia.⁴ UNSCOP was not able to present a unanimous report. Three countries—India, Iran, and Yugoslavia—presented a minority report. They proposed a federal Palestinian state. The Arab Higher Committee boycotted UNSCOP on

the basis that it was confusing the Jewish refugee crisis with the Palestine question, and that the continual flow of committees of inquiry was a violation of the Palestinians' rights as the indigenous population of the land.⁵ The UNSCOP recommended the following:

- That the British Mandate should be terminated and Palestine given independence.
- That in the interregnum Palestine should be put under UN supervision.
- That the European refugee problem should be connected with the Palestine issues, in as much as the resolution of the latter would make resolution of the former easier.
- That the religious significance of all the Holy Place should be preserved.⁶

The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was a resolution adopted on 29 November 1947 by the UN General Assembly. Its title was United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181, Future Government of Palestine. Following the formation of the British Mandate, Palestine was partitioned into two states: one a Jewish state and the other an Arab state.⁷ The Zionists favored partition, while Arabs rejected it. Consequently, the political committee of the United Nations considered the partition plan. The committee divided Palestine into six parts: three for Arabs and three for Jews. Even though the division was made according to the concentration of each group in a given area, there were 10,000 Jews in the Arab state and nearly 500,000 Arabs (48%) in the Jewish state. Fifty-six percent of the area of Palestine was given to the Jews, who constituted about 30% of the whole population, and 43% was given to the Arabs. The remaining 1% area of Jerusalem and Bethlehem was to be under international control.⁸

The UN resolution included a highly detailed description of the recommended boundaries for each proposed state. It also contained a plan for an economic union between the proposed states, and a plan for the protection of religious and minority rights. The resolution sought to address the conflicting objectives and claims to the Mandate territory of the two competing movements, Jewish nationalism (Zionism) and Arab nationalism, as well as to resolve the plight of Jews displaced as a result of the Holocaust. The Jews welcomed the partition plan and the Arabs strongly opposed it. Despite the Arabs' opposition and intense diplomatic bargaining and lobbying at the United Nations, the Partition Plan (Resolution 181) was approved by the required two-thirds vote on 2 November 1947.⁹ But, it soon became clear that partition would not be gifted by diplomacy.

Birth of Israel and the first Arab–Israeli war of 1948

The first partition of Palestine not only led to the Arab-Israeli War in 1948 but also laid the foundation of a new Palestinian movement, based primarily upon the use of violence as a political weapon.¹⁰ In secret understanding with the Jews and the US, the British withdrew from Palestine on 14 May 1948, without transferring power to any administration for the first time in their colonial history.¹¹ On 15 May 1948 the British forces withdrew their last detachment and the mandate came to an end. One day before, on 14 May 1948, the Palestinian Jewish community had declared the establishment of Israel as an independent state.

On 17 May 1948, the Soviet Union, which favored the Partition Plan, recognized Israel as an independent state. The United States and most other states also immediately recognized Israel and stimulated the Arabs.¹²

At this critical juncture, the regular Arab armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan

crossed into Palestine to rescue their Arab borders. The initial localized fighting took a new dimension and erupted into a full-fledged war¹³ in which joint Arab armies were involved: 6,000 Jordanians, 9,000 Iraqis, 5,000 Egyptians, 1,000 Syrians, 3,000 Saudis, and some 3,000 volunteers from other Arab countries. On the borders were 4,000 Jordanians, 1,000 Iraqis, 8,000 Egyptians, 1,500 Syrians, 800 Lebanese, and 3,500 volunteers from other Arab countries. The Arab forces amounted to some 46,000 in total. The Israeli forces in Palestine comprised 17,000 mobile attack troops, 8,000 semi-mobile attack troops, 50,000 regular defense troops, 12,000 members of *Irgun*, and somewhere between 400 and 800 members of the Stern Gang, constituting a total Israeli fighting force of some 97,800.¹⁴

During the war, outside actors also played key roles in ensuring victory for the Israeli forces. Britain, the USA, and the USSR supported the Israeli government and sent their troops to assist the Israeli army. These included 300 British-trained officers, some 20,000 veterans of the Second World War, and 3,000 specially trained commandos (Pal Mach).¹⁵ However, the courage and perseverance of the Israelis, who had high confidence and were fighting for their existence, could not be underestimated. On the other hand, the Arabs did not know what they were fighting for, and their leaders were not without their national, personal, and vested interests. Commenting on the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, an analyst writes:

Both armies were unequally prepared at the start, but the Israelis were supplied with necessary arms by the Zionists in America and Europe, and with airplanes piloted by volunteers from England, the United States and South Africa. The war lasted from 15 May 1948 until 24 February 1949. During these nine months there were two cease-fires. By the terms of each truce, the contending armies were to hold their positions and were not supposed to be reinforced with additional men or arms. Both sides ignored the second part of the agreement. The Arabs, however, were not able to avoid the arms ban on the whole area. But the Israelis were able to purchase great quantities of first-class armaments from Czechoslovakia. Flying fortresses from the United States and Beau-fighters from Britain were smuggled into Israel.¹⁶

During the war the Palestinian resistance was crushed and the Arab armies were defeated.¹⁷ In this war Palestine lost more than 78% of the land of Palestine including the western part of their capital, Jerusalem. What remained to the Palestinians were two separate pieces of land known as the West Bank (of the Jordan River) adjacent to the country of Jordan, which included a fragment of their old capital city, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip on the Mediterranean bordering the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula.¹⁸ As a result of the 1948 war, approximately 700,000 to 800,000¹⁹ Palestinians were expelled from their homes, cities, and villages to neighboring countries by Zionist forces. These dispossessed Palestinians began to live in the refugee camps in different neighboring countries in a state of deprivation and squalor. It was a product of their oppressive situations in the refugee camps which made the return to Palestine an urgent necessity.

Formation of Fatah

After the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948, Fatah was the first Palestinian organization, founded on 10 October 1959 by a small nucleus of young Palestinian radicals fully dedicated to the goal of

liberating Palestine through violent struggle. While Fatah was not the first Palestinian group to emerge in the post-1948 era, it was the first organization to embrace a new and specifically Palestinian-centered strategic orientation, and place the Palestinian struggle at the focus of its organizational existence.²⁰ The late 1940s and early 1950s were a time of rapid social and political change for the Arab states bordering Israel.²¹ Egypt, for instance, engaged in the struggle for the end of Britain's military presence following the overthrow of its monarchy in 1952. Syria was undergoing a succession of coups and counter coups. Lebanon, behind a facade of growing wealth and Westernization, was storing up the discontent, which led to the civil war of 1958.²² Jordan was passing through a spell of instability following the assassination of King Abdullah in 1951 at Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque.

In Cairo, in particular, the years immediately preceding the Free Officers' coup against the monarchy in 1952 were marked by an often clashing ferment of 'universalist' ideas from communism, pan-Arabism, and Muslim fundamentalism, each of which sought, in adopting the Palestinian cause as its own, consciously or unconsciously thereby to subordinate it to its own.²³ In 1951, as Yasser Arafat set about reorganizing the General Union of Palestine Students (GUPS) in Cairo, he found several fellow students who agreed with his "Palestine-first" orientation.²⁴ Among them was Salah Khalaf, a student of literature, some four years younger than Arafat, whose adolescence had been seared by the experience of the mass flight of the population of Arab Jaffa from their city.²⁵ "Khalaf's family had been able to pack into a crowded ship which took them to Gaza, but he later recalled having seen at least one woman drown in the chaos of the boarding." Khalaf was later to emerge, from behind a jovial exterior, as chief of Fatah's security services, and as a powerful orator and organizer for the movement in his own right. As he later recollected his early discussions with Arafat in Cairo:

Yasser Arafat and I knew what was damaging to the Palestinian cause. We were convinced, for example, that the Palestinians could expect nothing from the Arab regimes, for the most part corrupt or tied to imperialism, and that they were wrong to bank on any of the political parties in the region. We believed that the Palestinians could rely only on themselves.²⁶

The Cairo group was already defining what was to be one of the foundations of Fatah's ideology. By concentrating solely on the question of Palestine and how to regain it for its original inhabitants, Arafat and Khalaf and the group, which developed in collaboration with them in Cairo, hoped to cut away all the excess intellectual baggage of the more universal ideologies and return to what they considered the essentials.²⁷ Elsewhere throughout the Palestinian Diaspora, other similar grouplets were meanwhile coalescing along more or less parallel lines. The first test of the grouping in Cairo came with the Palestinian Students' Union elections in September 1952. The importance of this vote lay in the fact that, as Khalaf accounted it, the Union was "the only Palestinian organisation which held democratic elections."²⁸

In 1956 Arafat was not quite ready to become a full-time politician or soldier. After receiving his engineering degree with a specialty in sanitation, he took a job with the Egyptian Cement Corporation as an engineer.²⁹ At this time Arafat was twenty-seven years old with no previous employment record and, unusual among Arabs, neither a wife nor children. Whatever his connections had been with the Muslim Brotherhood and the Egyptian army or intelligence services,³⁰ Arafat had no great political prospects either, save for his natural talents. He had four particular advantages that would help him to attain the political heights. First, during these years,

he was developing the Arafat personality. Automatically and through observing President Nasser, he grasped the importance of the politician as actor, a man who radiated charisma and personified his hopes.³¹ Charisma did not come naturally to Arafat, who was short, ungraceful, and no great speaker. Yet he was able to develop personal symbols, which would become world famous, to make up for these deficiencies: the stubble of beard, the kaffiya (headscarf), and the military uniform among them. The result was his embodiment of a combination of roles: fighter, traditional patriarch, and typical Palestinian.³²

Second, in contrast to almost anyone else, Arafat had the proper worldview to become the emerging consensus leader of the Palestinian nationalist movement. He was neither an Islamist nor a leftist, who in any case would have limited his appeal, but he was able to learn from the political and revolutionary experience of both camps.³³ Equally important is the fact that Arafat was not a Pan-Arab nationalist owing allegiance to the leader of some Arab state, dependent on its will and waiting for it to solve the problem. Even in the 1950s, he was already grasping the future trends for Third World revolution, including the glamour of violence and the use of public relations methods, which would fully emerge a decade later.³⁴ Third, Arafat had no real competition in his chosen arena. There was no other serious Palestinian group or leader in the field at the time. Throughout his career, he did encounter personal and institutional rivalries. Finally, he had a group of colleagues, some of them quite able, who could balance his shortcomings but who lacked the ambition to seize leadership. Arafat had already worked closely with Abu Iyad, and during his student days he also met another key figure in Fatah's history, Khalil al-Wazir (later known as Abu Jihad), who was studying humanities at Alexandria University, Egypt. Abu Jihad was seven years younger than Arafat, an age difference that was apparently enough for Arafat to regard him a bit paternalistically.³⁵

Era of Nasser

The Sinai Campaign climaxed a period of mounting regional tensions. Initiated by Israel, France, and the UK, the war was designed to promote their various unilateral interests against President Nasser's growing opposition to the West's traditional influence in the West Asian region. An excuse for the military operation was the nationalization by Egypt on 26 July 1956.³⁶ In the background was the failure of negotiation on terms for terminating the British military presence in the Canal Zone, and the abandonment by the ruling Egyptian Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) of previous pro-Western sympathies.

The anti-Western orientation, which precipitated Egypt's alignment with the non-aligned bloc, was intended to silence criticism by the Muslim Brotherhood opposition movement regarding the Western influence in the country. Western and particularly American opposition to a high Arab profile within the regional security frameworks in planning stages had also played a major role in encouraging an anti-Western policy line. The rejection of Egypt's request for financial aid by US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, while seeking to deprive Egypt of other sources of assistance, further accelerated these emerging tendencies. The years preceding the war marked an upward spiral of the regional arms race. The US rejected Israel's requests for arms, though it did not disapprove of deliveries of arms to Israel from other suppliers.³⁷ Hence, in 1956 the first delivery of French arms and combat aircraft, conducted under terms of a framework agreement concluded in 1954, reached the Israeli army. Egypt, for its part, reached an agreement with Czechoslovakia on a large supply of Soviet-made arms. The deal, signed in September 1955,

reinforced President Nasser's position as leader of the Arab world and spelled an end to Western hegemony in West Asia.³⁸

The arms deal between Czechoslovakia and Egypt was perceived by Israeli leaders as an indication that Egypt was preparing for war.³⁹ Consequently, voices in Israel's security and political leadership calling for a pre-emptive military strike became louder and increasingly influential among security decision-makers. France, irritated by Egypt's support for the rebels in Algeria, resolved to encourage Israel's preference toward a pre-emptive strike, in order to curtail assistance by Arab states to the North African rebels. The tension along the Israeli-Egyptian border also increased, clashes became more frequent, and the Gaza Strip became the target for repeated Israeli cross-border retaliatory operations. On 12 September 1955, Egypt ordered the Straits of Tiran at the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba closed for passage of ships to and from the Red Sea port of Eilat. Seeking to neutralize the threat of the British-sponsored Baghdad Pact on the one hand and of Egyptian militancy on the other, and also in order to strengthen its strategic relations with France, Israel embarked on a major military move.⁴⁰

On 29 October 1956, the Israeli, British, and French armies invaded Gaza, Sinai, and the Suez Canal area.⁴¹ The Palestinian student activists in Cairo formed a Palestinian commando division to help the Egyptian war effort.⁴² According to Khalaf, "Yasser Arafat, who was a reserve officer at the time, was sent to Port Said as part of the engineering corps to participate in mine-sweeping operation."⁴³ Next, Arafat went to Kuwait, where he joined the Ministry of Public Works, later branching out to open his own contracting business there.⁴⁴ According to Cobban, "Khalaf spent a few years teaching in Egyptian-ruled Gaza before joining his old comrades in Kuwait and some other members of the Cairo group took up positions in the British-controlled Emirate (Princedom) of Qatar."⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, aware of the relevance of the West Asian conflict to the global framework of the Cold War, issued an ultimatum calling for an immediate cease-fire.⁴⁶ Firmly phrased letters were addressed to Israel, France, Britain, and the UN Security Council, as well as to the US. A cease-fire was declared on 6 November after pressure was exerted by the superpowers to bring the offensive to a halt. On 22 December 1956, the British and French forces withdrew from the area of the Canal, and the Israeli army completed its withdrawal from Sinai by March 1957. A UN force was deployed along the armistice lines.⁴⁷ Although the Suez war demonstrated Egypt's military margins, military defeat was soon translated into political victory. The historical influence of Britain and France in West Asia was terminated, and President Nasser scored a certain achievement by demonstrating his firm determination to end the Western occurrence on Egyptian soil.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, President Nasser's desire to exclude foreign participation from a regional security framework failed as Western influence in the region was replaced by Soviet predominance. The drawing in of West Asia into the framework of the Cold War was marked by increased Israeli-French strategic collaboration and by the initiation of a favorable shift in US-West Asia policy towards Israel.⁴⁹ At the same time, Soviet ties bolstered Egyptian strategic salience, and a new baseline was established for President Nasser's campaign for regional dominance.

Parallel to the entanglement of the region in the superpower rivalry during the Cold War, what ensued in West Asia in the succeeding year was the intra-Arab conflict, described by some analyst as the Arab Cold War. Characteristic of the Arab Cold War was the intense competition for regional primacy in the name of pan-Arab identity, central to which was the liberation of Palestine. Ironically, the dream of Arab unity remained elusive, as did the causes of Palestine despite the creation in January 1958 of the Egyptian-Syrian United Arab Republic (UAR).⁵⁰

While the formation of the UAR was supposed to advance the cause of Arab unity, in reality the union focused on the regional competition for power. In particular, this short-lived merger was meant to counterbalance both Iraq's claim to regional dominance and King Hussein's pro-Western policies.⁵¹ As a result, the small but active circles of politically oriented Palestinians intensified their attempts toward a course of independent action, which gave rise to a proliferation of Palestinian groups. One of them was the Palestinian branch within the framework of the increasingly pro-President Nasserite Arab Nationalist Movement (ANM).⁵² In retrospect, the circumstances leading to the creation of this branch were an early indication of the strategic shift that was taking place within the context of Palestinian political activism.⁵³

In March 1959, President Nasser introduced the slogan of a "Palestinian entity," in line with his plan to establish a Palestinian organization that would emphasize political action and in any event be subordinate to Egyptian interests.⁵⁴ This intention echoed determined attempts by Arab states to manipulate the Palestinian cause. The emergence of the ANM's Palestinian branch had a number of institutional features. Upon inception, the regulative pillar, namely the organizational core of the Palestinian branch of the ANM, was relatively independent. It did not rely upon the political legitimacy of an external power like the state-administered Palestinian units within Arab armies. The branch also differed from other non-state Palestinian groupings, such as the various Palestinian professional and student unions, in terms of its strategic emphasis on military action.⁵⁵ However, the branch was created within the institutional boundaries of an existing movement that relied heavily upon states' political legitimacy, and therefore, it was essentially subordinate to external control. This institutional base left no room for independent planning, least of all for a campaign bent on establishing a popular, normative base of support. In terms of institutional determinants of popular forces, the total dependence of the Palestinian branch of the ANM on external political legitimacy dictated its eventual submission to and incorporation by forces based on a relatively autonomous organizational core, and supported by a broad popular base.⁵⁶

In the Gulf region,

the Cairo group members came into direct contact with other Palestinian activists, already installed there for some time, which had developed similar ideas about the need for autonomous Palestinian action. The doyen of these activists was Khaled al-Hassan (Abu-Said), who from 1952 to 1967 served as the Kuwait municipality's chief executive.⁵⁷

Hassan had left Haifa in June 1948,

travelling to East Africa and then to Egypt, where he was imprisoned for a year, as he described it, "just for being a Palestinian." After escaping from the Egyptian prison camp he was reunited with his family in south Lebanon before settling in the Syrian capital, Damascus. In 1950, and again in 1951, he had tried to establish autonomous Palestinian organisations there, but both attempts failed. In 1952 he left Damascus under threat of another spell in prison, making his way to Kuwait. The political environment in Kuwait proved more appropriate than either Egypt or Syria for organisational activities.⁵⁸

Many Palestinians had already gone to Kuwait, then a British protectorate, where a combination of an oil boom and a lack of indigenous skilled personnel made them welcome. Abu Iyad also went there as a teacher, and Arafat found a job as a road engineer in Kuwait's Department of

Public Works. He would later brag that he made great sums of money in Kuwait and could have become a millionaire many times over if he had chosen to do so. Yet, while well paid by contemporary Arab standards, as were all skilled foreign workers in Kuwait, he was a low-level civil service engineer who lived in a small, government-owned bungalow in Kuwait City's Solaybiahat district. The house, with its little garden and high fence, was originally built for a minor British official.⁵⁹ In those years, Kuwait was the only place in the Arab world where Palestinians arriving from different countries were mixing together, debating openly, and forming groups without interference. In contrast to other Arab governments, Kuwait did not interfere with Palestinian underground activities since it neither sought to control the movement nor felt threatened by it. Kuwait, wrote Abu Iyad, "was one of the few countries where Palestinians were treated with sympathy and support."⁶⁰ Despite their freedom and prosperity, the fact that they were in Kuwait on sufferance, without being allowed to take citizenship or assimilate, heightened the Palestinians' distinct national consciousness. They felt like merely gilded refugees, allowed to stay only as long as Kuwait permitted,⁶¹ and most of the Palestinian people were working for the Ministry of Public Works. Hence, it was in Kuwait that Hassan first managed to build up a network which struck permanent roots, this time amongst the growing class of Palestinian professionals and businessmen in the Gulf states.⁶² After some time, the commitments of Fatah's founders had built up in the Gulf states, leading some on the Palestinian left wing to accuse them of being the creatures of the conservative rulers there. In an interview in 1969 with a left-wing Egyptian monthly, Khalaf explained the move the Cairo student leaders made to the Gulf in the mid-to-late 1950s as having been dictated by the need to earn enough to build Fatah a large organizational war chest. Hassan used a similar argument, saying that his two previous attempts to found a political organization had failed "because we didn't have even a penny to do anything for the movement, because we needed that penny to eat. We were starving at that time." Besides, all the governments bordering Israel, including that of pan-Arabist President Nasser, placed ruthless restrictions on Palestinian political activity right up until 1967; this provided an added impetus for the Palestinian activists to gravitate to the less politically restrictive atmosphere of the Gulf.⁶³

Some sources, notably Khalaf, date the founding of Fatah very precisely, to a meeting held on 10 October 1959, when a small group of us met in a discreet house in Kuwait to strike out the organisational structures of Fatah.⁶⁴ Hassan, however, dated the final alliance of the Fatah core only back to 1962, saying that until then all that had developed were sovereign local groups. Palestinian students discovered that wherever there is a concentration of Palestinians at that time, between 1958 and 1962, there was a Palestinian movement. So Hani al-Hassan, for instance, and his group were forming a movement in Germany. Hamdan was forming a movement in Austria. *Kawkaban* was forming a movement in Spain. Abdul-Fattah was forming a movement in Saudi Arabia. Abu Mazena and Abu Yusef were forming a movement in Qatar. Khalaf and his friends were forming a movement in Kuwait. There were some others in Iraq and Gaza and Damascus. But the Kuwait group was the only one who managed to have a magazine, called *Filastinuna* [Our Palestine]. They had a conference in Kuwait, and the whole were united in Fatah. The first man who started Fatah is Abu Jihad (Khalil al-Wazir).⁶⁵

Fatah's essential principles

The direction of the new organization was that which the refugee activists had already hammered

out through years of bitter experience in Cairo, Damascus, Gaza, the Gulf, and elsewhere. This orientation continued as the “bottom line” of Fatah’s activities until 1983. The movement was based on several essential principles, which were as follows:

- Palestine is part of the Arab World, the Palestinian people are part of the Arab Nation, and their struggle is part of its struggle.
- The Palestinian people have an independent identity. They are the sole authority that decides their own destiny, and they have complete sovereignty on all their lands.
- The Palestinian Revolution plays a leading role in liberating Palestine.
- The Palestinian struggle is part and parcel of the worldwide struggle against Zionism, colonialism, and international imperialism.
- Liberating Palestine is a national obligation which necessitates the materialistic and human support of the Arab Nation.
- UN projects, accords, and resolutions, or those of any individual which undermine the Palestinian people’s right in their homeland, are illegal and rejected.
- The Zionist Movement is racial, colonial, and aggressive in ideology, goals, organization, and method.
- The Israeli existence in Palestine is a Zionist invasion with a colonial expansive base, and it is a natural ally to colonialism and international imperialism.
- Liberating Palestine and protecting its holy places is an Arab, religious, and human obligation.
- Palestinian National Liberation Movement, “Fatah,” is an independent national revolutionary movement representing the revolutionary vanguard of the Palestinian people.
- The crowds which participate in the revolution and liberation are the proprietors of the Palestinian land.⁶⁶

When Fatah was busy in developing its organizational works in the early 1960s, ideologues throughout the Arab world, including many Palestinians, were still dominating most of the Arab political discussions with the argument that “Arab unity is the road to the liberation of Palestine.”⁶⁷ The Fatah organizers stressed instead that the liberation of Palestine was itself the most important immediate goal, and that “Arab unity,” in so far as it was important at all, would come about only after the Palestinians’ own activity had liberated Palestine. As Khaled al-Hassan described it,

We reversed the slogan, and this is how we reversed the whole tide of thinking. And we managed to do that. Because when you want to talk about unity, then you have to work against the regimes. When we want to talk about liberation, we have to work on liberation of Palestine.⁶⁸

In January 1964, President Nasser called for a conference of Arab leaders in Cairo. At this conference, the leaders agreed to set up the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to represent the Palestinian people in the struggle for the “liberation of Palestine”⁶⁹ from the Israeli occupation. At the same time, more than 400 delegates came together in East Jerusalem to discuss the idea of Palestine Entity, where they declared the establishment of the PLO. The PLO

has been an umbrella organization of the Palestinian resistance since its creation. The PLO's organizational structure was divided in two parts; one part is military and the second political. The armed wing of the organization was named the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) and the political wing was named the Palestine National Council (PNC). The principles of the PLO were approved and Ahmed al-Shukeiri, who was supported by Nasser, became the first president of the PLO. The establishment of the PLO not only provided institutional, monetary, and military assistance for Palestinian resistance groups, but it also formed a new political space in which the Arab states would continue to quarrel with each other over the Arab identity and the representation of this identity.⁷⁰

After the establishment of the PLO, the Arab leaders had postponed the issue of how to deal with the Israeli threat but had put on a show of solidarity. But the new Syrian government actively supported the PLO in launching guerrilla raids into Israel.⁷¹ President Nasser did not yet want war with Israel because he knew that Israel was a more powerful military power than Syria and Egypt combined. However, he felt drawn to support radical, Arab nationalists, especially in the struggle with Israel. In 1966, the Egyptian government signed a defense agreement with Syria which stated that aggression against either state would be considered an attack on the other. President Nasser rose again as the outstanding champion of the Arab cause. But the agreement with Syria paved the way for the sequence of events that led to the Six Day War in 1967.⁷²

The six day war of 1967

Between 1966 and 1967, Israel's borders saw repeated Arab militant attacks and Syrian military activity. On 11 May, UN Secretary General U Thant leveled charges at Syria for its sponsorship of Palestinian terrorism, denouncing those attacks as "deplorable," "insidious," and "menaces to peace."⁷³ During 1965–1967, Israeli armed forces staged numerous provocations along the Israeli-Syrian border area. This escalation led the Syrians and the Soviets to believe that Israel was planning to overthrow the Syrian regime using military force. In May 1967, Israeli officials began to publicly threaten military action against Syria if Syria did not stop Palestinian terrorists from crossing the border into Israel.⁷⁴ In 1967, Israel reiterated declarations made in 1957 that any closure of the Straits would be considered an act of war, or a justification for war. On 22 May, President Nasser declared the Straits closed to Israeli shipping.⁷⁵

President Nasser declared that he was open to referring the closure to the International Court of Justice to determine its legality, but this option was rejected by Israel.⁷⁶ Egyptian propaganda attacked Israel, and on 27 May, President Nasser stated, "Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel. The Arab people want to fight."⁷⁷ On 30 May, Jordan and Egypt signed a defense pact. The following day, at Jordan's invitation, the Iraqi army began deploying troops and armored units in Jordan.⁷⁸ They were later reinforced by an Egyptian contingent. On 1 June, Israel formed a National Unity Government by widening its cabinet, and on 4 June, the decision was made to go to war. The next morning, Israel launched Operation Focus, a large-scale surprise air strike that opened the Six-Day War. On 5 June 1967, in a surprise attack, the Israeli army destroyed almost the entire Egyptian air forces on the ground. According to some sources, "the Israeli army, government and secret service had been preparing for this war since the last four years," and "[t]he Israeli general staff had been working out the details of this summer offensive for a year and had begun the mobilization of reserves well in advance of the outbreak of hostilities."⁷⁹

In this war, Israel had without question the best-prepared troops in West Asia. Their arms technique was much superior. By mobilizing its reserves, Israel could put 300,000 trained, experienced soldiers into the field.⁸⁰ On the other side, the Arab governments were as ill prepared for the war as the Arab armies. They did not want the war, knowing that they were inferior in every respect.⁸¹ The Israeli army and government brutally exploited the military weak point and political mistakes of the Arabs, and they struck so hard that it had attained all their tactical goals within a week. The international community tried to bring about a cease-fire but succeeded only after a week had passed. Till then, Israeli's Western allies had kept a convenient low profile. Within six days, Israel occupied all of Palestine, and the Israeli army had won a decisive land war. Israeli forces had taken control of the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

In 1956, Israel had fought together with France and UK against Egypt, but in the war of June 1967, it was alone. Israel thus proved that it was capable of playing the part of the former colonial power single-handedly. In the Six Day War, Israel remarkably demonstrated its worth as the follower and its ally of the USA to the entire world. From then on, Israel would not worry about military and financial aid. Immediately after the defeat in war, the mood throughout the Arab world was one of gloom and hopelessness. Egyptian President Nasser's resignation on 9 June 1967⁸² was a symbolic acknowledgement of the failure of the strategy and tactics used previously and of conventional methods of war in the struggle for the liberation of Palestine. But Nasser, who brought alive Arab unity, was to return to office, stung by the delight of his enemies and moved by the wild outbursts of grief among supporters. This war was a disaster for the Arab states of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan as well Palestine.

After defeat in the 1967 war, Arab nationalism had finished and Palestinians were searching for a new way of resistance. In the 1950s, Palestinian groups started mobilizing secretly, but no compelling leadership emerged until the 1960s. Even then, Palestinian nationalism was overshadowed by Arab nationalism until the 1967 war. Most Palestinians viewed Arab nationalism as a more powerful mechanism—a large support system that could enable Palestinian liberation—something they could not achieve on their own. Arab nationalism also offered promise to refugees facing oppressive conditions in Arab countries.⁸³ After 1967, Palestinians no longer looked to outside support for their liberation movement. After 1967, the Palestinians no longer sought outside support for their liberation movement. They decided liberation organizations specific to Palestine would gain comprehensive support within the Palestinian territories.⁸⁴

Battle of Karameh

Early in 1968, however, Fatah guerrillas began looting Israelis from bases on the Jordanian side of the river. Most of these attacks were successfully blocked by the IDF.⁸⁵ Jordanian army infantry and weaponry units gave the Fatah squads covering fire at times, leading to frequent direct encounters between the IDF and the Jordanian army. On 14–15 February, Jordanian mortars hit several Israeli settlements in the Beit Shean Valley and along the Jordan Valley. IDF artillery and the IAF retaliated against Jordanian bases and artillery batteries, as well as the American-financed East Ghor Main Canal. As a result, thousands of Jordanian farmers fled eastwards, and Fedayeen moved into the valley.

An American-sponsored cease-fire was arranged, and King Hussein declared he would prevent

these groups from using Jordan as a base for attack.⁸⁶ In February, he sent twenty carloads of troops and police to order a Fatah unit to leave Karamah. When it arrived, the column found itself surrounded by men wielding machine guns; their commander said “You have three minutes to decide whether you leave or die.”⁸⁷ They withdrew. By March, several hundred civilians were living in the camp, along with about 900 guerrillas, mostly from Fatah, and PLO leader Yasser Arafat, who had his headquarters there.⁸⁸

On 18 March, an Israeli school bus was blown up by a mine near Be’er Ora in the Arava, killing two adults and wounding ten children. It was the 38th Fatah operation in little more than three months.⁸⁹ That night, the cabinet approved the attack. The US tried to avoid it by forwarding Israel a message from Jordanian King Hussein. Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol called the cabinet in for further counselling, but only the National Religious Party leader, Haim-Moshe Shapira, vocally opposed it; Israeli Education Minister Zalman Aran opposed it but remained silent.⁹⁰ On 4 March 1968, Jordanian intelligence began to detect Israeli activity near the border, as IDF troops began to deliberate near the Allenby and Damia Bridges. Jordan ordered the 1st Infantry Division to take up positions near those bridges and around Karamah.⁹¹ On 17 March, Dayan warned that the Arabs were preparing for a new wave of terror, which Israel would take steps to contain if King Hussein of Jordan could not. Eshkol repeated that message to the Knesset, and on the same day,⁹² Israeli Ambassador Yosef Tekoah filed two complaints with the United Nations against what he termed the Arabs’ repeated acts of aggression.⁹³

On the contrary, on 20 March, Jordan had identified parts of the Israeli 7th and 60th Armored Brigades, 35th Paratrooper Brigade, 80th Infantry Brigade, a combat engineer battalion, and five artillery battalions between those bridges. The Jordanians concluded that the Israelis were planning an attack with a drive on Amman, and the army took up positions near the bridges, with the 60th Armored Brigade joining the 1st Infantry Division. The infantry divisions were deployed near the bridges, each with a tank company. The artillery was mostly deployed on the higher Jordan Valley ridges overlooking Karamah for topological advantage.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, paratroopers were to be lifted by helicopters into the town while the fourth force would make a diversionary attack at King Abdullah Bridge⁹⁵ to draw the Jordanian forces from Karamah and to cover the main attack. Prior to the attack, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) dropped leaflets telling the Jordanian army that Israel had no intention to hurt them, and that they should not intervene; the leaflets went neglected. *Time* magazine reported the Fedayeen had been warned in advance by Egyptian intelligence, and most of the 2,000 Arab commandos who used Karamah as a training base had pulled back into the surrounding hills to snipe at the Israelis. Some 200 guerrillas stayed inside to defend the town. Later, Arafat’s deputy, Abu Iyad, claimed in his memoirs that he and Arafat had been tipped off about the Israeli attack by Jordanian officers, who learned it from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).⁹⁶

According to Abdallah Frangi, in the early morning of 21 March 1968, 10,000 Israeli infantrymen, supported by tank units and helicopters, marched over the Allenby Bridge in Jordan. Their objective was Karamah.⁹⁷ The Israeli army had decided to take out this base and remove the guerrillas in a few hours. However, the Fedayeen were not completely unprepared for this attack. The Jordanian General Khamanash had told Fatah leaders on 18 March that the Israelis were likely to attack within three days.⁹⁸ He also advised them to avoid a confrontation with a powerful enemy. From the military point of view, this well-meaning advice was certainly correct. However, Arafat, Abu Jihad, Abu Iyad, and the other Fedayeen made a different and

crucial decision to stand their ground and fight to the death. The Israeli forces attacked concurrently on the three bridges.⁹⁹ Combat engineers built a pontoon bridge in the north and the troops crossed the river.¹⁰⁰

A huge force of Israeli infantry and armor went east to block the road from Salt to the Allenby Bridge, and they encountered the Jordanian 60th Armored Brigade which tried to join the defense of Karameh.¹⁰¹ Within the next two hours, Israeli artillery fire and airstrikes were launched against Jordanian defenses on the Musri-Karameh Road, the Salt Road, and east of Abdullah Bridge. The Israelis also consolidated their hold on Karameh with airstrikes and artillery and began demolishing the camp.¹⁰² Meanwhile, *Operation Asuta*¹⁰³ was mounted against a few smaller guerrilla bases south of the Dead Sea, near Safi, where the school bus had struck the mine. These bases were raided by Israeli ground forces with close air support. About 20 Jordanian soldiers and policemen and 20 Fatah fighters were killed, and 27 were taken prisoner. After a few hours, the Israeli forces completely withdrew from Jordanian territory. The battle of Karameh was the political and military turning point in Palestinian resistance, especially for Fatah. Karameh restored the dignity and self-respect of the Palestinian and of the entire Arab World. Karameh pointed the way ahead after the disaster of the June War.¹⁰⁴

Black September

Following the defeat of the Arabs in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, or Six Day War, Palestinian fighters took part in the war against Israel. The war was mostly fought in the Sinai between Egyptian and Israeli forces. But the PLO launched raids from Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon as well. The Jordanian king had not been keen to fight the 1967 war, nor was he eager to keep letting Palestinians attack Israel from his territory, or from the West Bank, which had been under Jordanian control until Israel occupied it in 1967.¹⁰⁵ King Hussein had maintained secret, pleasant relations with Israel throughout the 1950s and 1960s. He had to balance his interests in preserving a peace with Israel against a restless and increasingly radicalized Palestinian population, which was threatening his throne.¹⁰⁶ Arafat created a war zone on Lebanon's border with Israel like the one he had made in the Jordan Valley. His revolutionary strategy against Israel, though bloody, brought no military success. Although he subscribed not to intervene in his host country's politics, Arafat's behavior threatened that country's stability. However, Lebanon was an even more flexible host for Arafat than Jordan had been, and his political fortunes continued to prosper despite his failures. It was true that Lebanon had a smaller number of Palestinians than Jordan, and no direct access to the West Bank could be available. But, the large Palestinian minority gave Arafat a support base,¹⁰⁷ while areas of the Lebanon-Israel border were excellent for launching attacks.¹⁰⁸ Beirut, then the Arab world's most modern cosmopolitan city, offered better access to the Western media, which Arafat was learning well how to manipulate, and a more pleasant lifestyle for PLO leaders than they had in Amman. Most important of all, though, was that Lebanon's central government and its army were weak and thus could not restrict PLO activities.¹⁰⁹ By the same token, the country was less able than Jordan to resist bullying by other Arab states, like Egypt's demand that Arafat be given a free hand to operate in Lebanon. From 1968 to 1973, Lebanon's army clashed with the PLO, trying to control its power. Each time, though, the Beirut government caved into the demands of Arafat and his foreign patrons. Nonetheless, while Lebanon's deep domestic divisions gave the PLO powerful local allies, once again the prospect of exercising power in his host country seduced

Arafat into growing entanglements in local politics, which made him more enemies than friends.¹¹⁰

In Beirut, Arafat managed the creation of a large political, military, and economic infrastructure which was well financed by Arab governments' donations and taxes on Palestinians working in Arab states. Illegal methods, which Arafat made no attempt to stop, swelled its treasury and enriched those involved. These included forcing Lebanese businesses that were moving goods through ports to pay protection money to Fatah, whose members also ran large illicit trades in arms, medical supplies, and even drugs. Some robbed stores and turned the loot over to their groups, which then sold it back to the merchants and split the profit with the thieves.¹¹¹ Such activities damaged the movement's image among the Lebanese and diverted the PLO from its political goals. Some of these earnings benefited the Palestinian people, for whom Fatah built hospitals, orphanages, schools, and a police and judicial system. Fatah also had a relief fund for families of those killed in the service of the cause and a network of economic enterprises, including a textile plant and farms, which employed about 3,000 people.¹¹² In the refugee camps, 150,000 Palestinians depended on Fatah for everything, including trade unions, garbage collection, cultural centers, and youth groups. The program in the UN-run refugee camp schools, funded partly by US taxpayers' money, was revised to offer paramilitary training.¹¹³

Before September 1970, Arafat had only about 800 Fatah soldiers in Lebanon, but their numbers tripled as he moved forces from Jordan.¹¹⁴ They were well paid and given bonuses to ensure that they did not defect to other groups. Supposedly, these troops were for use against Israel, but Arafat faced anew the dilemmas over intervention in local politics and conflicts among PLO groups.¹¹⁵ Rather than concluding that interference in Jordan's internal affairs had been a mistake, PLO and Fatah leaders blamed Arafat for not having tried harder to overthrow the king. They wanted the PLO to become the front line of a liberation struggle that would help the masses destroy Arab regimes and fight Western imperialism throughout the Third World.¹¹⁶ Without transforming the Arab world and expelling US influence from the region, they believed, the PLO could not destroy Israel. Lebanon seemed the ideal place to launch this campaign.¹¹⁷ Since the Arab states were responsible for Palestinian suffering, they must, in Abu Jihad's words, "be a base for our people" and had no right to limit or control the PLO's choice of timing, methods, or anything else, even if Palestinian activities dragged the host country into war or damaged its vital interests.¹¹⁸

Lebanon was especially vulnerable to this strategy. In the past, its unique system for balancing power among its many religiously defined communities had brought stability and prosperity. But this structure had been undermined by radical ideologies and changing population proportions, which produced forces eager to use the PLO to help them seize power. Arafat heightened the spiraling revolution in the country in several ways.¹¹⁹ To build up his own hand, he supported Lebanese radical groups that were subverting the country and let PLO member groups fight each other, Lebanon's army, and the militias of Lebanese communities.¹²⁰ Obviously, the PLO's presence and Arafat's policies were not the sole cause of Lebanon's breakdown into a destructive, bloody civil war, which eventually brought it under Syrian control, but they were a major factor in accelerating and deepening this tragic process.¹²¹

On 6 September 1970, three airplanes, two American and one Swiss, and all of their passengers were hijacked by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).¹²² One American plane was taken to Egypt, while the other two were forced to land at an old unused airstrip in Jordan. The PFLP threatened to kill the hostages and blow up the planes unless

European governments freed Palestinian militants being held in their jails. British Prime Minister Edward Heath released Leila Khaled, who had just been captured by the Israelis and turned over to the British after she had killed a guard while trying to hijack an El Al airliner in British airspace, and another PFLP militant, who had been arrested for earlier attacks, in order to ensure that British hostages were not harmed.¹²³ Arafat freed several Western hostages from the hijacking who came into Fatah's hands but did not criticize the hijackings, probably viewing them as strengthening his cause's power and popularity. Jordan, however, saw the hijackings as a challenge to Hussein's authority and as a signal for a revolution to overthrow the king. Jordanian tanks surrounded the airfield, while some officers ordered their troops to march on Amman for a confrontation with the PLO forces, whether their commanders wanted it or not. At this moment of chaos and bloodshed, Arafat chose to escalate his demands, calling for a national unity government as a precondition for any cease-fire and expressing solidarity with the PFLP as a member of the united forces under his command.¹²⁴ Finally, the king decided to move decisively. He declared martial law and demanded that the guerrillas leave Jordan's cities. Arafat called on his troops to be ready and ordered a strike to topple the government.¹²⁵

The first clashes between Fatah forces and the Lebanese army had begun in 1968 and continued sporadically for many months. Arafat demanded clear freedom of action, while the government insisted that the PLO not cross the border to attack Israel lest this action force the country into war.¹²⁶ The question was settled, in Lebanon as in Jordan, by Nasser, who invited the two sides to Cairo with himself as mediator. On 28 October 1969, the Lebanese delegation arrived. But Arafat refused to come until Lebanon accepted his terms. On 3 November, Lebanon accepted an agreement that gave Arafat full freedom of action as long as he respected Lebanon's laws and sovereignty. Arafat promised that he would not launch attacks from Lebanese border villages, shoot at Israel from Lebanese territory, or lay mines along the frontier.¹²⁷ The agreement proved hollow.¹²⁸

Within three weeks, clashes began again in southern Lebanon as PLO forces violated the agreement.¹²⁹ Soon, Arafat was making speeches urging Lebanon's people to revolt against a government that he accused of being US agents plotting to destroy his movement. Smiling, he told an audience that "the Lebanese people" should punish this behavior.¹³⁰ The country's leaders rightfully considered such statements to be inciting revolution.¹³¹ As Junblatt had feared, the PLO-initiated border war and Israeli counter-attacks made thousands of Lebanese civilians flee from the south. At the same moment that Arafat was encouraging revolt against Lebanon's government, he was tightening control over his own movement. While tolerant of other PLO groups doing as they pleased, Arafat accepted less pluralism within Fatah itself. In 1971, a group of younger members, who called themselves the Free Officers, attacked Arafat for having lost touch with the membership and creating a "cult of personality."¹³² Arafat quickly suppressed them and secured his control over Fatah.

When Arafat thought preserving order was vital for his own interests, he was always able to implement that.

Throughout September, the Jordanian military launched attacks to push the PLO out of Jordan, attacks now called "Black September" by the PLO, when King Hussein decided that it was time to act.¹³³ Yet Arafat did not depend on repression alone to stay in power. He also met the challenge by showing critics that he was a real revolutionary ready to battle Arab regimes and the West. In 1971, he created a covert international terrorist group within Fatah called Black September, a reference to the September 1970 Palestinian defeat in Jordan. The Black September group was headed by Abu Iyad, was staffed by Fatah's intelligence personnel, and used Fatah's

facilities and funds. A CIA report concluded that Arafat maintained “pretence of moderation” but that “the Fatah leadership including Arafat now seems clearly committed to revolution.”¹³⁴

After the crisis in Jordan, the Fedayeen movement was in confusion. The Palestinians got a general impression that the Palestinian movement continue because of the hostile attitude of some of the Arab regimes, particularly of Jordan. The greatest problem for the Fedayeen was to carry on the movement without any Arab states’ support. This problem was discussed by the Fedayeen leaders in a secret meeting after the crisis, in which the movement declared to carry forward with guerrilla warfare tactics. These guerrillas would receive a special kind of training and would be free from political pressures.

The existence of the Black September Organization (BSO)¹³⁵ came to light when the Jordanian Prime Minister, Wasfi Tal, was assassinated by four members of the BSO in Cairo on 28 November 1971,¹³⁶ and these four members were arrested by the Egyptian government. The arrest led to a big agitation in Egypt in which 35,000 students supporting the Palestinian cause demanded war against Israel.¹³⁷ The BSO also punished five Jordanians living in West Germany whom it suspected of intelligence work for Israel. They made an attempt to kill Jordan’s ambassador to Britain. They also claimed credit for PLO expulsion from Jordan. They were also responsible for blasts in the “struver” electronic factory at Hamburg, which supplied electronic generators for the Israeli Air Force, and they were also responsible in August 1972 for sabotaging the Trieste oil refinery in Italy which was sending oil to the “pro-Zionist interests” in Germany and Austria.¹³⁸ In May 1972, two young women and two men of Black September were the first to hijack an airline to Lydda Airport in Israel. This was a Belgian Sabena airline. The Fedayeen demanded the release of Palestinian peoples languishing in Israeli jails. The two men were shot dead by Israeli forces, and the women were captured. The Lydda airport operation failed, and the BSO waited for the next opportunity.¹³⁹

On 5 September 1972, BSO Fedayeen moved toward the Olympic Village where the Israeli athletes for the Olympics in Munich were put up. The Fedayeen killed the 11 Israeli athletes, coaches, and officials sharing the five apartments allotted to them. After the Munich massacre, the interim Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir ordered Mossad to assassinate those known to have been involved.¹⁴⁰ What was then known as “Operation Bayonet” had begun. By 1979, during what came to be known as Operation *Wrath of God*, at least one Mossad unit had assassinated eight PLO members. Among them was the leading figure of Yasser Arafat’s personal security squad, Ali Hassan Salameh, who was behind the 1972 hijacking of Sabena Airline. He was killed by a car bomb in Beirut on 22 January 1979. In the April 1973 Operation Spring of Youth, Israeli commandos killed three senior members of BSO in Beirut.¹⁴¹

October war of 1973

The October 1973 Arab-Israeli War, known as the Yom Kippur War in Israel and the Ramadan War in Arab countries, was a watershed event in Arab-Israeli relations. Yom Kippur, a high holy day in Judaism, occurred on 6 October 1973. On that day Egypt and Syria launched an attack that took the Israelis by complete surprise. The Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and broke the Bar Lev line, and Syrians took the Golan Heights.¹⁴² The elimination of the Israeli air forces was a strategic masterpiece by the Syrian and Egyptian command.¹⁴³

By 9 October, in the south, the Israelis shunned further counter-attacks as the Egyptians elected to reinforce their positions. The Israeli reserves arriving on the Syrian front stabilized the

situation and restored the pre-war lines by the evening of 10 October. A major Israeli counter-attacks in the north was prepared for 11 October, aimed at threatening the Syrian capital of Damascus and knocking Syria out of the war. Consequently, Israel could deliberate on the Sinai. The attack succeeded in pushing the Syrians some ten miles past the pre-war lines, but it stopped approximately 20 miles from Damascus. At that point, the Syrian defensive lines held, aided by the arrival of troops from Iraq and Jordan. By 14 October, the northern front braced, with both sides facing force ratios more suitable for defense than offense.¹⁴⁴

The counter-attack in the north did not blow Syria out of the war, but it did affect the southern front to Israel's advantage. On 11 October, Syria urgently requested Egyptian action to reduce Israeli pressure in the north.¹⁴⁵ Egypt had achieved success thus far by remaining under their SAM umbrella and fighting a defensive war. Not all Egyptian commanders were convinced that switching to the offense was the best course of action; notably, Minister of War Ismail was opposed. However, the Syrian plea strengthened the position of other key Egyptian leaders who had argued that Egypt should exploit her gains.¹⁴⁶ As a result, the Egyptians launched the equivalent of a two-armored-division thrust along a broad front against the now-prepared and reinforced Israelis. The Egyptians were inflicted with extremely heavy losses. This was the last major Egyptian offensive operation, but it did disrupt plans for a major Israeli attack.

The United Nations sent its own peacekeepers to the highly volatile regions affected by the fighting. Between January and March 1974, Israeli and Egyptian forces disengaged along the Suez Canal region. At this time, the Israelis coped to keep control over the strategic Sinai Desert, an area that allowed Israel a buffer to ensure any fighting there did not spill over into Israel itself. In the Golan Heights, 1,200 UN troops were sent to keep the peace there in May 1974. They effectively formed a UN buffer between Syria and Israel.¹⁴⁷ The American Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger,¹⁴⁸ played the role of a peace broker between Egypt and Israel. In September 1975, Egypt and Israel signed an interim agreement which declared their willingness to settle their differences by peaceful rather than military means. In October 1973, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat had assumed a warlike approach to Arab relations with Israel, and he was seen by many Arabs to be the successor to Nasser and the savior to the Palestinians in Israel. His adoption of a diplomatic approach to solving the region's problems was too much for some Arabs.

Consequences of war

Arab and Israeli armies both claimed victory. Israel, after being nearly overtaken, staged a remarkable comeback, conquering new territory in the north and isolating an entire field army in the south.¹⁴⁹ Despite the losses, Arab claims of victory are not unbelievable. In the north region, the Syrians and their partners had fought the Israelis to a draw. In the south, Israel had isolated the Egyptian Third Army, but it is not clear that the Israelis could have protected their forces on the west bank of the canal from a determined Egyptian assault and still maintain sufficient strength along the rest of the front. In the final stage, Syria essentially maintained the status quo ante, and Egypt regained the Suez Canal.¹⁵⁰ Unquestionably the best argument for an Arab victory is the changed political situation. The Arabs had accomplished their goal of upsetting the status quo, and the 1973 war was a direct antecedent of the 1979 Camp David Accords. As commented by an analyst, if war is the employment of military force in support of political objectives, there can be no doubt that in strategic and political terms the Arab states and particularly Egypt won the war, even though the military outcome was a stalemate permitting

both sides to claim military victory.¹⁵¹ The 1973 October war had not been fought to liberate Palestine from Israeli occupation. Instead, it was driven by President Sadat's strategy of drawing US attention to the Arab world through initiation of a peace plan.

The October war in 1973 War had changed the situation and the balance of power. The Arab countries at the summits of Rabat (1973) and Algiers (1974) recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.¹⁵² The Non-Aligned countries rallied to this position and accentuated the isolation of Israel (diplomatic relations between virtually all African states and Israel were broken off). Relations between the Palestinian resistance and the Soviet Union, which had their ups and downs, improved. Moscow would henceforth put all its weight behind Arafat.¹⁵³ This breakthrough by the PLO was consolidated by the visit of its leader to the UN General Assembly in November 1974, and its admission as an observer member of the UN. Within this framework the PLO renounced international terrorism, concentrated its military presence in Lebanon, and adopted a new political strategy after a long internal struggle between the "realists" and the "extremists."¹⁵⁴

The situation changed with the outbreak of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975. The Palestinians, engaged in the Lebanese conflict of 1975–1976, fell off with Damascus following the Syrian military intervention.¹⁵⁵ This episode, symbolized by the siege of Tel al-Za'atar camp, was a perfect illustration of the ambiguous relations established between the PLO and the various Arab regimes: when their interests were at risk, the latter had no hesitation in sacrificing their Palestinian brothers. The international background had also changed. Between 1974 and 1977 there had been a real possibility of convening a peace conference on West Asia, co-sponsored by the US and the USSR, and even of finding a global solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This helped the "realists" to carry the day within the PLO.¹⁵⁶

Anwar al-Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, followed by the signing of the Camp David Accords, destroyed this process in favor of that of a separate peace. While Egypt was to regain Sinai, the Palestinians were to obtain autonomy only under occupation. This was massively rejected by the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, despite their reputed "realism."¹⁵⁷ The dynamics of the 1974–1977 situations were destroyed. Despite massive mobilization of the "Palestinians of the interior," despite initiatives, of which the contacts between the PLO and left-wing Israeli Zionists (the Sartawi-Peled-Avnery encounters) were hardly the least spectacular, and despite its breakthrough in Western Europe, the Palestinian resistance movement had lost the initiative. On 6 June 1982, Israel, liberated on its southern front, launched Operation Peace in Galilee.¹⁵⁸

Dismantling of the PLO in Lebanon

While the conquest of south Lebanon by the Israeli army took only a few days, the siege of Beirut was to last almost three months. These terrible days were widely reported by the international press, and the likes of the massacres of Sabra and Shatila contributed to the tarnishing of Israel's image. Despite fierce resistance, Arafat and his followers were forced to leave the Lebanese capital. A page had been turned in the history of the PLO.¹⁵⁹ Losses were heavy. The resistance movement's politico-administrative machinery, concentrated in Beirut, was destroyed, and the PLO lost the "capital" from which it had been able to deploy an intense political, diplomatic, and military activity.¹⁶⁰ A more serious problem was that the leadership of the resistance movement was henceforth effectively cut off from the main body of the Palestinian

people. It no longer had contact with the last sizeable group of Palestinians, which had supplied it with a large proportion of its soldiers and many of its cadres. Lastly, with the departure of its fighters from Lebanon, the very idea of armed struggle, one of the PLO's key traditions, was affected.

For the first time since the 1967 Six Day War,¹⁶¹ the PLO was no longer present on the enemy's borders. Far from the battlefield, it ran the risk of losing its political clout and autonomy and failed to attract younger generations, particularly those in the camps.¹⁶² Against this background of crisis and uncertainty, the debates on strategic choices for the PLO resurfaced.¹⁶³ For several years the factions of the PLO would tear themselves apart in search of a strategy that seemed impossible to find. The signing, on 11 February 1985,¹⁶⁴ of an agreement between King Hussein and Arafat revived tensions.¹⁶⁵ It was fervently denounced by almost all factions of the PLO, with the exception of Fatah. The Palestinian National Salvation Front, combining Habash's the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP),¹⁶⁶ Jibril's PFLP-General Command, the Fatah dissidents al Sa'iqa and Abu Nidal's group, with the full support of Syria, tried to set up an alternative to the PLO. But clashes between Amal and the Palestinians in Lebanon, and Hussein's repeal, in February 1986, of the Jordanian Palestinian agreement, combined with the efforts of the Soviet Union, ended in reconciliation.¹⁶⁷ In April 1987, in Algiers, the Eighteenth Palestinian National Council met, with the participation of Fatah, the PFLP, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Communist Party (a member of which was elected to the Executive Committee for the first time). The crisis provoked by the departure from Beirut remained. It would take the first *intifada* to shake the PLO from its state of paralysis. While the organization was not directly responsible for the outbreak of the rebellion on the West Bank and in Gaza, all the demonstrators nonetheless unequivocally identified with it; the PLO thus acquired a stronger legitimacy, and the power to make the radical diplomatic and political decisions necessary. From 12 to 15 November 1988, Algiers was the scene of the Nineteenth National Council,¹⁶⁸ involving Fatah, the PFLP, DFLP, Communist Party, and a few other small organizations.¹⁶⁹ Only the PFLP General Command, al Saiqa, the Fatah dissidents, and Abu Nidal's group refused to participate, and they later condemned the Council's conclusions.

Organizational structure

The Fatah movement is divided in two parts: one is the most important decision-making bodies called Central Committee of Fatah, and the other is the Fatah Revolutionary Council. Central Committee is mainly an executive body, while the Revolutionary Council is Fatah's legislative body. The first Central Committee was formed in February 1963, consisting of ten members, including Yasser Arafat, Khalil al-Wazir, Salah Khalaf, and Khaled al-Hassan. Arafat and al-Wazir, who lobbied for increased personal responsibility, primarily faced opposition from al-Hassan, who opposed premature military action against Israel which the former two advocated.¹⁷⁰ The PLO in 1964 severely undermined Fatah, with 80% of its members joining the PLO's armed wing, the Palestinian Liberation Army. With this, Arafat and al-Wazir convinced the Central Committee to allow military operations. Consequently, al-Assifa was formed as Fatah's armed wing, but Arafat's rival Abu Youssef was appointed its leader. In 1965, Arafat was chosen to replace him, but he eventually began facing opposition from the central committee. Al-Hassan led the committee to cut funds to al-Assifa in an attempt to reduce its operations, but Arafat decided to move to Damascus, where he received financial assistance from

Palestinians working abroad.¹⁷¹

In the 1989 Fatah Conference, 18 Fatah members were elected to the committee, with Arafat as the secretary-general. Following Arafat's signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, only half of the central committee became leading members in the newly established Palestinian National Authority. The rest of the committee either resigned or became inactive. While he had good support from the central committee, Arafat decided to restructure it to further strengthen his authority in the Palestinian territories. He convened a conference in Gaza in October 1995, in which he added to the committee "insiders" Zakaria al-Agha¹⁷² and Faisal Husseini. In November 1995, the committee set up councils to organize campaigns for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections and threatened to expel any Fatah member who ran as an independent.¹⁷³ Elections for the central committee were held on 8 July 2009, with 96 candidates competing for the seats. Mahmoud Abbas was elected as chairman, and an additional three seats were added to the committee.¹⁷⁴

Revolutionary council

Fatah's Revolutionary Council, better known as the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), headed by Sabri al-Bana (Abu Nidal),¹⁷⁵ was founded in 1974, as a consequence of Abu Nidal's split from the Fatah organization. The breakup and the founding of the new organization was the result of the Iraqi regime's influence, which prompted Abu Nidal to launch independent armed operations to serve Iraqi interests.¹⁷⁶ The organization considers itself since its foundation as the real Fatah, accusing the leaders of the original organization of betrayal. Fatah's Revolutionary Council was considered the most dangerous, active, and murderous Palestinian terror organization in the 1980s. It has demonstrated an ability to operate over wide areas in West Asia, South America, and Europe.¹⁷⁷ It has carried out operations and armed acts against targets of various Arab countries, more than any other Palestinian organization, and also against Palestinian militants considered to be too moderate. From the beginning of the 1980s, Fatah's Revolutionary Council also attacked Jewish, Israeli, and Western targets. It practically ceased all armed attacks in the 1990s, although it is still considered potentially dangerous due to its new relations with Iran.¹⁷⁸ The Fatah's Revolutionary Council was also known as the Arab Revolutionary Council,¹⁷⁹ but it chose to claim credit for its actions under the names of the Arab Revolutionary Brigades and the Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims when claiming credit for attacks on British targets, under Black June when claiming credit for attacks on Jordanian targets, and under the Black September Organization at the time of Munich massacre.

Fatah's Revolutionary Council has about 400 members plus dozens of militia men in the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. It has no known affiliation in the Territories. The Fatah Revolutionary Council has carried out dozens of bombings and assassinations during its thirty-year existence. Organization members have assassinated several PLO leaders as well as diplomats from England, Jordan, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates.¹⁸⁰ Fatah has also maintained a number of militant groups since its founding. Its mainstream military branch is *al-Asifa*. Fatah is generally considered to have had a strong involvement in armed struggle in the past. Other groups are like Force 17, Fatah Hawks, Tanzim, and Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades.¹⁸¹

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2

THE RISE OF HAMAS AS FATAH'S POLITICAL RIVAL

Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, emerged as Fatah's political rival or alternative in Palestinian politics during the first *intifada*, which marked the beginning of the political Islamic forces in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The movement had to face Israeli occupation on the one hand, and the national secular forces led by the PLO on the other. Until the emergence of Hamas, the most important Islamic movement in the occupied territories—the Muslim Brotherhood—had shied away from active resistance against the Israeli occupation—a decision which stood in the way of its full development as a popular force. This situation began to change with the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising, which led the Muslim Brotherhood to play an active role in the resistance for the first time. It was the Islamic movement, which after many years of existence was able to emerge as a potent challenge in the occupied territories to the dominant nationalist trend.¹ The new force of Hamas soon overshadowed its parent organization and now prevailed in a number of localities, especially the Gaza Strip, with a magnitude that parallels that of Fatah, the largest of the PLO factions. Its emergence has brought about a state of imbalance in the decades. Moreover, the developing rivalry between the Islamists led by Hamas and the secular nationalist forces represented by Fatah may not peter out even in the event of the end of the Israeli occupation, since what is at stake in this rivalry is the identity and the future direction of the Palestinian people. Factors that have contributed to the rise and growth of Hamas in Palestinian politics will be the main focus of this chapter. The chapter will also examine the political structure of Fatah, its military wing, ideology, and political vision as well as its leadership.

Origin of the Muslim Brotherhood

Hamas was established in the latter half of the 1980s as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood in the occupied territories of Palestine. Muslim brotherhood spread as an Islamic group in the occupied territories after the Arab-Israel War of 1948.² The founder of Hamas, religious leader Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, was inspired by Brotherhood ideology. The Brotherhood, also known as *Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*,³ was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, and soon spread to

other parts of the Arab world.⁴ They claim that their original intentions were strictly humanitarian and spiritual, with a heavy prominence on spreading Islam.⁵ The main goal of al-Banna's movement, like other Islamic revival groups, was to transform society as closely as possible to an Islamic state, with no distinction being made between religion and government, and with the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* serving as the basis for all aspects of life.⁶ According to an analyst, our duty as Muslim Brothers is to work for the reform of selves, of hearts and souls by joining them to God the all-high; then to organize our society into a good community which commands the good and forbids evil-doing, then from the community will arise the good state.⁷

Hassan al-Banna was born in 1906 in the province of Buhrya in Egypt, as a member of strict religious setting.⁸ His father was an Islamic leader, known as an Imam, that held to the strict doctrine of Islam. Al-Banna, however, developed an early interest in Sufism, a mystical practice of the Sunni sect of Islam, and was a member of the Dhikr Circle, a group practicing Sufism. In 1923, Al-Banna moved to Cairo⁹ in Egypt, which was then the most populated nation in the Arab world, and the first to experience sustained modernization and Westernization. After graduating from the *Dar al-Ulum* in 1927, Al-Banna embarked on a teaching career in the state school system while concurrently promoting ideas for a collective action in the service of Islam. He vowed to become a counselor and a teacher giving himself to both children and adults in order to teach the "objectives of religion and the sources of their well-being and happiness in life."¹⁰

In response to the secular movement of Westernization, Al-Banna aspired to provide an alternative path to modernization and material development.¹¹ He was profoundly impacted while being trained at the *Dar al-Ulum* after witnessing what he perceived as "un-Islamic" practices occurring in Cairo.¹² In response to the Westernization culture, Al-Banna aimed to present an alternate pathway to modernization and material expansion. This pathway became known as the Muslim Brotherhood when Al-Banna along with six friends took an oath to be "troops for the message of Islam ... brothers in the service of Islam; hence we are the Muslim Brothers."¹³ The Brotherhood grew fast in Egypt, from 150 branches in 1936 to 1,500 in 1944, when membership was estimated at between 100,000 and 500,000. They also started to spread out all over West Asia and North Africa by setting up several branches in Palestine, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Lebanon.¹⁴

Since its origins, the Brotherhood has aspired to reassert Islam through the establishment of *Shariah* law and Sunni Islamic governments throughout West Asia. In the Brotherhood's view, this is the natural, correct, and primary attempt of all human civilization, with the ultimate goal being amalgamation under the Caliphate, or universal Islamic state. According to Al-Banna, we want the Islamic flag to be hoisted once again on high, fluttering in the wind, in all those lands that have had the good fortune to have Islam for a certain period of time and where the muzzein's call sounded in the *takbirs* and the *tahlis*. Then fate decreed that the light of Islam be extinguished in these lands that returned to unbelief.¹⁵ The Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea must again become Muslim seas, as they once were. Once this is established, the goal is to spread the rule of the Caliphate to the entire globe, "erasing national boundaries under the flag of Islam."¹⁶

The Brotherhood's connection with Palestine dates back to 1935, when Hasan al-Banna sent his brother, Abdal-Rahman al-Banna, to establish contact there. The first Muslim Brotherhood group formed in Palestine was established in Jerusalem in 1946 and was endorsed by Haj Amin al-Husseini, a preeminent Palestinian nationalist leader, who was named a local leader of the groups.¹⁷ After some years, other groups were established in Jaffa, Lydda, Haifa, Nablus, and

Tulkarem. The movement was welcomed by the Nationalists as an ally in the liberation struggle against the Zionist and British Mandate forces. The Muslim Brotherhood participated in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War despite some initial opposition from Arab governments.¹⁸ Muslim Brotherhood volunteers found themselves fighting alongside the forces of the Arab armies. Hasan al-Banna dispatched three brigades of volunteers from Egypt into Palestine to help the Palestinians in their struggle.¹⁹ These forces were further strengthened by local Palestinian volunteers. The brotherhoods in Jordan and Syria also dispatched with small groups of volunteers to fight in the Palestine struggle.

It is worth mentioning that the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, while embracing the same ideology as the society across the Arab world, does give a special place to two figures aside from the founder Hasan al-Banna.²⁰ One important model for Palestinian Islamists is Sayyid Qutub, who was executed in Egypt in 1966 and is considered a true symbol of revolutionary Islam.²¹ In contrast to Hasan al-Banna, who was known for his moderation, Qutub embodies the concept of active opposition to and non-cooperation with the existing un-Islamic rulers. The most important intellectual and theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood was Sayyid Qutub. The doctrine and methods developed and propagated by this author are still highly important for contemporary Sunni fundamentalist groups. In his early work, *Al-'Adal al-Ijtima' iyya fil-Islam (Social Justice in Islam)*, Qutub demonstrates that Islam guarantees social justice which emanates from the Islamic principle of the equality of men. Islamic rule thus excludes oppression which no human-made system such as communism or capitalism can avoid.²² But it is in the most influential and voluminous Quranic exegesis (*tafsir*) *Fi Zilal al-Quran*, written in prison between 1953 and 1964, that Qutub exposed his most novel ideas: his interpretation of *Jahiliyya* and the notion of *Hakimiyyat* of Allah (sovereignty of God). He does not limit *Jahiliyya* to the time of pagan ignorance reigning on the Arabian Peninsula before the arrival of Muhammad, but he interprets it as a situation which occurs at any time when God's laws are neglected by society and rulers. Societies with human-made legislation, such as constitutions other than the Qur'an, are considered to in *Jahiliyya*.²³

Thus, most of the existing governments in the Arab-Muslim world are considered *jahili*, which represents a revolutionary departure from traditional Islamic teaching in which it is a serious infraction to declare a Muslim an infidel. This new thought with the ideological basis for opposition against Muslim governments can be described as a "commentary with a definite aim"²⁴ or a "campaign of struggle."²⁵ "His driving objective was that the Muslims of today should be able to live and practice true Islam."²⁶ Following the example of the first Muslims who emigrated to Medina (*Hijra*) and only attracted Mecca when they felt strong enough to do so, Qutub elaborated the theory of an ever-growing nucleus of "true" believers that should be developed until it can wage a jihad against the surrounding society and its rulers. He believed that only through jihad could the sovereignty of God (*Hakimiyyat of Allah*) be re-established. This would be the source of law.²⁷ Qutub did not complicate how exactly the state, society, and economy would be organized under the Islamic order. The Muslim Brotherhood movements, and movements that share the same intellectual background and understanding are presently the most powerful and active political movements in West Asia.²⁸ They are represented on the political scene, and their members enjoy parliamentary legitimacy in Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait, Morocco, Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, and Bahrain. They are also strongly represented in the outlawed opposition in places such as Libya, Tunisia, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.²⁹ Although they share the same background and sources of teaching, these movements are greatly colored by their own nationalist concerns and agenda.

After the creation of Israel in 1948, relations between the Brotherhood and the Hashemite leadership in Jordan, which had annexed the West Bank in 1950, were generally smooth and cordial despite periodic tensions. The activity of the Brotherhood in the West Bank was not political, mainly, but social and religious. In the Gaza Strip, on the other hand, administered by Egypt until 1967, the Brotherhood's relations with administration were problematic most of the time and the Brothers were persecuted and outlawed.³⁰ Subsequent to the Jewish occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the Brotherhood constantly concentrated mainly on what it described as "the upbringing of an Islamic generation" through the establishment of religious schools, charity associations, social clubs, and so on. But the Brotherhood's emphasis on the Islamic restructuring of society and religious education seemed to have little relevance for a population that was seeking liberation from foreign occupation in Palestine. The emerging Palestinian nationalist movement had greater appeal, and the failure of the Brotherhood to participate in this resistance cost them many potential adherents.³¹

Several factors, both organizational and objective, contributed to strengthening the Brotherhood. In 1971, *Al-Mujamma al-Islami* (the Islamic center) was established in Gaza by Shaikh Ahmad Yassin, a dynamic preacher and a 1948 refugee who was later to become the primary force of time. Virtually all religious organizations and institutions dominated by the Brotherhood—including the Islamic University in Gaza—were controlled through the Islamic center. Then, in the 1970s, the centralizing effects of *Al-Mujamma*³² and the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood were now merged into a single organization called "The Muslim Brotherhood society in Jordan and Palestine."³³

The organizational changes laid the groundwork for the Brotherhood's growth. In the late 1970s, certain disillusionment had begun to spread with regards to the Palestinian resistant movement led by secular forces, making the population more amenable to alternative political or ideological approaches. The Islamic Revolution in Iran also had a galvanizing effect, capturing people's imaginations. These factors gave a boost to the Brotherhood which stepped up its political activities aimed at countering the secularist factions of the PLO against the Israeli occupation. Moreover, while the occupation authorities were expending considerable effort on dismantling and repressing the resistance organizations, the Muslim Brotherhood, which was not involved in armed resistance, was able to build its organisational structure and pursue its work among the masses with little Israeli interference.³⁴

The Muslim Brotherhood had religious ideas and rallied support for the Islamic movement. Apart from the various associations, it had established libraries and sports and social clubs. The organization used *zakat* (one of the five pillars of Islam)³⁵ to help thousands of needy families. Thousands of children were enrolled in nursery schools, kindergartens, and schools run by the Islamic movement. Loans were extended to students in Palestinian and Arab universities.³⁶ The Brotherhood was also able to gain significant access to the population through its network of property that it leases to the local inhabitants. In the Gaza Strip, *waqf* constitutes 10% of all real estate: "hundreds of shops, apartments, garages, public buildings, and about 2,000 scores of people, from preachers and other clerics to grave diggers."³⁷

But the Muslim Brotherhood's most effective tool in spreading its influence was the mosques. In the period from 1967 to 1987, the number of mosques in the West Bank rose from 400 to 750, in the Gaza Strip from 200 to 600.³⁸ Mosques as sanctuaries are not subject to interference from the Israeli authorities. Despite the Brotherhood's growth and effectiveness in gathering support through its social services and activities, a certain amount of dissatisfaction continued because of its failure to engage in fighting the occupation against Israel. This dissatisfaction led to the

creation of the Islamic Jihad movement, which broke away from the Brotherhood in the early 1980s.

Structure of the Muslim Brotherhood

The Muslim Brotherhood has been outlawed in Egypt since the 1950s. Consequently, it has created an organizational structure designed to be as durable as possible to suppression from the regime. This is achieved, on one hand, by decentralizing its activity and, on the other, by becoming state-like in organizational behavior, through local and nationwide networks. The movement is composed of a central administrative body (legislative branch, executive branch, and judiciary/arbitrating branch) based in Cairo, and local networks.³⁹ While the movement's popularity with the Egyptian public is beyond question, it is rather difficult to provide figures about the support it enjoys or locate data on the extent of its socio-economic activity. This is mainly because the movement's members keep their membership a secret due to the regime's threats. The number of supporters is estimated between hundreds of thousands and several millions. Another assessment, based on voter turnout and the electoral achievements of the Muslim Brotherhood, puts the support rate for the Muslim Brotherhood at 20–30% of the Egyptian public. Some believe, however, that the numbers are much lower.⁴⁰

The Muslim Brotherhood's organizational infrastructure is based on a bottom-up design:

- The basic level is the “family” (Usra), a framework established in the first several decades of the organization's existence. It is a cell that first included five, and then a larger number of activists sharing a close relationship with each other. This cell represents the broadest range of members on various levels of organizational connection.⁴¹ Each “family” chooses a leader (naqib) to represent it on the administrative council of the local Muslim Brotherhood branch. Each family member is required to follow Islamic values in their lifestyle; take part in weekly meetings and other activities; pray, fast, and study the Qur'an with fellow members of the movement; and donate a portion of his income to the assistance of needy peoples.⁴² This network of cells has established itself to be a highly effective training and bonding system for the movement's activists.
- The activity of all the families is monitored by a regional administration. In its appointed segment, it operates as an independent body both socially (helping people in need, local activity in mosques, classes) and politically. The activity of the regional administrations is directed by the professional departments, subjected to the General Guidance Office.⁴³ The organization also used variety within its ideological perspective to attract people from different social backgrounds. This required tailoring its campaign according to their specific target audience.⁴⁴ They pledged to fight against poverty when addressing the lower classes and voiced for democracy within more educated urban neighborhoods. They also didn't admit that their ideas were in any way anti-modern or anti-Western. On the whole, the organization's message conformed to the popular understanding of the religion and the prescriptions of religious scholars working under the state. This also helped to diffuse the image of the Brotherhood as a moderate Islamic group and was therefore able to recruit people of different levels of religious commitment.⁴⁵
- On the national level, the structure of the Muslim Brotherhood has remained essentially identical to the initial scheme formed in the 1930s and 1940s. The movement's

organizational structure was reformed in the 1980s. The reform focused mainly on a partial departure from the centralized character and provided more decision-making freedom to province-level leaders. This was reflected in the expansion of the various committees and departments and the development of the movement's local authorities, namely the general guide.

Currently, the following bodies may be said to constitute the movement's national level:

- The general guide (*al-murshid al-'aam*)—the title held by the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, the person who shapes the movement's policy and activity pattern. The general guide is also the chairman of the Guidance Office and the movement's Shura Council. Members of the movement are expected to fully obey his decisions, and all Muslim Brotherhood departments are subject to his authority.⁴⁶ In practice, this changes in accordance with the general guide's personality, power, and status in the movement's leadership. Traditionally, the general guide in Egypt also serves as the head of the international Muslim Brotherhood movement.

Formally, the general guide's election procedure is well-established; however, it is in fact flexible and open to interpretation.

- The general guide is formally elected by the movement's Shura Council from the candidates presented by the Guidance Office. Usually, the candidate is a member of the Guidance Office, even though this is not required by the regulations (it is enough for the candidate to be a member of the Shura Council). In Muslim Brotherhood tradition, the new general guide is the oldest physically and socially functioning member of the Shura Council perceived to be as a worthy candidate.
- If the Shura Council is unable to convene for any reason, its authorities (including the election of the general guide) are transferred to the Guidance Office.
- Being also the leader of the global Muslim Brotherhood movement, the candidate must be known and respected by Muslim Brotherhood circles outside of Egypt, and secure the agreement of the Supreme Shura Council (the Shura Council of the international Muslim Brotherhood movement).⁴⁷

Rise of Hamas

As noted, Hamas was established by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin after the first Palestinian *intifada* in January 1988.⁴⁸ Sheikh Yassin's contribution to the growth of the Islamic movement in Palestine emerged out of his conviction that students must have an Islamic education and should understand the meaning of Jihad. But he also knew the value of giving them an all-round education. Sheikh Yassin encouraged the youth to organize teams for sports and participate in social and cultural functions in addition to their religious studies as early as 1992.⁴⁹ Yassin had been active in Islamic politics in Gaza since 1970. Like many of Hamas's early members he was influenced by the revolutionary ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood. At that time, the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian authority, and the Brotherhood blamed its government for being passive towards the 'Zionists' and sided with the Palestinians in their war against Israel.⁵⁰ The

Brotherhood then adopted extremist tactics on its own soil in Egypt, which led to a temporary ban of the movement. A Muslim Brother was blamed for the assassination of the Prime Minister of Egypt, Mahmoud Fahmi Nok Rashi,⁵¹ in 1948;

Al-Banna was subsequently killed by government agents in Cairo in February 1949. The Brotherhood was legalized again by the Egyptian government but only as a religious organisation. This state of affairs proved temporary as a result of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952.⁵²

After 1967, however, when Israel occupied Gaza from Egypt, the Brotherhood's counterpart in Palestine was becoming more active, spreading their ideology and working towards increasing their independent influence with Palestinian society. They set up charitable organizations and established religious schools and kindergartens which were normally attached to the mosques. The Brotherhood or other Islamist groups sympathetic to them set up Islamic societies in Gaza, Hebron, Nablus, and Jerusalem.

Following the ideas and teaching of the Brotherhood, Sheikh Yassin set up an Islamic Society in 1976 to promote Islamic values in Palestinian society. In 1978, he helped set up another organization called the Islamic compound (in Arabic *al-Mujama al-Islamiya*).⁵³ As president of the organization between 1973 and 1983, he was succeeded on his imprisonment by one of his fellow Hamas founders, Dr. Ibrahim Ali Yazuri. The first thing Yassin did was to register it with the Israeli authorities. A license was granted within two hours, but barely an hour later, the Israelis came to Sheikh Yassin and withdrew their consent, claiming there had been a mistake. The mosque and its nursery were closed, and they took Sheikh Yassin and Haj Ahmad Dalloul, another member of the Committee, for questioning, accusing them of collecting donations without permission and setting up a foundation. The Israeli decision, despite obvious second thoughts to grant the license to the Islamic compound in Tel Aviv, was an indicator of what would become unannounced, but official, Israeli policy. The Israeli government perceived its staunch enemy to be the nationalist and secular PLO, and by allowing Islamist rivals to flourish, it believed that opposing Palestinian groups would do its work on the ground in a way that did not necessitate active Israeli involvement.⁵⁴

During an interview in his office, Arafat's security advisor Mohammad Dahlan once said that Yitzhak Rabin, Defense Minister in Yitzhak Shamir's coalition government, was questioned by members of the Knesset⁵⁵ about his supposed support of Hamas by funding the Islamic compound and its activities. Rabin's short answer was that it was a tactic to undermine the influence of the PLO. He was also apparently quizzed by another Knesset member about the possibility of Hamas working against Israel. Rabin's reply was "This issue can be discussed later."⁵⁶

The Islamic Compound's activities as defined by its license were supposed to focus on sports, but in practice, Yassin admitted, "We were spreading the message of Islam, memorizing the *Quran* and building, schools, and clinics."⁵⁷ In 1983, Yassin and others leaders of his local organization, the Islamic Compound, were looking for weapons to arm their military wing, the *Mujahideen Palestine*, which Yassin had established the previous year. This new territory for them, vulnerable to the attentions of Israel's intelligence, succeeded in infiltrating the Islamic Compound and helpfully provided armaments (in other words, conducted a sting operation). Sheikh Yassin, Dr. Ibrahim Al Muqadma, Abdul Rahman Tam Raaz, Mohammad Chehab, Mohamed Arab Mahara, and others were subsequently arrested for possession of weapons.

Experience taught them that they needed to place things carefully if they had to develop a military wing when the social and political conditions were ripe for it.

The founder of Hamas later described the development of his movement in four clearly defined stages. The first phase was to build its institutions, charities, and social committees which would open them to the young and old; anyone who could play a role in resisting the occupier. This was a prelude to their confrontation with the Israeli enemy in the *intifada*, which according to Sheikh Yassin was instigated single-handedly by Hamas without involvement of other Palestinian factions.⁵⁸ The second phase worked on strengthening the roots of the resistance, and to boost political credibility among every household in the West Bank and Gaza. The third stage was the development of its military capabilities from stone throwing to using guns, hand grenades, and other explosives⁵⁹—anything which would give the Israelis sleepless nights, he said. The final stage was to see Hamas moving beyond the Palestinian dimension and establish a dialogue with its Arab and Islamic neighbors, because he said, “our enemy needs confrontation from a stronger force, and to have international backing is important for us.” Yassin announced that the Palestinian cause had gone beyond the slogans of the PLO, which reminded Arab and Islamic states that they should support the Palestinian cause, while cautioning them to leave the Palestinians to make their own decisions. While Arafat was adamant that they should remain independent of external interference, Hamas thought this policy foolhardy, arguing that the Palestinian cause is also an Arab and Islamic cause.⁶⁰

Palestinian uprising

Despite claims of the contrary, the *Intifada* or Palestinian Uprising erupted suddenly without any political decision by any organized group, and caught the Brotherhood, like the PLO, by surprise. On 8 December 1987, a motor accident at a Gaza checkpoint involving an Israeli truck and small vehicles transporting Palestinian workers,⁶¹ several of whom were killed, triggered the riots that spread and evolved into what became known as the *intifada*. This incident acted as the lighting spark to the accumulated fuel of many issues piling up for a long time; it burst out as a unplanned act of resistance against Israeli occupation which had been present on a low and discrete level for almost fifty years. It was at this time that the Palestinians decided to merge their efforts of gaining independence once and for all, regardless of the costs. The desire for freedom could be illustrated from the depth and wideness of the coordination of the resisting body, the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU).⁶² It was the force with which the Uprising began and continued for eight years which surprised Israel. Despite violent acts by Israel directed towards Palestinians, Palestinian retaliatory actions were limited to resistance movement and nonviolent civil disobedience. These actions primarily included creation of barricades, refusal to pay taxes, boycott of Israeli products, and general strikes. But the stone throwing at the Israeli Defense Forces by the Palestinian youth defined the violence which was highlighted by Israel where it was only to stop the impeding Israeli military forces. The uprising involved thousands of people, including children and women who had not even had a previous resistance experience.⁶³

By the start of the *intifada*, the various Islamist movements that went on to become Hamas had managed to establish themselves as a potent force in Palestinian politics, and one whose outlook and strategy differed in key ways from Fatah. But they lacked unity, let alone weapons. This was partly a reflection of the division of the Palestinian society itself. When the Jabaliya

refugee camp exploded suddenly into violence on 8 December 1987,⁶⁴ it provided the nascent Hamas with an impetus to focus more on their military direction.⁶⁵ The very next day, leading members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza met to discuss ways of utilizing the event to stir up religious and nationalist sentiments and assure the spread of public demonstrations. The meeting was held at the house of Ahmad Yassin, the founder of the Islamic Center, and was attended by other prominent leaders of the Center: Dr. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rantisi (age 40), a physician residing in Khan Yunis; Dr. Ibrahim al-Yazuri (age 45), a pharmacist residing in Gaza Strip; Shaykh Salih Shihada (age 40), an instructor at the Islamic University residing in the town of Bayt Hanun; ‘Isa al-Nashshar (age 35), an engineer in Rafah; Muhammad Sham’a (age 50), a teacher in al-Shati refugee camp; and ‘Abd al-Fattah Dukhan (age 50), a school principal at al-Nusayrat camp. The group was soon meeting regularly to develop contingency plans to deal with the fast-developing situation.⁶⁶

On 14 December the Brotherhood leaders issued a statement calling on the people to stand up to the Israeli occupation. Hamas retrospectively considered this its first serialized leaflet, though the new organization did not identify itself as Hamas until January.⁶⁷ Meanwhile Sheikh Yassin and his colleagues were in contact with their counterparts in the West Bank that same month, i.e. January 1988. Sheikh Yassin assigned Sheikh Jamil Hamami, a Brotherhood activist in the West Bank and one of the young preachers at Jerusalem’s *al-Aqsa* mosque to establish with his colleagues a branch of Hamas there. Hamami thus became the connection between Sheikh Yassin on the one hand and the Hamas command in the West Bank and the Brotherhood command in Jordan on the other. It should be noted that the latter provided financial support for the *intifada*.⁶⁸

The establishment of Hamas or the Islamic Resistance Movement (in Arabic *Harakat al-Muqawa al-Islamiyya*)⁶⁹ was not a clear-cut and immediately conscious decision, but it evolved over time. The Brotherhood’s response to the uprising was the subject of tensions within the organization. The question of participation in the *intifada* was not just one of the young versus the old. The new situations confronted the Muslim Brotherhood with a real ideological dilemma. On the one hand, given the unique events taking place in Palestine and the internal pressures within the movement, it would have been politically impossible for Yassin and the other leaders to allow the Brotherhood to remain on the sidelines,⁷⁰ especially in the light of the Brotherhood’s ongoing and bitter rivalry with PLO factions. It was not easy for the group to justify suddenly joining the *intifada* when its previous positions were well known; until the very eve of the uprising, Yassin and the other leaders had been arguing that the time had not yet come for the actual jihad.⁷¹

According to their oft-stated views, the Brotherhood was still in the phase of educating the Muslim generation in preparation for the bounding of the Muslim community; this in turn would be the prelude to the declaration of jihad against Israel.⁷² Similarly, Yassin and his close associates in the Brotherhood had to find a way to join the *intifada* without compromising the future of the movement they had built up with such painstaking efforts and personal sacrifice. (Yassin and a number of others had already served prison sentences.)⁷³ It was Sheikh Yassin’s idea, as a way out of these dilemmas, to create an ostensibly separate organization out of the Muslim Brotherhood to take responsibility for its participation in the *intifada*. The calculation was probably that if the *intifada* failed, the Brotherhood could distance itself from Hamas and escape Israeli retribution for its participation; whereas if the *intifada* continued, the Brotherhood could derive benefit by claiming Hamas as its own. This is precisely what happened when the Hamas Charter was issued in August 1988 proclaiming Hamas as a wing of the Brotherhood.⁷⁴ It

means that the establishment of Hamas by the Brotherhood in the occupied territories was parallel to the founding of the UNLU by the PLO factions, serving to channel their respective bodies' resistance activities.⁷⁵

Hamas's active role in the *intifada* and the growing awareness of its relationship to the Brotherhood was much needed because of the PLO campaign criticizing it for its non-participation in the armed struggle. Indeed, the Brotherhood began to equate the two organizations deliberately, and Yassin and his colleagues became more vocal and less circumspect in terms of their political visibility. Hamas soon became a credible and convenient name for a rehabilitated Muslim Brotherhood society, enabling the new organization to attract followers and supporters who had not been members of the Brotherhood.⁷⁶ Aswini K. Mohapatra argues that Hamas established itself as a serious rival to the Palestinian nationalist movement while contesting the PLO's claim to be the sole representative of the Palestinian people; Hamas has sought to liver itself into a dominant position by rejecting categorically the concept of coexistence with Israel.⁷⁷

Organizational structure

Although Sheikh Yassin took the initiatives to form the new resistance group, Hamas's other leading figures and its structure carried the organization further in its evolution and rising into the sole alternative political entity to Fatah. In the process of transition from a named resistance movement to a systematized party, Hamas created its complex and secret form of internal structure. However, Hamas has been a religious movement, a social welfare network, a militant group, and, at the same time, a political party. In its new political role, increasing numbers of Hamas members held official positions.⁷⁸ Many of these members were from the lower-or middle-class refugee families, with university-level education and from white-collar businesses. The organization was divided into three bases inside and outside the occupied territories and different constituencies that allow the movement certain latitude in its discourse.

The "outside" political bureau (*al-Maktab al-Siyasiya*) is headed by Khaled Meshaal, a soft-spoken former physics teacher who is the group's supreme political leader. The political bureau has eight to ten members who are responsible for daily affairs, fund raising, and international relations of the organization. They mainly live in exile in Syria and are appointed by the *Shura Council* (Consultative Council). The latter is an internal parliament made up of around fifty members who live both inside and outside the occupied territories. The members of the *Shura Council* are elected from the locally chosen representatives, and they are responsible for "outlining the overall strategy of the Hamas movement."⁷⁹

Together with the political bureau, they form the committees to regulate the charity organizations, educational institutions, internal affairs, and military.⁸⁰ Inside leadership of Hamas is divided into two regions: Gaza Strip and West Bank. Their main function is to have control over local units' daily dawah activities and "Security and Event Units."⁸¹ Between the two branches, Gaza leadership has a stronger ground in the overall structure of the organization, the political bureau and the military unit of Hamas. Until the assassination of Hamas's spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the organization had seemed to harbor all its units within its body. Khaled Hroub describes the two-branched leadership inside Palestine as "they control the muscles of the movement," while the outside leadership "controls the financial resources and external contacts."⁸²

In an interview he had with Reuters in 1998, Yassin rejected the idea of Hamas having separate factions that are moving uncoordinatedly. He said that “We cannot separate the wing from the body. If we do so, the body will not be able to fly. Hamas is one body.”⁸³ In the same article, another influential leader of Hamas, Abd al-Aziz al-Rantissi, stated that “Hamas’s political wing determines the overall policy of the movement.”⁸⁴ However, after the assassinations of Sheikh Salah Shehada, the founder of the military wing of Hamas, in 2002, and both primary leaders Sheikh Yassin and al-Rantissi, in 2004, the relationship between the military structure and the political bureau became more secretive, and even distant. An example of such an act could be the kidnapping of Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit by the al-Qassam Brigades in 2006.⁸⁵ All the efforts of Ismail Haniyeh for the release of the Israeli prisoner remained insufficient. After one year, Haniyeh commented to BBC News that there was a chance for an agreement if the Israelis used “logic and reason” to end what he called the “humanitarian suffering” of Palestinian prisoners.⁸⁶ Although there were major shifts of coordination between the political and military wings⁸⁷ of Hamas, the political leadership continues to be the sole unit that set the framework for the military wing. The latter decides “when, where, and how.”⁸⁸ The following figures show the internal structure of Hamas.

Hamas’s social welfare network

Hamas, from a militant movement to a political party, slowly carved its way to the top. Its movement aimed the social and political Islamization of the society from the bottom up. This strong faith in the upbringing of the society was an inherited tradition from Hamas’s Muslim Brotherhood roots. This belief in the “need to first re-establish the core principles of Islam within the individual” has been the basis of the Muslim Brotherhood movement initiated by Hasan al-Banna.⁸⁹ The latter considered that the only long-term strategy to defeat the dominant powers in the region (British) should be based on a program of “educating the masses in the true ways of Islam” starting with the individual⁹⁰ and establishing socio-economic justice among the Muslim population.⁹¹ So, besides its religious aspect, the Muslim Brotherhood organization succeeded in shaping itself also as a political movement with clear “socio-economic aims.” Hasan al-Banna defined the totality of the Muslim Brotherhood movement as “we believe that Islam is an all-embracing concept which regulates every aspect of life, adjudicating on every one of its concerns and prescribing for it a solid and rigorous order.”⁹² Yet, under the teachings of Hasan al-Banna, the Muslim Brotherhood promoted the objective of “building of a new generation of believers who will support the *Dawah* and become models for others.”⁹³ In doing so, the movement concentrated its activities on mosques, charity organizations, schools, students, and trade unions.⁹⁴ As being the most effective tool in “spreading influence,” between the years 1967 to 1987, the numbers of mosques in West Bank and Gaza rose from 400 to 750.⁹⁵ Besides their significance in religious teachings, and praying, mosques served as a platform for political socialization of masses. They would sometimes be co-located with other institutions (library, kindergarten, or health center) or charity organizations.⁹⁶ The organization’s funding for its charity work relied mainly on the collection of *Zakat* and its control over the property of *Waqf*. The collected revenue would be allocated to the public in need via the organization’s institutions.⁹⁷ The Muslim Brotherhood’s fundamental goal for reforming the society by and through all means was carried on by Hamas after its formation in 1987 with only one exceptional point: the Muslim Brotherhood movement did not support the idea of engaging in an armed

struggle until the full conversion of the society into Islam was completed. However, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and the other founding leaders of Hamas believed that both the Islamization and the jihad could be run at the same time without awaiting the accomplishment of the Palestinian society's transformation.

Hamas's inherited grassroots work had become its major strength in his journey to 2006 electoral success. Many Palestinians who were in need of charity and social welfare appreciated Hamas's services which were delivered honestly and transparently compared to PA's "corrupted performances."⁹⁸ Looking at a society with a large population in which the members are living under the poverty line and at constant risk of inner as well as outer violence,⁹⁹ one could presume how people might become open to all sources of aid and protection both in individual and family bases. Particularly after the second *intifada* in 2000, the inefficiencies of the PA institutions and growing economic poverty increased the demands for Hamas's charity services.¹⁰⁰ A newspaper article cited a mother of ten as "all we know is that Hamas is the one which brings us food."¹⁰¹

Hamas was able to implement its background experience sensitively on its people. The leaders of the movement were from the refugee camps themselves and were perfectly aware of the needs and demands of the society. So, Hamas transformed its common knowledge into action. This helped the organization in two phases: first, by their honest and transparent allocation of charity and social work, they increased their popularity among Palestinians, especially among the younger generation. They did this through the soup kitchens, social center, women centers, kindergartens, and health centers. Thus, these social institutions became Hamas's *raison d'être* and strength in the society.¹⁰²

Secondly, Hamas provided itself with an immensely strong network of information for the establishment of their political and military infrastructure. Hamas institutions such as student unions, sports clubs, and mosques were serving for young Palestinians as places where they could direct their anger and enthusiasm (zeal) towards a "higher goal" of being better Muslims as well as being a martyr. Although Hamas officials denied the fact that these organizations were benefiting the movement's recruitment offices,¹⁰³ and controlling over all the actions of Islamic Center, the international community believes otherwise.¹⁰⁴ Ibrahim al-Yazuri, an original participant in the founding of Hamas, described Hamas philosophy in perceiving social welfare as follows:

Everyone knows that the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, is a Palestinian jihad movement that strives for the liberation of all Palestine, from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river, from the north to the south, from the tyrannical Israeli occupation, and this is the main part of its concern. Social work is carried out in support of this aim, and it is considered to be part of the Hamas movement's strategy ... The Hamas movement is concerned about its individuals and its elements, especially those who engage in the blessed jihad against the hateful Israeli occupation, since they are subjected to detention or martyrdom. The movement takes care of their families and their children and provides them with as much material and moral support as it can. This is one of the fundamental truths of Islamic work and thus represents the duties of the Islamic state ... The movement provides this aid through the support and assistance it gives to the zakat committees and the Islamic associations and institutions in the Gaza Strip.¹⁰⁵

In both ways, the social welfare organizations which were controlled by the Islamic Center under

the shade of Hamas are providing vital services to the Palestinian society. Thus, people who are benefiting from or working for these institutions usually become the sympathizers, sometimes even members of the organization. The attacks of 11 September 2001, increased the awareness of the international community related to Islamic charity organizations and transformed them in their eyes into the funders of Islamic terrorism. Particularly, Hamas's promotion of martyrdom by providing the families of the suicide bombers with monthly stipends increased US pressure over Israel and PA for the control of the charity network.¹⁰⁶ Although the international community and Israel tried to limit and sometimes ban the activities of these welfare institutions, that did not help to reduce the popularity of Hamas at all.

Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades

The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades named after Izz al-Din al-Qassam is the military wing of the Palestinian Islamist political organization Hamas. Created in 1992, under the direction of Yahya Ayyash,¹⁰⁷ the primary objective of the group was to build a coherent military organization to support the goals of Hamas, which was at the time concerned with blocking the Oslo Accords negotiations. From 1994 to 2010, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades carried out a number of attacks against both Israeli soldiers and civilians.

Hamas is composed of three interrelated wings. The social welfare and political wings are the public faces of the group's social, administrative, political, and propaganda activities. The military wing is principally engaged in covert activities such as executing suspected collaborators, surveillance of potential targets, procuring weapons, and carrying out guerilla and military attacks.¹⁰⁸ From the start, however, the military wing of Hamas was divided into regional networks and local cells which communicated secretly through coded messages passed through internal communications channels, especially couriers.¹⁰⁹

The so-called external leadership of Hamas, located outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip, has traditionally played a more dominant decision making role than the group's internal or local leaders. This management trend began when the first head of the Hamas political bureau, Mousa Abu Marzook, ran the organization from his home in the United States and continued as the group later established political headquarters in Amman, Jordan, and then Damascus. The external leadership is divided into two main groups, one of Gazans led by Marzook,¹¹⁰ and one composed mostly of Hamas members from the West Bank who have studied or worked in Kuwait. The Kuwaidia, or Kuwaiti group, is led by Khaled Meshaal. The two factions work closely together, but there is some resentment against the Kuwaiti group within Marzook's faction, because Meshaal's Kuwaidia tend to dominate key positions within the Hamas political bureau. The structure of Hamas was static for its first few years, largely because Yasser Arafat's secular PLO was still weak and headquartered hundreds of miles away in Tunisia. Israel was not yet a regular target of Hamas attacks and was not therefore focusing on the group at the time. Hamas activities were distributed into functional branches whose operations were further broken down region-wise, which includes:

- A social welfare and administrative branch (the dawa), responsible for recruitment, funding, and social services;
- Al-Mujahideen al-Filastininun, an entity responsible for arms procurement and military activities, containing a subgroup charged with overseeing and coordinating demonstrations and other popular resistance, as well as organized violence in the

framework of the first intifada (uprising);

- A security branch (the Jehaz Aman) responsible for collecting information on suspected collaborators, and then apprehending, interrogating, and killing them, and
- A publications or media branch (the A'alam) responsible for producing and distributing leaflets, staffing press offices, and addressing propaganda issues.¹¹¹

Then, the group's political wing that oversees the activities of the rest of the movement's various component parts. Over time, however, the structure and responsibilities of Hamas's overt and covert wings developed to accommodate the changing environment in which the group found itself. In 1987, Hamas military cells began to carry out their first attacks targeting Israelis. At this point, Israeli collaborators within Palestinian society became a primary problem to Hamas's operations, so the Majd (an acronym for *Majmouath Jihad u-Dawa*, or the Holy War and Sermonizing Group) was created to serve as the strike force of the one-year-old Jehaz Aman security branch.¹¹² Its role was to discover and deal with Palestinians suspected of helping Israel. Founded in 1982, five years before the official founding of Hamas, the *al-Mujahideen al-Filastinun* was entrusted with the responsibility of procuring weapons. After the uprising broke out, this group was in charge of executing shooting and bombing attacks as well.¹¹³

After the Gulf War, the Majd and the *Mujahideen al-Filastinum* merged and became the military wing of Hamas.¹¹⁴ The influx in funds after the Gulf War allowed Hamas to strengthen its military capabilities and amass a standing army to lead the fight against the Israelis. The new military wing was renamed Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in honor of the famous Muslim leader who was killed in a rebellion against the British Palestine police during the British Mandate period in 1935.¹¹⁵ Izz al-Din Abd al-Qadar ibn Mustafa ibn Yusuf ibn Muhammad al-Qassam (1882–20 November 1935)¹¹⁶ was a Muslim preacher who was a leader in the fight against British, French, and Zionist organizations in the Levant in the 1920s and 1930s. Al-Qassam was born in Jableh, Syria, in the northern Latakia Governorate as the son of Abd al-Qadar, a Sharia court official during Ottoman rule and a local leader of the Qadari Sufi order. His grandfather had been a leading sheikh of the Qadari order and moved to Jableh from Iraq. Al-Qassam also followed the Hanafi School of jurisprudence (fiqh) and studied at the Istanbul Mosque under the teaching of the well-known 'Alim ("scholar") Sheikh Salim Tayarah.¹¹⁷ Sometime between 1902 and 1905, al-Qassam left for Cairo to study at the al-Azhar. Who he studied with is controversial. Some accounts say he studied under reformist Salafi scholar Muhammad Abduh and came into contact with another prominent Salafi, Rashid Rida,¹¹⁸ while others are skeptical of this account.¹¹⁹

At the al-Azhar, al-Qassam developed the thinking that would guide his future activism. Critical of a stagnant Islam, he preached among the ranks of the poor peasantry and fringe dwellers in urban slums of the necessity for a modern Islam: one capable of defending itself from Western colonialism through jihad.¹²⁰ He returned to Jableh in 1909 as an 'alim and served as a teacher at a Qadari madrasa ("Islamic school") where he taught both the mystical practices of the Sufi and the jurisprudence and commentary of the Qur'an. In addition, he preached as the imam of the Ibrahim Ibn-Adham Mosque.¹²¹ Following his return to Jableh, al-Qassam commenced a program of Islamic revival based on moral reforms which included the encouragement of maintaining regular *Salaah* (prayer) and the *Sawm* during Ramadan as well as advocating an end to gambling and alcohol consumption. Al-Qassam's campaign highly influenced Jableh's residents who increasingly adopted his reforms. He developed amiable relations with the local

Ottoman police who he would call upon to enforce *Sharia* law on rare cases of major violations.¹²² On some occasions, he would send disciples as vigilantes to intercept caravans transporting alcohol which would then be disposed of. Despite the support for Arab nationalism from some of his fellow alumni at al-Azhar and among Syrian notables, al-Qassam's loyalties most likely laid with the Ottoman Empire as his relationship with the authorities would indicate.¹²³ He was well regarded among much of Jableh's population where he gained a reputation for piety, simple manners, and good humor.

The al-Qassam Brigades continued the Majd duties of kidnapping and murdering suspected collaborators, but they soon branched out into targeting Israeli civilians. In December 1991, it carried out the first militant attack against an Israeli civilian, murdering Doron Shorshan, an Israeli resident of the "Kfar Darom" settlement in Gaza. This attack marked a turning point in the modus operandi of Hamas and set the group on the road toward the stunning and random suicide bombings and other attacks for which it is now well known.¹²⁴ Despite having rounded the militant corner and established a full-fledged militant wing, it still took time for the group to develop capabilities equal to its intent. The evolutionary development of Hamas's militant tactics led to the group's first suicide car bomb attack on 16 April 1993, when the al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for a blast outside a roadside cafeteria near the Mehola settlement in the West Bank.¹²⁵ After some time, on 6 April 1994, Hamas carried out its first successful suicide car bomb attack in Israel proper when a car packed with nearly 400 pounds of explosives detonated beside a bus picking up students in the Israeli town of Afula, forty miles northwest of Jerusalem.¹²⁶

As the al-Qassam Brigades continued their assaults on military and civilian enemies, newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was pressured to make a statement against Hamas and terrorism. On 17 December 1992, he ordered the deportation of 415 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members to Lebanon.¹²⁷ What began as an unprecedented show of force by Rabin soon became a political quagmire as the Lebanese unexpectedly refused to take the deportees, claiming that they were Israel's responsibility.¹²⁸ The Palestinians were left in a small territory on the Lebanon-Israel border where they were denied entry into either country. This situation, documented by media around the world, further strained the peace process that Arafat and Rabin had been engaging in as Arafat was pressured to suspend any negotiations until the deportees were allowed to return to their homes.¹²⁹ Rabin eventually consented, providing Arafat return to the negotiations, and organized reentry for the deportees. They were allowed reentry into Palestine in phases, with the last group returning home in December 1993, a full year after they had been exiled.

Since 1987, Hamas has committed countless acts of violence against both military and civilian targets, including suicide bombings, rocket and mortar fire, and shooting and other bombings attacks since its founding. In its early years Hamas conducted small-scale attacks, like the 1989 abductions and murder of Israeli soldiers Avi Sasportas and Ilan Sa'adon. But the group is best known for its suicide bombing attacks. Between February 1989 and March 2000, Hamas carried out at least twenty-seven attacks, including twelve suicide bombings and three failed bombings. These attacks caused approximately 185 deaths and left over 1,200 people wounded.¹³⁰ Hamas had previously not resorted to attacking civilians, but this incident made a bold statement that the group was encouraging all followers to not necessarily limit their violent resistance activities to military personnel. Hamas reasoned that since all Israeli civilians are required to serve in the military at one point in their lives, Israeli noncombatants are non-existent.

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3

IDEOLOGICAL ROOTS OF THE HAMAS– FATAH CONFLICT

As discussed in the preceding two chapters, the roots of Hamas–Fatah conflict lay in the fundamental ideological differences between the two Palestinian factions. While both are struggling for Palestinian statehood, they widely vary over the nature of the future Palestinian state. As part of the Islamic fundamentalism sweeping across the Muslim world in the 1980s, Hamas aims at creating an Islamic state in Palestine. As a product of the era of secular nationalism in the 1960s, Fatah stands for secular democratic state in Palestine. Its ideological position is predicated on the belief that the Palestinian people are part of the Arab Nation, and their struggle is part of its struggle though the Palestinian people have an independent identity. In contrast, Hamas considers nationalism as an element of religious belief and the land of Palestine as an “Islamic trust” for future Muslim generations till the day of Judgement. Because the problem of Palestine is a religious problem, it defies “political settlement” implicit in which is its rejection of the Fatah’s pursuit of a negotiated settlement with Israel. It is, instead, the “sacred duty” of all Muslims to fight in defense of the Palestinian land. In other words, Islam is the solution; is the bedrock theme for Hamas, which justifies both its moral agenda of founding of “Islamic personality” as well as its call for the spread of the spirit of Jihad for liberating Palestine. What have thus sustained the intra-Palestinian contest for political ascendancy are the apparently irreconcilable ideological positions and their divergent vision of the future Palestinian state. Broadly, this chapter examines the basic ideological differences between the two rival Palestinian factions and then explains the extent to which they have contributed to the flare-up of political hostility.

Origin of secular nationalist ideology in Palestine

Secular Arab Nationalism has been the root of the secular nationalist ideology of the Fatah/PLO since its creation. The central principle of Arab nationalism is that the peoples of the Arab World, from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea, constitute a separate nation bound together by common linguistic, cultural, religious, and historical heritage.¹ One of the primary goals of Arab nationalism is the end of Western influence in the Arab world, seen as a “nemesis” of Arab strength, and the removal of those Arab governments considered to be dependent upon Western

power. It rose to prominence with the weakening and defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

In the early twentieth century, Muslim intellectuals and politicians formed several organizations and societies, namely *al-Muntada al-Adabi* (the Literary Club) and the Ottoman Decentralization Party, *al-Qahtaniya*, *al-Ahd*, and *al-Fatat* (the Young Arab society).² These organizations and their activities carried the Arab nationalist torch, spreading its sparks throughout the Arab world. In the first few years of its existence, *al-Fatat* called for greater autonomy within a unified Ottoman state rather than Arab independence from the empire.³ The unwillingness of some Muslim thinkers like ‘Abdu, Rida, and Kawakibi to champion political independence for the Arabs from Ottoman Empire reflected the general intellectual disposition. Their principal concern was for the “close cooperation between the two national communities: the Turks and the Arabs.”⁴ The contrary, however, was not good enough, for Christian thinkers and writers did not agree with their ideas. These individuals had no doubts about breaking Ottoman unity, promoting a separate Arab identity, and advocating an independent political sphere for those whose mother language was Arabic.

Perhaps the earliest to advocate the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the creation of an independent Arab state was the Syrian Christian, Negib ‘Azoury. ‘Azoury echoed Rida’s and Kawakibi’s contempt for the Turks, but whereas the hostility of Rida and Kawakibi lay in what the Turks allegedly did to Islam and the Muslim world, ‘Azoury blamed the Turks for having “bankrupt the Arabs. Without them, the Arabs would have been among the most civilized nations in the world.”⁵ ‘Azoury argues that the Arabs are not just Muslims, but also Arabic-speaking Christians, and together they constitute the same “nation” that had to be politically independent from the Ottoman Turks.⁶ The frontiers of this nation-state would extend from the Tigris and the Euphrates to the Suez Isthmus and from the Mediterranean to the Arabian Sea. Following the path of England and France, this Arab state was to be secular, liberal, and constitutional. Another Christian from Syria, Ibrahim al-Yaziji (1847–1906) also advocated for an Arab nation for Muslims and Christians based on secular ideology.⁷

The Arabs remembered their achievements and argue that when foreigners, particularly the Turks, came to dominate them, Arab civilization began to decline. Thus, in order for the Arabs to reclaim their past glories, they needed to expel the Turks from their middle. Then, the old vigor of the Arab nation would return and the Arabs would restart their former progress in civilization.⁸ An analyst argues that there is an unmistakable appeal to the Muslim majority to join with the Christians in their ‘Arab nationalism’ and rise against the admittedly Muslim, yet ethnically separate, Ottoman Turks; while slender variations in points of emphases, nuances, and ideological direction could be found in the writings of other Christian intellectuals. The primary focus of these writers invariably was on the national uniqueness of the Arabs, Muslims and Christians alike, and their membership of one inseparable Arab nation that would find its true expression and would fulfill its promise only through a secular and liberal nation-state.⁹

The Ottomans had suffered major military setbacks in 1917, opening the way for British forces under the command of General Allenby to move into Palestine from Egypt, capturing Jerusalem in December of that year. Arab forces led by Faysal paralleled Allenby’s effort. Focusing primarily on disrupting Ottoman communications and supply lines, Faysal was able to lead his troops into Damascus on 1 October 1918. He set out immediately to form an Arab administration.¹⁰ Here, Faysal had a real opportunity for the idea of Arab nationalism to be institutionalized. Needing to give legitimacy on his rule, which he thought could be tarnished by his Hejazi origins;¹¹ he dynamically celebrated the virtues of the larger Arab identity. He

reminded the citizens of Syria that he and they belonged to the same people, the Arabs, who lived in “the region which is bounded by the sea in the east, the south, and the west and by the Taurus Mountains to the south.”¹² He would place loyalty to the “Arab nation” above all loyalties, even above commitment to religious beliefs. “The Arabs,” he declared in a speech in Aleppo, “were Arabs before Moses, Christ and Muhamed.” Indeed, Muhamed was an Arab before being a prophet.¹³ These ideas were put into action by the national government. The government’s policies were deliberately and purposely nationalist and secularist. A number of Christians joined Faysal’s administration, participating actively in the country’s politics. Along with their Muslim colleagues, they generally were nationalists who believed in cementing Syria’s Arab nationalist identity.¹⁴

Sati al-Husri was an ex-Ottoman official of Syrian descent, who was appointed by Faysal as minister of education. Husri embarked on a wholesale Arabization of the Syrian school system. Textbooks were translated into Arabic, historical and social studies were expected to reflect Arab nationalist concerns, and an Arab academy was established to find Arabic terms for scientific and technological use.¹⁵ Along with language, Husri cites history as the other crucial factor in nationhood. He argues that nationalist feeling depends on historical memories more than anything else. History-based ideas and data play an important role in the life of nations and have a great impact on the direction of nationalist ideology.¹⁶

Husri’s nationalism is emphatically secular and intellectually extricated from Islamic political thought, even though Islam is the religion of the crushing majority of the Arab people. In his national formulation, Husri contends that, unlike language and history, religion does not constitute a fundamental element of national formation.¹⁷ While he concedes that at times religion has played an important role in development national feelings, he states that this is true only of “national religions,” such as Judaism, that serve a particular people. In contrast, universal religions such as Islam and Christianity, which are embraced by people of different languages, cultures, and locale, must by definition be opposed to nationalism. In such a competition, Husri is confident that human solidarity built around religious affiliation would not stand up to the force of secular cultural nationalism.¹⁸ In support of his secular views, Husri would cite historical instances.¹⁹

This formulation is meant to emphasize the secularism of Husri’s Arab nationalism. It thus allows him to incorporate the Arab Christians under the unifying roof of Arab nationalism. Husri pointedly argues that Christians are as proud of their Arab heritage as their Muslim brothers, and a Christian is as Arab as any Muslim. This concept of liberalism toward the minority Christian population in the Arab world is not reflected in the rest of Husri’s Arab nationalist doctrine.²⁰ The concept of liberal democracy is missing from Husri’s ideological formulations, and the notion of individual liberty is so tangential to his main concerns as to be irrelevant. In this he was merely mirroring the German romantics upon whose ideas his concept of nationalism was based, and to them the word “liberty” did not refer to the rights of the individual, but to the independence of the nation from foreign rule, through “the unity and power of the group.”²¹ For example, have no doubts about restricting the freedom of the individual for the higher good of the love of the fatherland.²²

Nasserism and pan-Arabism

Nasserism is a secular Arab nationalist ideology based on the thoughts of Egyptian President

Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein. In larger perspective, it combines elements of Arab socialism, Palestinian nationalism, anti-imperialism, or anti-Israeli and international non-alignment policy. It also opposed ideologically to Western capitalism. Nasserism or Arab socialism also developed as a rejection of communism, which was seen as incompatible with Arab traditions, and the religious support of Arab society.²³

After the Egyptian Revolution in 1952, Nasser became the powerful leader of Egypt, and he had many challenges. The first of these was the Arab-Israeli problem. In the first years after the revolution, Nasser was not worried about the Israeli threat.²⁴ He supported liberation of Palestine from Zionist occupation. He shared the Arab sympathy for the exiled Palestinian Arabs and hostility towards Zionism. But his real hatred was for the corrupt old regime in Egypt which was responsible for the catastrophe in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.²⁵ He was fully aware that the Arabs were in no condition for a second round with Israel and he was prepared to agree with both the UK and the US that the problem should be frozen for the time being—especially as both the Eisenhower and Eden administrations seemed prepared at that stage to adopt an even-handed policy between Arabs and Jews in West Asia.

How to design Egyptian foreign policy? It was the second challenge for President Nasser. He was originally well disposed towards the US, and the Eisenhower administration was prepared to give the young revolutionaries some humble support. Even the Eden government accorded them a certain patronizing tolerance although the often violent course of negotiations on the Sudan and the Suez base had planted the seeds of a deep distrust of Nasserism in British policy which was soon to develop into hatred.²⁶ In any case, neither Washington nor London was prepared to provide arms to Egypt, and they were not ready. For example, Egypt extend its influence outside its borders by leading a movement to keep the West Asian Arab states out of the Cold War, which was then at its height, and outside any Western-based military defense system.²⁷ In the face of American doubts, the UK government was pursuing its plans to establish an anti-Soviet military system based on its principal ally in the Arab world—Iraq—which was to become known as the Baghdad Pact.²⁸ President Nasser was equally determined to try to prevent the Arab states from being strained into this pact which he regarded, not without reason, as a means of extending the West's hegemony over the Arab world.²⁹

Pan-Arabism was the dominant ideology of the Arab world, and the Arabs considered Nasser its acknowledged leader. An analyst attributes Nasser's status to his charisma, bolstered by his perceived victory in the Suez Crisis.³⁰ The Cairo-based Voice of the Arabs radio station spread Nasser's ideas of united Arab action throughout the Arabic-speaking world. Again, a political analyst states that Nasser conquered the Arab world by radio.³¹ Nasser had the support of Arab nationalist organizations, both paramilitary and civilian, all over the West Asian region. His followers were numerous and well-funded. Despite Nasser's objection, they called themselves "Nasserites." He preferred the term "Arab nationalists."

President Nasser believed in secular nationalist ideology, and he tried to implement it. He established a secular democratic state in Egypt. Certainly, Nasser's rule was not liberal, as he banned political parties and largely ruled through his own power, but it was still largely secular.³² He never adopted the hostility towards religion that characterized so many other socialist governments, and he often courted religious groups to legitimize his rule. He even had ties to the Muslim Brotherhood early in his rising year. Yet his was nonetheless a secular ideology that consciously sought to include Arab Christians as well as Muslims.³³ Pan-Arabism was the identity of the era, not Islamism, and as a result Nasser's politics was not based on a religion. He did not ignore religion, and in fact he sought to make stronger the state's control

over institutions of Islam, but his rule was never fundamentally based on or dedicated to Islamic values. The political leaders were wary of Islam, seeing it as an obstacle “to the full realization of the nation-state.”³⁴

President Nasser emerged as a powerful threat to US interests as well as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) because he boycotted both ideologies and created a new idea with support of the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito, called the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) policy for the national independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and security of third world countries. Nasser was against imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, and all forms of foreign violence, occupation, domination, interference, or hegemony as well as great power and alliance politics.³⁵ Consequently, the US adopted the Eisenhower Doctrine and pledged to prevent the spread of communism and its perceived agents in West Asia. Although President Nasser was an opponent of communism in the region, his promotion of pan-Arabism was viewed as a threat by pro-Western states in the region.³⁶ The US tried to isolate Nasser and reduce his regional influence by attempting to transform King Saud into a counterweight.³⁷

Ba’athism

Ba’athism is a secular Arab nationalist movement started by Michel Aflaq, a Christian thinker, and the Sunni Muslim Salah ad-Din Bitar in 1940. It believes in the development and creation of a unified Arab state through the leadership of a progressive revolutionary government. In 1953 the Ba’ath movement became known as the Ba’ath Arab Socialist Party, and it became one of the strongest ideologies of Arab revolutionary nationalism.³⁸ Arab unity is at the core issue of Ba’ath ideology and prevails over all other objectives. Aflaq was an Arab nationalist with a Western education and Western European attitudes. For a moment he was ragged between the doctrines of Marxist materialism and romantic nationalism. This romantic nationalism touches a harmony close to nearly all Arab hearts, harking back to the days of glory and the Islamic Arab Empire.³⁹ Aflaq builds the new Arab Empire on a secular framework as a substitute of Islam, although he recognized the impact of Islam but advocated secularism. Aflaq, being of Christian origin, was obligated to establish his nationalism on secular values, despite the fact that Arab nationalism is often equated with the Arab Muslims.⁴⁰

Some Arabs supported the Ba’athist Revolution to liberate the Arabs from the possibility of encroaching *Sharia* law because the Ba’athists had sacrificed their lives to aid the destruction of *Sharia* law. Islam is a reactionary religion. Iraq was a secular state and therefore indefinitely more progressive than the Islamic “republics” surrounding it. Regarding Iraq, most Ba’athist Arabs opposed *Sharia* law and supported secularism, while other Muslims were religious fanatics. The Ba’athist ideology has been pursued mainly by Arab states Syria and Iraq, who claim religious beliefs from Christianity, to Islam, to atheism, to even Judaism. Ba’athists devotedly embrace secularism and technological progress and opposes Islamic *Sharia* law. Besides, the Iraqi Ba’athists embraced the Soviet Union, logically becoming allies of third positionists as nationalists who are conscious of the threat of capitalism. Ba’athism strongly continues to oppose a global capitalist structure that not only keeps them confined but also the majority of the world. Therefore, Arab Ba’athists and their American, European, and Israeli Third Positionist brothers should work actively together to shatter imperialistic ideologies like capitalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and mainstream Torah Zionism.⁴¹ Ba’athist ideology supported technical progress and boycotted religious values in the state. Iraqi President Saddam

Hussein set out to progress his people scientifically at the outlay of religion in the same way that Stalin did! The regime in Israel which the Ba'athists opposed was nothing but a puppet for US interests in the West Asian region. The US stabbed Saddam Hussein in the back, and logically he had to respond with defiance. But this does not mean that Saddam Hussein was stuck on killing Jews. An analyst argues that Hussein was an open-minded and secular man. He was not against the Jews, but his interests were against of US.⁴²

Influence of the soviet union and communism

Communism is also an ideological root of secular nationalist ideology because several Arab nationalists were influenced by the Russian Revolution of 1917. After the revolution, numerous political parties were formed which were based on communist ideology. The loyalty of Arab communist parties to Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideological and organizational precepts, together with their dependence on Soviet material and political support, renders it necessary to trace their initial foundations in the context of political developments in the USSR. The Bolshevik Revolution was initially willingly welcomed by many peoples of West Asia. After the October 1917 revolution, the victorious Bolsheviks inherited a strong socio-economic base to build on and were able to add a new ideological dimension to it. The communist revolutionary appeal was, at that time, enthusiastically greeted by many Muslim and non-Muslim people of the world, who saw in it a historic chance for the fulfillment of social and national aspirations which had long been suppressed by the domination of the Western powers. The Bolsheviks condemned their underhanded diplomacy toward the Muslim countries.⁴³

Soon after the 1917 October revolution, the Soviet leaders encouraged Arab and other Asian anti-imperialism or anti-colonial activists to join the popular struggle for national liberation.⁴⁴ Reasoning that the achievement of national liberation was possible only through a united effort within the country, the Soviets even contemplated utilizing Islam as a “cultural movement,” and “the only factor of unity among the Muslims,” for that purpose.⁴⁵ At that time, they also considered the prospects for extending the struggle for political independence by tying it to the battle for social justice and ultimately the implementation of socialist and secular ideas.⁴⁶ Consequently, Arab communists had strong ideological interests and practical involvement in the Arab nationalist movement. As such, then they had an impact on the ideological and organizational shape of Arab politics in the twentieth century, which was on the whole quite disproportional to their direct political role and real strength in the region.⁴⁷

On 19 January 1918, the Soviet government established a Commissariat for Muslim Affairs. A Central Bureau of Muslim Communist Organizations was set up in November 1918 by a regional Muslim congress meeting in Moscow. In November 1919, a Second Congress met in Moscow and passed a resolution calling for the establishment of communist parties throughout West Asia.⁴⁸ According to British Foreign Office reports, within a year of the establishment of the Comintern in March 1919, Bolshevik propaganda and ideas began to appear in Palestine, and Jewish immigrants established the Socialist Workers' Party (*Mifleget Poalim Sozialistim*).⁴⁹ It was, in fact, this party that initiated the formation of communist parties in Syria and Lebanon and influenced the transformation of the Egyptian Socialist Party into the Egyptian Communist Party. In 1920, the Bolshevik government consequently refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the British-mandated rule in Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan, and of France in Syria and Lebanon. The egalitarian Treaties of Friendship and Brotherhood – concluded in 1921 by Soviet Russia and the Muslim countries of Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran – repudiated the very concept of the

mandate system. Moreover, the USSR was the first country to establish full diplomatic relations with Hijaz (after 1932, the name was changed to Saudi Arabia) and in 1926 recognized an independent Yemen.⁵⁰ It is in this context that Arab communist groups and parties began emerging throughout the region:

- The Socialist Party of Egypt was formed in 1921, elements of which formed the Egyptian Communist Party in 1922. In 1923, the Comintern recognized the Egyptian Communist Party.
- The Spartacus group was formed in Beirut in 1921. In 1924, the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon (CPSL) were established, and in 1928, the Comintern recognized it.
- The Palestine Communist Party (PCP) was established in 1923 and was officially recognized by the Comintern in 1924.
- In the Maghrib, in 1919, communist parties began as extensions of the French Communist Party.
- The Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) was organized in 1934.

Subsequently, the Third International issued a call to the Muslim peoples to attend a congress, to be convened at Baku on 15 August 1921, devoted to a discussion of their future. From the very beginning, the Iraqi communists in particular were strongly orientated toward a pan-Arabism path. The *Jam'iyat al-Ahrar* (Association of Liberals) published in its 1929 program a call urging that people regard "all Arab countries as one country."⁵¹ Further, its members were bound to oath their loyalty, making an oath upon "the honour of Arabism."⁵² At the same time, the communists' pan-Arab political orientation was, at least partly, inspired by Soviet interests in an alliance with the broad popular Arab movement in a common struggle against the Western powers.⁵³

This may explain the parties' hesitant attitude toward becoming involved with the petit bourgeoisie and other national revolutionary groups of the period. Naturally, for all future communist documents on the issue of Arab unity, the statement anticipated its gradual and free voluntary implementation and assumed both the complete national state independence of the Arab countries involved and that a federal political structure would be established.⁵⁴ Probably due to the impact of Marxist-Leninist theory and the strong non-Arab ethnic minorities represented in their rank and file, the Arab communists soon showed some doubt and cautiousness toward the grandiose appeals of Arab nationalism.⁵⁵

Nonetheless, a more careful, and even somewhat doubtful, attitude did not mean the denial of the goal of Arab unity that the Arab communists conceived of as an essential tool for strengthening the national liberation struggle against Western imperialism.⁵⁶ Their proposed rule was to "proceed separately but to strike together."⁵⁷ Occasional temporary agreements with the Arab nationalist groups for common action were considered permissible "provided their vacillation and inconsistency are criticized, thereby preserving the complete ideological and organisational independence of the communist movement."⁵⁸ The communists considered their participation in the national liberation of the Arab countries as a way to achieve a position of leadership of the peasant masses, the poor in the city, and the masses of the petit bourgeoisie. As the resolution stated, hegemony over the working class cannot be realized without a persistent manual struggle for Arab national independence and freedom. There can be no permanent victory for national and political independence without an agrarian peasant revolution, and the

establishment of a workers' and peasants' government, at least in the more developed Arab countries, namely Syria, Palestine, and Egypt.⁵⁹ Thus, we have seen communist ideology had a huge impact on Arab nationalism as well as Palestinian secular nationalism.

Fatah's ideology

Fatah has not defined its ideology in clear terms. It is opposed to formulating any ideological program in general and maintains strict objectivity with regard to the ideological and political conflicts which divide the contemporary society, including the Arab world.⁶⁰ Fatah has explained why it has not defined its ideology. It is of the opinion that the Palestine National Liberation Movement (Fatah) "is neither a Party nor a Front. It is simply a movement." Moreover,

The Party has a fixed social ideology and the Front group organisations within the context of a specific plan of action. The fundamental element of a movement is dynamism. It accepts fundamental principles as well as assumptions but subjects its thoughts to practice and experience. Through motion and dynamism the movement builds its intellectual content.⁶¹

According to Fatah, it has certain basic principles and concepts. Its intellectual content can crystallize only through dynamic and pragmatic experience. Its dynamism is cybernetic. This cybernetic dynamism is essential for the success of an active movement like Fatah. Theory is an outcome of experience, and practice is a real test for thoughts and positions.⁶² Everything is judged through practice. Fatah through its dynamism translates all its concepts and policies into practice, modifying and altering them to the point where it can build its intellectual content. Consequently, as a movement, Fatah refused to be still and cannot define the man of the future through metaphysical reasoning. It thinks that by defining the ideology, it may become static which will hinder its growth. Therefore, it wants to be dynamic and to build up its concepts and policies through experience and practice.⁶³

Fatah appointed a special committee in 1958 to draft its guiding principles. The summary of the draft is as follows:

- Revolutionary violence is the only available means of liberating the homeland.
- This violence must be exerted by the masses.
- The object of this revolutionary violence is to liquidate the political, economic, and military institutions of Zionism over the whole of the territory of Palestine under Israeli control.
- This revolutionary action should be independent of all party or state control.
- This revolutionary struggle will of necessity continue over a long period.
- It is an Arab revolution spearheaded by the Palestinians.⁶⁴

As compared to other Fedayeen groups, Fatah's stand seems to be conservative. It does not make a fundamental break with the past, though it has adopted all modern political ideas that suit the prevailing situation—except the Marxist ideology of scientific socialism.⁶⁵ There were two wings, "the rightists" and "the leftists," in the organization. The former was led by Khaled el

Hassan and the latter by Salah Khalef. Yasser Arafat was the organization's spokesman. He acted as an arbiter between the factions.⁶⁶ In spite of the charges leveled against Fatah, it is difficult to say that it is fundamentally a conservative movement. It may have followed a conservative policy to win over the conservative elements of the Arab East, but its practice has a definite left orientation.

Fatah has implemented the Maoist military strategy of people's war without uttering the name of Mao Zedong. Fatah explained its leftist stand in a very short article called "Fatah and the Left" published in the *Fatah*. It explained its leftism as follows: notwithstanding the variegated definitions of the Left in general, it can be safely stated that all genuine leftist movements seek to end man's exploitation of man, start by refusing a given condition or structure, and proceed to change it by resistance or struggle and revolt.⁶⁷

The apex of struggle is armed struggle. Fatah was more leftist than anything since it intellectually rejects a status quo or a given condition and wants to change it through armed struggle. Within this frame of reference, Fatah accused the Communist Party in Jordan, for instance, of being rightist because it has failed to join the national movement which has taken up arms to change the status quo. Fatah also justifies its leftist stand by citing examples of various revolutionary experiences and how they vary from one another. There are variances in socialist experiences from Yugoslavia to Poland and from Russia to China.⁶⁸

As long as there are such differences over the social content of these experiences, and as long as every social content is certainly changing with time, it is not easy to predict the future and define, outright, a theoretical social content for the Palestinian Revolution. Even if it has not defined its ideology, Fatah believes that the social content for the Palestinian Revolution is bound to safeguard two basic objectives:

- Doing away with man's exploitation of man.
- Implementing social justice.

To blame Fatah for having businessperson inclinations just for not restricting the Palestinian revolutionary struggle to the class of peasants and workers is, to say the least, unfair.⁶⁹ Those who make such accusations ignore the fact that Fatah represents a peculiar but wider class: the class of uprooted, displaced, and oppressed Palestinians. It therefore embraces all the Palestinians who hope for a homeland. Fatah's left orientation is based on the analysis of the Arab situation and the nature of the Palestinian struggle. Its argument is that certain classes which were unknown in the days of Marx have emerged in history. Marx did not study a class called the "displaced persons' class" which has appeared among the Palestinians. Fatah, which never called itself Marxist-Leninist, was the first to practice armed struggle. Fatah claims that actual practice and not words should be the real condition.⁷⁰ There were many Marxists in Fatah. Hence, to say that Fatah is a "right" organization is to undermine its character in the context of historical situations. Its political orientation may have been influenced by the traditional culture and religious faith which are common in the Arab countries. The "Voice of Al-Asifah"⁷¹ (Fatah Radio) and its Fedayeen communiqués used to start with "In the Name of Allah, the magnificent, the merciful ..." but this may be a tactic to win over the Arab masses and to get the financial support of conservative regimes like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It may not be a question of strategic compromise (or a long-term compromise) with them. Because whatever Fatah has announced or may announce would be connected with the requirement of immediate stages of the national liberation movement than with long-term strategy.⁷² Fatah is of the opinion that it

represents a revolutionary movement that does not allow it to be bogged down in the sticky incompatibilities of ideology. Revolutionaries all over the world pin hope in the “cybernetic dynamism” of Fatah.⁷³ It cannot be criticized on the basis of its present ideological stand which may be short-term tactics. One has to keep in mind that the Palestinian revolutionaries do have bases in several Arab countries. They cannot antagonize the regimes on whose territory they operate. If Fatah officially takes a Marxist-Leninist line, it can neither get the financial support from the Arab regimes nor freely operate. Apparently, Fatah’s line is pragmatic.

Secular Palestine as Fatah’s goal

Fatah tries to create a secular state in Palestine under the PLO. According to Fatah, every person can live with his/her religion. Therefore, at the fourth session of the PNC, in July 1968, the Palestinian Covenant was amended to emphasize Palestinian distinctiveness within the Arab nation. The changes were drafted and approved with the agreement of the Fedayeen organizations and all those attending the Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting.⁷⁴ Article 1 of the PLO charter (1968) says, “Palestine is the homeland of the Arab Palestinian people; it is an indivisible part of the Arab homeland, and the Palestinian people are an integral part of the Arab nation.”⁷⁵ Again, article 3 states, “The Palestinian Arab people possess the legal right to their homeland and have the right to determine their destiny after achieving the liberation of their country in accordance with their wishes and entirely of their own accord and will,”⁷⁶ and that Israel should be eliminated from the region. Judaism, according to the Covenant, “being a religion, is not an independent nationality, nor do the Jews constitute a single nation with an identity of its own; they are citizens of the states to which they belong.”⁷⁷

The uncompromising maximalism adopted by the PLO in the Covenant represented the consensus among Palestinians and was received sympathetically by the Arab world then led by Nasser. Most Arabs believed that Israel was a barrier in the way of a possible Arab unity. The extensive literature about the conflict published in the Arab world in those days, official and unofficial, emphasized the main lines of the Covenant and the refusal to recognize Israel. In the words of the PLO’s charter, article 22:

Zionism is a political movement organically associated with international imperialism and antagonistic to all action for liberation and to progressive movements in the world. It is racist and fanatic in its nature; aggressive, expansionist, and colonial in its aims; and fascist in its methods. Israel is the instrument of the Zionist movement, and geographical base for world imperialism placed strategically in the midst of the Arab homeland to combat the hopes of the Arab nation for liberation, unity, and progress.⁷⁸

The recurrent emphases of the fourth session of the PNC on the general principles of the Covenant, despite the results of the June 1967 war and the occupation of additional Arab territory by Israel and the defeat of the Arab armies by Israel, strengthened the PLO and its perception by other Arabs as the representative of the Palestinian people. This made a significant contribution to the increased prestige of the PLO in the world and its recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and as a revolutionary movement waging a just struggle for national liberation.⁷⁹ In parallel to the rising prestige of the PLO, a discussion began in the late 1960s, influenced by the outcome of the 1967 war, in various circles of the PLO and its supporters in the Arab world and elsewhere, about parts of the consensus expressed in the

Covenant and in particular the establishment of a Palestinian state and the attitude towards the Jews.⁸⁰ The first glimmers of a change were the result of intentional pressure exerted by the PLO to break out into the wider world and expand its support and recognition as the representative of the Palestinian people by states and societies not necessarily Arab or West Asian. This entailed a need to adopt positions that took account of the presence of Jews in Palestine. It placed the idea of “the establishment of a secular democratic Palestinian state after the liberation of Palestine from the Zionists” on the agenda of the Palestinians and PLO; the idea was first floated in May 1968 and adopted officially by the PNC at its eighth session, held in Cairo in March 1971.⁸¹

The concept of a secular state represented the first step toward recognition of the Jews and their right to equal treatment with the Palestinians. In particular the idea was based on the assumption that “after the liberation of Palestine from Zionist rule,” the entity to be established in Palestine would be “an independent and democratic state whose citizens have equal rights, irrespective of their religious affiliation.”⁸² In their attempts to market this idea, Fatah leaders emphasized the need to distinguish Judaism as a religion from Zionism “as a racist movement that is not appropriate to human identity”⁸³ in the future Palestinian state, civic equality for the Jews would be conditional on their renunciation of Zionism.⁸⁴ The Democratic Front for Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), headed by Naef Hawatmeh, went further than Fatah and recognized that “a Jewish people had been born” in Palestine that was distinct from the other Jews in the world, and it would be necessary to take account of this identity in the future resolution of the conflict.⁸⁵ In practice, the Democratic Front came very close to the idea of a binational state in Palestine but did not dare advance it as its preferred solution; instead, it continued to advocate a democratic state with “a special link to a united Arab socialist state.”⁸⁶

Origin of Islamic Jihad in Palestine

Since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising in December 1987, the Palestine Islamic movement has sought to utilize the concept and technique of jihad. Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad have done this in the political context of a mass civilian uprising against Israel.⁸⁷ Jihad and Palestine are, however, absent in account of the rich Islamic heritage, and the special place it occupies in the accounts of the life of the Prophet, however, help explain how the Islamic movement has harnessed the notion of Jihad and used it as a battle cry to liberate the holy land from Israeli rule. The centrality of Jerusalem to the Islamic faith assumes importance in the context of a foreign occupation of the holy land.⁸⁸ This foreign occupation has involved the control of Islamic religious life: for example, *the Harm al-Sharif* is a holy site in Islam, and it is located in Jerusalem. Since the uprising, the abuse of religious rights by the occupying forces has provided justification for jihad made by the Palestinian Islamic movement.⁸⁹

Since its founding in Egypt in 1928, the Muslim Brotherhood has sought to fuse religious revival with anti-imperialism resistance to foreign domination through the exultation of Islam. At its beginning, the Brotherhood differed from earlier reformers by combining a profound Islamic ideology with modern grass roots of political activism.⁹⁰ The Brotherhood pursued an Islamic society through *tarbiyya*,⁹¹ concentrating first on changing the outlook of individuals, then families, and finally societies. While Islamic Jihad has remained small and has never commanded a following anywhere near the following of the Brotherhood, it is important to dwell briefly on the movement and its position, because its positions encompass criticism leveled at the Brotherhood which in fact were later addressed in the creation of Hamas, i.e. the Brotherhood's

lack of commitment to an all-out struggle against Israel.⁹²

The manner in which the Islamic Jihad views jihad is reflected in the activities that the group has undertaken in the occupied territories. It is contended by many analysts that the approach of the group to this subject is rooted in several sources, including Shia Islamic thought and the Egyptian Islamic Jihad movement⁹³ (particularly the *Takfir wa-Hijra* group). Islamic Jihad cites all these sources as influential in their approach to jihad, but as one of their most senior leaders, Shaikh Abd al-Aziz Odeh [Awad], declared: “We consider Sayyid Qutb [Qutub] to be a genuine representative of the Islamic revolutionary trend.”⁹⁴ In his books, Qutub emphasized both striving by the sword and preaching for jihad. However, he declared that anyone who understood that particular chapter of the religion would also understand the place of *Jihad bi-al-sayf* (striving through the sword), which is striving through preaching in the application of the Islamic movement. The importance of waging jihad is constantly emphasized by Qutub. Islamic Jihad in Palestine has remained committed to the revolutionary approach encouraged by Qutub.⁹⁵ It is argued that while preaching has its place, *Jihad bi-al-sayf* is the only way for Palestinians to liberate themselves.

Ideologically, the Islamic Jihad shares with the Muslim Brotherhood the same basic precepts concerning the need for the establishment of an Islamic state and for the application of Islamic principles in an Islamic society.⁹⁶ The chief difference between the two groups lies in the place of Palestine in their priorities and their means of action. All Islamic groups, not only in Palestine but throughout the Muslim world, consider Palestine in its entirety as a Muslim land, no part of which can be ceded under any circumstance. The establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is therefore seen as sinful if it entails conceding the rest of Palestine to Israel, an illegitimate entity.⁹⁷ For the Islamic groups, Palestine is not merely a Palestinian or an Arab problem, but an Islamic problem for the entire Islamic nation; true Muslims are called upon to sacrifice lives and money to liberate every inch of the holy land.

Where the Islamic groups differ is on the centrality of the Palestine issue and the proper timing for liberating the country. For the Muslim Brotherhood, the first priority is the Islamic transformation of society, which it sees as a prerequisite to the liberation of Palestine.⁹⁸ According to the Brotherhood, armed struggle (jihad) cannot be undertaken until the society is a reformed and secular ideas are abandoned and Islam adopted. The Islamic Jihad, on the other hand, considers Palestine its central issue and advocates armed struggle as its strategy for political action without waiting for the Islamization of the society.⁹⁹ The Islamic Jihad was more critical of the Brotherhood’s failure to engage in an armed struggle in that jihad is one of the five pillars of Islamic doctrine. The Brotherhood’s reformist approach and traditionalist ideas and practices favored evolutionary action by an Islamic vanguard. For the Islamic Jihad, the problems of Arab society cannot be solved by gradual measures or “true patching and reform,” but by “decisiveness and revolution.”¹⁰⁰

In a similar vein, Islamic Jihad objected to the Muslim Brotherhood’s position of coexistence with the Arab regimes, especially those having strong ties with the West, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. These it regarded as an “actual security belt for Israel,” considering the Arab regimes and Israel as the two sides of the same coin; they are both the fruit of the Western invasion of the Arab world.¹⁰¹ Given these views, it is not surprising that another source of disagreement between the two groups emerged over the attitude toward the Islamic revolution in Iran, which the Brotherhood began to criticize after the Iran–Iraq war broke out. The Jihad movement, on the other hand, considered the Ayatollah Khomeini as an important source of ideological inspiration. Because of its focus on Palestine as a central issue, the Islamic Jihad

shares a common objective with the PLO factions.¹⁰² Despite its Islamic approach to the achievement of this objective and its disapproval of the PLO's political program and diplomatic conduct as being incompatible with the "Islamic views of history," the Islamic Jihad does not see itself as a rival or alternative to the PLO. The Brotherhood, for its part, has accused the Islamic Jihad of being part of the Fatah movement, the "Islamic Fatah," and for concentrating on political matters at the expense of Islamic education.¹⁰³

Despite the challenge posed by the more radical Islamic Jihad and the nationalist forces, a challenge made stronger by the Islamic Jihad's launching of military operations in the mid-1980s and even participation in certain joint actions with Fatah against Israeli targets in the occupied territories,¹⁰⁴ the Brotherhood held firm in its refusal to engage in outward resistance to the occupation. However, the *intifada* changed Hamas's gradualist approach and soon turned it into a well-organized resistance movement in the occupied territories.

Hamas's goal

Hamas emerged as an Islamic resistance organization in Palestinian politics. Hamas was also working as a Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and was following its ideological Islamic path since its creation. Article 2 of its charter mentions that

The Islamic Resistance Movement is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Palestine. The Muslim Brotherhood movement is an international organization. It is one of today's largest Islamic movements. It professes a comprehensive understanding and precise conceptualization of the Islamic precepts in all aspects of life: concept and belief, politics and economics, education and social service, jurisdiction and law, exhortation and training, communication and arts, the seen and the unseen, and the rest of life's ways.¹⁰⁵

And, according to Article 1,

The Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is its system. For its ideology, fundamental precepts, and world view of life, the universe and humanity it draws from Islam. It judges all its actions according to Islam and is inspired by Islam to correct its errors.¹⁰⁶

The ultimate aim or goal of Hamas is to liberate Palestine from occupation by the "Zionist enemy" and re-establish an Islamic state.¹⁰⁷ Hamas's aims are spelled out in the charter it issued on 18 August 1988, which contains the philosophy of the movement, its rationale, and its positions not only on the central issue of the Palestine problem but also on social welfare and Palestinian nationalist movement.¹⁰⁸

Destruction of the Israeli state is not just goal but the precondition of liberating Palestine. And this will be accomplished only by spreading the spirit of Jihad through which Hamas aspires to raise the banner of Allah on every inch of Palestinian land. For Palestine is an Islamic trust consecrated for future of generation of Muslims until the Day of Judgment.¹⁰⁹

Palestine as any other land conquered by Islam had become Islamic patrimony or *waqf*, which

does not belong to any person, party, or state. It becomes the property of former, present, and future generations. The people living on the land have been given the usufruct, but not the right of property.¹¹⁰ According to article 11:

The Islamic Resistance Movement [firmly] believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [Trust] upon all Muslim generations till the day of Resurrection. It is not right to give it up nor any part of it. Neither a single Arab state nor all the Arab states, neither a King nor a leader, nor all the kings or leaders, nor any organisation—Palestinian or Arab—has such authority because the land of Palestine is an Islamic Trust upon all Muslim generations until the day of Resurrection...¹¹¹

Consequently, no Arab state or leader, nor any organization, has the right to make concessions on this land or to agree to the partition of it, because who could possibly represent all Muslim generations from the creation until the “Day of Judgment”¹¹² who collectively owns the soil? The recognition of the Jewish state in Palestine is considered *kufur*, meaning infidelity or unbelief.¹¹³ According to Hamas charter’s article 34:

Palestine is the heart of the earth, the meeting of the continents, and the lure of the avaricious since the dawn of history. The Messenger (saas) points to that in his venerable narration when he says to Mu’ath bin Jabal: O Mu’ath, Allah is going to open for you the Greater Syria (Ash Sham) after me. From Al- Irish to the Euphrates its men, women, and children are steadfast till the day of resurrection. Whosoever of you chooses a coastal site of Greater Syria or Jerusalem (*bayt al-maqdes*) then he is in constant Jihad till the Day of Resurrection.¹¹⁴

Ziad Abu-Amr argues that the Palestinians have a special place in the Islamic faith because Jerusalem had been the first direction of prayer for Muslims and the *Al-Aqsa* mosque is considered the third sacred place of Islam.¹¹⁵ The Prophet had started his ascension to heaven from Jerusalem and his night-journey took him to *Al-Aqsa*.¹¹⁶ As Jerusalem and Palestine are presented as central to Muslims, it follows logically that their enemies throughout history tried to win Palestine in an attempt to defeat the Islamic *Umma*.¹¹⁷ The Franks had fought for Palestine for 200 years, and this attempt was repeated in World War I after that the West decided to divide Palestine and to assure its permanent attendance with the foundation of Zionism, but the Arab world depended on the liberation of Palestine and the elimination of the “Zionist entity.”¹¹⁸ Thus, Jerusalem has always been the central point of the struggle between faith and unbelief¹¹⁹ and will remain the focus of this struggle. It is a fight between Islamic civilizations and Western civilization because Western forces are trying to undermine the Islamic awakening. Hamas argues that it is an individual’s religious duty to fight for the liberation of Palestine and Jerusalem. Andrea Nüsse states that “there is no doubt about the advent of the ‘day of liberation’ (*al-yawm al-tarir*) whose ideological content as well as it’s phonetically similarity” (sentence incomplete).¹²⁰

These arguments seem to be the most direct reflection of Quranic revelations and Islamic tradition in the Islamists’ thought. Even if the use of *waqf* for describing the land of Palestine seems to be a recent development, the idea underlying it has a long tradition: Any territory that is once opened (*maftū*) to Islamic rule has to remain ruled by Muslims, and Hamas, as an Islamic organization, wants to establish an Islamic society on Palestinian lands; no territory can be left to

non-Muslims to rule there.¹²¹

Hamas argues that the territory is very important in Islam because of God's rule over it. This is an essential part of the Islamic venture on earth. But no territory was ever considered to be of a more central or sacred nature than another. In the Holy Qur'an, only the holy towns of Mecca and Medina are mentioned.¹²² The notion of sacred territory is limited to the surroundings of these towns in which non-Muslims are not allowed to enter. The *Al-Aqsa* mosque is respected as a holy Muslim place, but the idea that the specific territory of Palestine is holy emerged only recently. It certainly has no place in the fundamentalist ideology as developed by Sayyid Qutub and Sayyid Abul A'la al-Mawdudi, who reject any attachment to a specific territory. Islamic scholar Qutub clearly states that the notion of "territory" in Islam has only a value inasmuch as it signifies the realization of God's sovereignty and his rule over it.¹²³ The final goal can never be the protection and expansion of *Dār al-Islām*, but the spread of God's rule to the whole earth.¹²⁴ Andrea Nüsse explains the change of the direction of prayer as

a rejection of chauvinistic attachment to blood and land. Taking Jerusalem as the direction of prayer was a hard blow to the Arab 'national vanity,' the fixing of the Ka'ba as the direction of prayer alienated those worshipping the 'idol of Israel.'¹²⁵

Therefore, the attachment to a specific territory even for allegedly religious reasons is rejected by the ideologues of modern fundamentalism. Hamas departs from its spiritual heritage on this issue. The Palestinian fundamentalists seem clearly to have been influenced by Judaism, in which the notions of the sacred territory and the Promised Land are prominent.

The Arab struggle for Palestine was from the beginning until 1967 based on a wider cultural Arab-Islamic identity, whereas that of the Jews always focused on territory.¹²⁶ Muslim identity is traditionally based on adherence to the religiously defined *Umma*; loyalty and membership are based on an ideological basis, not on a territorial one. Thus, throughout history Palestine had never been a separate entity but was part of *Dār al-Islām*. As Hillel Frisch suggests, the "nationalization of the universal religious doctrine of the Palestinian fundamentalist movement" is the result of the emulation of the Jewish territorial doctrine of the "promised land."¹²⁷ The confrontation with the Jewish doctrine alive in the state of Israel seems to have made necessary this innovation in traditional Islamic thought. In the concrete struggle against the Jewish state in Palestine, the religious obligation to set up an Islamic society on earth might have been judged too general and abstract to challenge the very precise Jewish claims for the specific territory of Palestine. Consequently, we have another example of the ambition of foreign thought by the Islamists.¹²⁸

On the question of nationalism, Hamas makes an even more innovative and unorthodox move away from Islamic thought of the past. The Palestinian fundamentalists discarded the old incompatibility between Islam based on ideological grounds, and the Western idea of the nation-state which is based on territorial claims: "Fatherland (*wa an*) and nationalism (*wa aniyya*) are (¼) part of the Islamic faith."¹²⁹ Andrea Nüsse argues that if nationalism means that certain people are linked through specific material, human and territorial characteristics, then this is the case of Hamas.¹³⁰ But above all, it has a "God that breathes soul and life in it." The use of the Quranic image of the banner of God that links the earth strongly to the sky¹³¹ seems to stand here for Palestine and Islam. As Palestinian nationalism is considered a part of the Islamic doctrine, to give up any inch of Palestinian land would mean abandoning a part of the doctrine. These very surprising assertions lack all historical continuity with Islamic thought. The difficulty in finding

any Quranic evidence for these positions becomes clear when we examine the verses quoted in support: “(¼) for rectitude is henceforth distinct from perversity. But whoever disbelieves in the *aghūt* (evil) and believes in God, has firm hold of a strong handle that will not break (¼)”¹³² and Hamas could hardly have chosen a more general, indistinct Quranic directive to support its very specific position in the question of nationalism. The Hamas charter’s article 12 describes its definition of nationalism:

Nationalism, from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement, is part and parcel of religious ideology. There is not a higher peak in nationalism or depth in devotion than Jihad when an enemy lands on the Muslim territories. Fighting the enemy becomes the individual obligation of every Muslim man and woman. The woman is allowed to go fight without the permission of her husband and the slave without the permission of his master.¹³³

The founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hassan al-Banna, argued that the Islamic model had been “tested by history, when it created the strongest, the most virtuous, the most merciful, the most pious, and the most blessed of *Ummas*.”¹³⁴ Furthermore, he wrote that Muslims had waged humane wars, aimed at civilizing and exalting the truth. Sayyid Qutub, who was the main ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood from the early 1950s until his execution in 1966, similarly wrote that the aim of the Muslim conquests had been to eliminate the obstacles in the way of Islam: the territories occupied were “conquered for freedom, light and joy,”¹³⁵ and the blessing of the first period of Islam “lasted for a thousand years.”¹³⁶

Hamas’s position on the question of Palestine is furthermore preeminent in shaping the future of the Islamic “*Umma*.”¹³⁷ The future of Palestine and the future of the *Umma* cannot be separated. The Palestinian *Jihad* has positive consequences for the Islamic awakening¹³⁸ and the control over Palestine. To understand the depth of this conviction, which could easily be taken as rhetoric, the role accorded to the history of mankind in the Islamic faith needs to be understood. Underlying the link between the establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine and the destiny of the Islamic *Umma* is precisely this traditional perception of history as it emanates from the specific relationship between a believer and God laid down in the Qur’an. As we know, Wilfred Cantwell Smith pointed out that the mediator between God and Man in Islam is righteousness (in Christianity, it is the person of Christ). Man approaches God by participating in the Islamic venture which is the realization of the ideal society on earth. Again, he emphasizes that a Muslim expresses his faith less in belief than in practical terms by behaving according to the accepted code.¹³⁹

Muslims this have set out to make history Islamic¹⁴⁰ according to God’s will. History is the arena in which God makes his will manifest through the believers. The Muslim bears the full responsibility of making known to the world the validity of the Quranic revelation. The motto preceding the *Mithāq* stresses this responsibility: “You are the best nation (*Umma*) that came forth to people, enjoining righteousness, and forbidding abomination, and believing in God (¼)° History therefore cannot be considered separately from the realm of the sacred.”¹⁴¹ Andrea Nüsse states, “it now becomes clear why the Western domination of the Arab-Islamic world since the 19th century was felt to be such a catastrophe and a matter of shame.”¹⁴² The incapacity of the Muslims to prevent the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and the repeated military defeats against Israel had fundamentally undermined the self-confidence of Muslims and was seen as a sign of unrighteous behavior coming from nonconformity to Islamic tenets. The

Muslims, representatives of God's will on earth, were defeated by the non-Muslim enemy. God had withdrawn his favor from the Islamic *Umma*. Historical events thus no longer corresponded to the divine plan given to the Muslims.¹⁴³

In Palestine, Hamas is fighting to settle history to Islamic beliefs and convictions. The outcome of the struggle over Palestine is decisive for the whole *Umma*. A victory in this struggle would prove that Muslims are again on the right path and will continue to succeed in the world. This also means that the fight for Palestine can only be won under the banner of Allah—a fact proven largely by the historic examples of Muslim victories over the Christian crusaders and the Tartars,¹⁴⁴ and the Muslims have to learn from their past experiences. The establishment of an Islamic state in Palestine is seen to be the only possible political solution: a state which will be part of a wider Islamic domain that will finally embrace the whole world. *Jihad* is seen as the only means of spreading Islam to the four corners of the earth. The liberation of Palestine has Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic aspects, and all three are essential to the struggle.¹⁴⁵

Notes

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4

HAMAS–FATAH

The struggle for power

Started as a militant Islamist movement against the Jewish state of Israel, Hamas emerged as the largest political party in Palestinian parliamentary elections in 2006. The election results represented a major shift in the Palestinian political landscape, which had previously been dominated by Fatah, the biggest faction of the PLO. The movement's extensive welfare networks and reputation for discipline and reliability gained it support from voters already frustrated at the failure of the Oslo peace process and corruption and incompetence of the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority. With the spurt in its popularity, Hamas posed a serious threat to Fatah's decade-old hegemony in Palestinian politics. Factors accounting for the electoral success of Hamas are the main focus of the discussion in this chapter. It is argued that the failure of the Oslo peace process together with misrule of the Fatah-led PA created conditions conducive to the surge in popular support for Hamas, undermining Fatah's ascendancy in Palestinian politics. However, the bulk of this chapter is devoted to a comprehensive analysis of the elections in the Palestinian Authority (PA), one of the principal objectives of the Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed by Israeli and Palestinian leaders in September 1993. It begins with the first Palestinian general elections held in 1996 followed by the municipal and presidential election in 2005, and finally, the 2006 Palestinian legislative council elections that culminated in bloody fratricidal war and led to a split into "Hamastan" and "Fatahland."

Oslo peace accord

Despite all its limitations and ambiguities, the Declaration of Principles (DOP) on Interim Self-Governing Arrangements for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Jericho marked the mother of all breakthroughs in the century-old conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Signed on 13 September 1993 by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, the DOP was a turning point in West Asian history.¹ Three personalities were primarily responsible for this decision: the first one was Yitzhak Rabin; the second was Shimon Peres, the foreign minister; and last was Yossi Beilin, the deputy foreign minister.² Although the agreement was signed in Washington under the mediation of US President Bill Clinton as master of ceremonies,

it had been negotiated in Oslo and initiated there in late August. Thus, the “Oslo accord” is a more appropriate name for the historic document than the “Washington accord.”³ As another political analyst has pointed out, “it is important to remember that the Oslo Accord is not a peace treaty or a final settlement of any kind—far from it. It is an agenda or interim agreement to negotiate such things.”⁴

The Oslo Accord is composed of two parts. The first part is mutual recognition of the other, which came in the form of letters that were exchanged by the two leaders. The second part is the Declaration of Principles, spelling out initial responsibilities, which were few, and a timetable for negotiating various outstanding issues, which were many. The agenda that the Accord lays out called for Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the “Jericho area” (a town in the West Bank); establishment of a Palestinian police force for internal security affairs; elections for a “Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority” or Palestinian Council; and transfer of authority to the Palestinians regarding “education and culture, health, social welfare, direct taxation, and tourism.”⁵ Permanent status negotiations would begin in two years, with a final settlement to be achieved within five years. Everything else was left up to the established timelines and agendas, and the mutual promise to see things through. Thus, the shape of the permanent settlement was not specified in the DOP but left to negotiations between the two parties during the second stage. The DOP is completely silent on vital issues such as the right of return of the 1948 refugees, the borders of the Palestinian entity, the future of the Jewish settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, and the status of Jerusalem. The reason for this silence is not hard to understand: if these issues had been addressed, there would have been no accord. Both sides took a calculated risk, realizing that a great deal would depend on the way the experiment in Palestinian self-government work out in practice while Israeli Prime Minister Rabin was strongly opposed to an independent Palestinian state, though he favored an eventual Jordanian-Palestinian integration, Arafat remained steadfastly committed to an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem.

Hamas and other Palestinian factions such as Islamic Jihad rejected the Oslo Accord on various grounds. It is interesting to note that Oslo came about largely as a result of Hamas’s challenge to the PLO and Israel. In turn, the accord posed a serious challenge to Hamas, for its own success was premised on the failure of Yasser Arafat’s huge gamble on accommodation with Israel.⁶ As a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas represented a new Palestinian nationalist movement of Islamic tone.⁷ Predictably, Hamas was involved in suicide bombing, kidnapping and targeting Israelis, and the result was the expulsion of more than 400 Islamists, most of them political figures associated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad.⁸ Israel could not have dreamed up a better way of transforming the movement it feared into collective martyrs. The outrage of the unified the Palestinian people forced the PLO leadership to suspend the US-sponsored peace talks with Israel for three months. The mass expulsion proved a failure for Israel in security as well as in political terms, since it did not isolate the Qassam Brigades. As a result, attacks on soldiers, settlers, and civilians increased throughout 1993, terrifying the Israelis and setting the stage for Oslo.⁹

On 24 September 1995, at the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba, the Interim Agreement established in the Oslo Accord’s DOP (Article VII) was negotiated and signed by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in the presence of US President Bill Clinton, Egypt President Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan. It became popularly known as the Taba Accord, or Oslo II.¹⁰ This agreement, which marked the conclusion of the first stage in the negotiations between Israel and the PLO, incorporated and superseded Gaza-Jericho and the early empowerment agreements.

The interim agreement was comprehensive in its scope and, with its various annexes, stretched to over 300 pages.¹¹ From the point of view of changes on the ground, it was highly significant. It provided for elections to a Palestinian Council, the transfer of legislative authority to this Council, the withdrawal of Israeli forces, and the division of territories into three areas: A, B, and C.

- Zone A: 3% of the West Bank; under Palestinian control; and containing the six main cities of Bethlehem, Jenin, Nablus, Qalqilya, Ramallah, and Tulkarm. (Jericho is included, but was already under Palestinian control, and Hebron was to be handled separately and later, which we'll discuss.)
- Zone B: 24% of the West Bank; under joint Palestinian–Israeli control; and containing 450 small towns and villages.
- Zone C: 74% of the West Bank; under Israeli control (pending “permanent status negotiations”); and containing Jewish settlements, Jerusalem, military bases, state lands, and external borders.¹²

Ironically, vague language allowed for broad interpretation. The actual wording in the accord is as follows: “Area C” means areas of the West Bank outside Areas A and B, which, except for the issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations, will be gradually transferred to Palestinian jurisdiction in accordance with this agreement.¹³ Arafat maintained that most of Zone C was soon to be Palestinian. Israel’s view was different:

In attempting to reassure Israelis, Foreign Minister Peres noted that under the accord, Israel would maintain control of 73 percent of the land, 80 percent of the water, and 97 percent of the security arrangements – a statement that only intensified Palestinian anxiety.

Regardless of how the two perspectives differed, the situation caused concern on both sides, not the least of which came from religious extremists.¹⁴

Meanwhile, Hamas disclosed that Arafat had negotiated away Palestinian land, while various Jewish settler groups and fundamentalist rabbis saw Oslo II as a violation of biblical Israel. Criticism of Rabin also came from the Knesset itself, including members of the Likud Party. Acts of terrorism were perpetrated from both sides in expression of this anger. But Arabs killing Jews and Jews killing Arabs were not the only acts of violence to disrupt this period. On 4 November 1995, after attending a peace rally in Tel Aviv, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a young Jewish law student. Shooting the prime minister twice in the back, a religious zealot, Yigal Amir, claimed divine guidance in his act to, as he viewed it, save Israel and Jewish lives from Rabin’s concession of land to the Palestinians. Shimon Peres assumed the position of prime minister and continued with the developments of Oslo II.¹⁵ But a new era was descending upon Israel and the occupied territories, where the ambiguities of the Oslo Accords, occupation, and militant activities of Hamas would become the status quo, and still are. In short, Hamas increased its support among the Palestinians after the Oslo Accord through its military activities, posing a potent security threat to Israel as well as to the PLO.

Palestinian general election, 1996

On 20 January 1996, the first Palestinian general elections were held within the territories of the Palestinian National Authority, an autonomous entity created as a result of the series of the rise of Hamas in September 1993. In any case, Palestinian people supported the elections, because they viewed it as preparing the ground for a transitional period during which the final status of the occupied territories would be determined.¹⁶ Elections were considered appropriate means of choosing the participants for the final status negotiations with Israel and as a way to set up a democratic political system that would be different from the authoritative regime prominent in the surrounding Arab countries. New PLO leadership hoped that the newly acquired legitimacy would give greater weight to demands for Israel’s evacuation from all of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,¹⁷ and for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. From its perspective, therefore, the elections were an important step towards the building of a Palestinian state. However, Palestinian critics of the Oslo Accords argued that these accords did not offer the Palestinians what they had long struggled for, namely independence and the establishment of a state alongside Israel. They also maintained that the elections gave the Palestinian entity its final shape with the elected institutions possessing sovereignty only in the areas evacuated by Israel, leaving large Palestinian population centers under Israeli rule.¹⁸

To sum up, those who supported the elections believed it would lead to the formation of a democratic regime and a pluralistic political system in the territories. Those who opposed or had reservations about the peace process looked at the elections as a game manipulated by Israel and the institutionalized Palestinian leadership¹⁹ that would only serve the interests of a small oligarchy within the PLO. Moreover, Israel was interested in the formation of an elected body that would constitute an alternative to the Palestinian National Council (PNC) and that would be controlled directly by the Palestinian leadership conducting the negotiations with Israel. Such an institution could act as a counterweight to the PNC, where Palestinian opposition to the peace negotiations was relatively strong.²⁰ Moreover, the interim agreement signed on 28 September 1995 in Taba, known as Oslo Accord II, underlined the importance of the election for promoting agreement on the legitimate state of Palestine.

Electoral process

In accordance with the interim agreement and the electoral law, elections for the President of the PNA were held simultaneously with those for the members of the Palestinian Assembly,²¹ using separate ballots. The official date of the elections was announced by the chairman of the PNA council in a formal order that included the official appointment of members of the electoral supervisory committee and of the appeals committee. The dates to begin the preparations for the voters’ roll and to present the candidates for the elections were also announced at that time.²² For the purpose of electing the president of the PNA, the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip were considered one electoral district, while for the purpose of electing the Assembly of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were divided into 16 electoral districts. Each district was then allotted a number of representatives in proportion to the number of inhabitants who could vote (see [Table 4.1](#)).²³

Table 4.1 Election districts and number of seats in assembly

<i>District</i>	<i>Seats in assembly</i>	<i>No. of voters</i>	<i>No. of voters per seat</i>
Bethlehem	4	55,134	13,784

Hebron	10	133,084	13,308
Janin	6	82,314	13,719
Jericho	1	12,906	12,906
Jerusalem	7	80,051	11,436
Nablus	8	111,651	13,956
Kalkilyya	2	27,278	13,633
Ramallah	7	79,108	11,301
Salfit	1	18,996	18,996
Tabas	1	15,914	15,914
Tulkarim	4	56,319	14,080
Northern Gaza	7	61,123	8,732
Gaza City	12	122,724	10,227
Dayr al-Balah	5	56,015	11,203
Khan Yunis	8	71,629	8,954
Rafah	5	44,034	8,807
Total	88	1,028,280	Average 11,685

Source: *Al Nas wal-Imkhabat (Ramallah)*, 20 January 1996, p. 15.

Participation in the elections was open to all Palestinians, 18 years of age and older, who lived in their electoral district and whose names were on the voters' rolls. The exception was citizens who had been deprived of their right to vote by court order, who had been imprisoned²⁴ for a crime or for harming public order. Candidacy for membership in the Assembly was open to every Palestinian who was 30 years of age or older on Election Day, and who complied with the other conditions applicable to voters.²⁵ The election committee announced the opening of voter registration about two months before the elections and concluded the registration about a month before them. The number of voters whose names were enrolled totaled 1,028,280.²⁶ The registration of voters was conducted by officials appointed by the election committee for this task. Generally the registration officials were members of the educational system, who collected the registration forms from houses.²⁷

There were two candidates for the position of PNA president: Arafat, who represented the Fatah Party, and Samiha Khalil, an independent candidate. Khalil, an inhabitant of the small city of Al-Bira near Jerusalem, had been active in the Palestinian women's movement since the 1960s. The 88 Assembly seats were sought by 725 candidates, or 8.7 contestants for every seat. 559 of these candidates²⁸ were independent candidates, who ran on the basis of their previous activities, personal wealth or their relationship to one of the larger clans in a specific district. According to the interim agreement, the elections were open to international supervision. In addition to the central election committee and local observers appointed to watch over the elections, international observers were stationed throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.²⁹ More than 1,500 international observers, including officials and non-government organizations, took part in the supervision of the first Palestinian elections. The official delegations included 650 observers, representing the European United Electoral Unit, Australia, Canada, China, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Korea, Malta, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and the Non Aligned Movement.³⁰

Hamas's response

Hamas officially boycotted the 1996 Palestinian general elections because these elections were based on the Oslo peace accords. Hamas rejected the Oslo Peace Accords because it failed to grant the Palestinians their basic rights. Hamas's decision to boycott the 1996 election was closely linked to two overriding questions: first, its participation in the elections would mean conferring legitimacy to the PA, which it opposed as the creation of the Oslo process; second, its ideological position of rejecting compromise with the Jewish state, which it considered as "shameful and humiliating."³¹

Hamas as an ideological opposition movement distinguished itself by its adherence to the Palestinians basic rights (*thawabit*). It could not have it both ways and participate in elections that were broadly perceived as a vote of faith in the Oslo Accords.³² Thus, in spite of internal debate, the political leadership remained opposed to participation. There were indeed some practical considerations that Hamas could not escape. First, despite the intention to hold the elections under international supervision, it was doubtful that Hamas would win against Chairman Arafat given his internal popularity and extended backing.³³ Hamas and other opposition leaders realized that Arafat had stacked the deck against them by adopting a majoritarian method rather than proportional representation which would effectively strengthen Fatah as the ruling party at the expense of other popular political forces.³⁴ Second, even if the elections were relatively fair, Hamas had to calculate the potential scope of its success—in the case of both participation and boycott—and the results of each choice.³⁵ According to a poll conducted in May 1995 by the Palestinian Research Centre in Nablus, only 28% of West Bank and Gaza Strip residents believed that the elections for the PA Council would be fair. At the same time, 20% were willing to boycott the elections if the opposition organizations called for that. Only 50% of the participants said that they felt free to criticize the PA. According to the poll, Hamas had only 12% of the popular support.³⁶

Generally, the support for and against the elections were divided along regional lines. Due to the PA's tighter control in Gaza, for instance, Hamas leaders were relatively more inclined to participate in the elections than were their colleagues in the West Bank. It was this same Gaza Strip leadership that had pressured the outside leadership to consider establishing an Islamic political movement like those in the neighboring Arab states, an issue that became an inseparable part of the debate over Hamas's participation in the elections and its relations with the PA.³⁷ The Gaza leaders of Hamas also indicated willingness to enter into negotiations with the PA over this issue, even without the consent of the "outside leadership."³⁸

In addition to the regional division, difference within Hamas apparently derived from socio-economic disparities as well. In the Hamas-PA meeting in Khartoum in November 1995,³⁹ the Hamas delegates, all from the autonomous Palestinian area, were not prominent political leaders in the movement but members from a wealthy group of merchants in the movement.⁴⁰ Hamas's dialogue with the PA did not induce the movement to change its essentially negative position on the elections, although it tempered it somewhat. At the PA's behest, Hamas agreed to do no more than passively boycott the elections and not to interfere with the Palestinian public's freedom to decide.

Hamas's decision not to participate officially in the elections remained unchanged in the talks held in Cairo on 18–20 December 1995 between its delegates and the PA's representatives.⁴¹ The main issues on the agenda were Hamas's participation in the elections and the PA's demand that Hamas should cease its military operations against Israel. On the issue of elections, PA

urged Hamas to stop playing a negative role and to participate at least in East Jerusalem in order to bolster the Palestinians' position in their negotiations with Israel over the final status of the city due to begin in May 1996. Hamas, however, refused to perceive Jerusalem as an exception and stuck to its boycott of the elections as whole. On the issue of armed struggle against Israel, Hamas refused to halt its attacks against Israel completely, but it did agree to stop its violent attacks on Israel from the areas under the PA's control.⁴² Within the framework of a passive boycott of the elections, Hamas encouraged persons identified as Islamists or even as its own members to run as independents. Informally, Hamas also called on its followers to exercise their right to vote for Islamic candidates who had been associated with or maintained good relations with the movement.⁴³ This move represented a realistic approach that recognized the strong public excitement about exercising this unprecedented civic right. Indeed, if Hamas called for a boycott and people voted anyway, it would lose its credibility.

Election results

Two notable features of the election results were the proportions of the total electorate that participated and the distribution of the votes. The rate of participation in the elections, which was 75.86% of all those eligible to vote, is high in comparison to the turnout in Western democracies, where participation is generally between 50% and 60%, but is slightly lower than that in Israel, where, for instance, 78% participated in the 1992 elections. In Israel's first elections, for example, the voter turnout was 86.9%.⁴⁴

The voter turnout in Gaza was much higher than that in the West Bank: 87.77% of registered voters in Gaza went to the polls as compared to 73.5% in the direct control over the entire Gaza Strip, as opposed to its limited control over the West Bank. Two districts that had a high proportion of abstentions were the Jerusalem district, where only 40.37% voted, and Hebron,⁴⁵ where 66.4% voted. During the elections period, these two districts were under direct Israeli rule—a situation that limited political activity and election campaigning.⁴⁶ In addition to the factors of Israeli rule, the overall 24.14% abstention rate was due in part to a conflict of principles and ideologies, such as opposition to the elections.⁴⁷ Along with Hamas, three other prominent secular radical Palestinian factions—the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)—announced their boycott of the elections as well. These groups did not participate because of their opposition to the Oslo Accord of September 1993, which was the basis for the elections.⁴⁸

After counting the votes and deducting the invalid ballots for President of the PNA, Yasser Arafat won as expected, a sweeping victory in the first Palestinian presidential election with 88.2% of the vote, while Samiha Khalil received only 11.5%.⁴⁹ In the legislative elections, Fatah won 55 out of 88 Assembly seats (see [Table 4.2](#)). The distribution of the valid votes for membership in the Assembly was also not a surprise. Although 55 independent candidates received about 60% of the votes, they won only 5 seats in the Assembly. The Fatah candidates received only 30% of the votes in the balloting but won 55 seats, or 62.5% of the Assembly's seats.⁵⁰ Only 21 Fatah candidates lost and could not enter the Assembly. This impressive achievement may be ascribed to the methods Fatah used to point out to the voters the candidates it preferred, its district-level organization, and the care it took not to disperse voters among various Fatah candidates.⁵¹

Table 4.2 Results of the 1996 elections

<i>Presidential elections</i>	<i>Percentage of votes</i>
Mr Yasser Arafat	88.2
Mrs Samiha Khalil	11.5
Legislative Council	88 Seats
Fatah (Palestine Liberation Movement)	55
Independent Fatah	7
Independent Islamists	4
Independent Christians	3
Independents	15
Samaritans	1
Others	1
Vacant	2

Source: Central Election Commission (CEC), Palestine (1996), www.elections.ps

The candidates of the other organizations received 10% of the total vote, but only two were elected to the Assembly, one for the Fida Party (Democratic Union) in Ramallah and the other for the Democratic National League in Gaza. The distribution of votes among the 559 independent candidates, the regional majority voting system, and tendency to vote along clan lines together led to the failure of other candidates. Among the independent candidates who were elected, seven were associated with the Islamic trend, representing 3.5% of the Assembly; five were women, representing 4.4% of the Assembly; three were Christians; and one was a Samaritan from Nablus (see Table 4.2).

The elections conducted in the PNA territories on 20 January 1996 were part of the peace process and constitute an important step in the emancipation of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from Israeli rule.⁵² These were “founding elections” and must be judged as such. They do not yet permit us to draw any conclusions about the ability of the political system in the emerging Palestinian entity to develop along democratic or authoritarian lines.⁵³ This will depend primarily on the commitment of the various political forces and their leadership to the democratic process and on the internal and external pressures exerted on them in the future.

Municipal elections of 2004–2005

The Palestinian municipal elections were held in 2004–2005. The radical Islamic movement Hamas claimed victory in municipal elections in the Gaza Strip, winning 7 out of the 10 municipal councils. A victory for Hamas would be seen as a blow to the elected Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as could a power-sharing deal with Abbas’s Fatah Party.⁵⁴ The municipals elections were held in two stages. The first election took place on 23 December 2004, involving 26 West Bank municipalities. A second election took place on 27 January 2005 for Gaza Strip municipalities.⁵⁵ The first elections took place 40 days after the death of President Yasser Arafat and a month before the presidential elections of 9 January 2005.

Hamas’s win in the first phase of the municipal elections, along with the exit results, cast a shadow over predictions that Hamas would not make significant gains in the upcoming legislative elections.⁵⁶ With an 81% voter turnout in the first phase of the elections, Hamas won 77 of 118 municipal seats in the Gaza Strip, against Fatah. In the West Bank, Hamas won 109 of

the total 306 seats, while Fatah secured 136 seats.⁵⁷ Three observations, however, are particularly noteworthy for analysis. First, Hamas's campaign strategy suggests an acute awareness of what constitutes the power within an electoral system, and that more than Fatah, Hamas recognized that in such a system, power is fundamentally linked to gaining and maintaining votes. Secondly, echoing Hamas's internal practices and political theory, grassroots consultations and heading public opinion played a central part in victory. Thirdly, Hamas's elections results suggest that it is stronger in urban areas, with important implications on its attitude towards religion and democracy.⁵⁸

On 5 May 2005, some 320,000 Palestinians (around 80% of the electorate) voted in 82 constituencies across the West Bank and Gaza.⁵⁹ In the preliminary results released by the Higher Elections Committee (HEC) on 9 May, Fatah appeared to win control of around 50 municipalities, as against Hamas's 30.⁶⁰ One reason was better candidates, particularly in the rural West Bank. In localities like Split,⁶¹ the Fatah list was made up of entirely new people unassociated with the previous appointed council and known locally for professional loyalty. With a 4,500-strong electorate, Fatah won 13 of the 15 council seats.⁶² Fatah also formed effective alliances, particularly among the tribes and families that dominate local polities in rural areas. In Jiftlik village in the pit of the Jordan Valley, whose electorate is "97% Fatah," in the opinion of former village head, voters dispersed its support among the four main village families and returned nine "independents."

These victories, however, revealed Fatah's shrinkage of vote share due to the emergence of Hamas as a potent rival. For instance, Fatah's base in the West Bank was small clan-ruled localities with fewer than 5,000 voters. Moreover, the larger the constituency, the more urban, educated, and younger its electorate; and the more they suffered from the occupations and PA misrule, the fairer was Hamas's performance.⁶³ Take Qalqiliya, a town of 40,000, which from 2002 had seen 83% of its municipal land lost or isolated by the Wall. In a truly stunning result, Hamas candidates won all 15 seats to the town council.⁶⁴ The young and able mayor, Maruf Zahran of Hamas, was a political prisoner in Israel and contested the election from there himself.⁶⁵ Is this protest against the Wall, or an expression of support for armed resistance? Neither, says Zahran: "The people have punished Fatah because of the lack of reforms. This was a vote of protest against the Palestinian leadership." Local Fatah leadership agreed to resign en masse once the scale of the defeat was known. Similar resignations followed similar outcomes in the Hebron district and in Bethlehem, where rival Fatah won four of the eight allotted Christian seats against Hamas's winning five of the seven Muslim seats.⁶⁶

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas emerged as the winner, with an estimated 70% of the vote and 77 seats out of 118. The Rafah result in particular was a political earthquake, since Fatah and the PA had invested enormous resources in keeping what was once seen as a cast-iron nationalist stronghold as well as perhaps the most lethal front line in the struggle against Israel. Hamas won ten seats to Fatah's five.⁶⁷ Claiming fraud, Fatah gunmen took to the streets, clashing with their Islamist victors and wounding nine. On 8 May, a group of armed and masked Aqsa Martyrs Brigade guerrillas forced the closure of Central Election Commission (CEC) offices in Central Gaza in the mistaken belief that the CEC was responsible for the local elections (the HEC claims that right).⁶⁸ Fatah alleged that the HEC had somehow allowed Hamas's supporters to vote twice or use names of those "martyred" in the struggle. The most appropriate answer came from the Palestine Human Rights Center,⁶⁹ a local election monitor in Gaza. It said that while there were "many violations" during the elections campaign, especially the use of mosques by Hamas and

PA security personnel by Fatah,⁷⁰ “these did not damage the essence of the electoral process, nor did they affect the result,” particularly in Rafah and Buraji, where Hamas won a verdict shared by the dozens of the international observers in Gaza.

Perhaps the most scathing assessment of the rigging claim came from Talal Awkal, once a leader in the PFLP and now a columnist on the Palestinian newspaper *al-Ayyam*. “It is universally accepted,” he wrote on 9 May, “that the opposition often accuses the regime of fraud during elections. But it is surely unique for the government to accuse the opposition of fraud. Apparently, Fatah has not learned the lessons of its previous mistake.”⁷¹ In all, the local elections of Palestine, the results of which represent a landslide victory by Hamas in all of the major cities in the West Bank with the exception of Ramallah, reveal the depth of the socio-political transformation had taken place in Palestinian society and what the factors are behind them.

As noted, one of the basic factors behind the political shift in Palestine towards the Hamas movement was the state of frustration arising from the stagnating peace process ten years after the signing of the Oslo Accord.⁷² The Palestinians appeared to be convinced that the peace process led by the Palestinian Authority and its party, the Fatah movement, came at the expense of national interest and rights. In the light of these sentiments and despite the success of Israel and the United Nations in describing the forces of the Palestinian resistance “terrorist organisations,”⁷³ the Palestinians remained indifferent to how outsiders might characterize the move towards Hamas. The central question in the Palestinian mind was the result of the Oslo Accord that ironically produced more sieges, subjugation, settlement construction, and harming of national rights.

Another important factor in the elections was the current state of disintegration and confusion in the Fatah movement. Despite the negative indicators and results revealed of local elections,⁷⁴ the movement was unable to solve its internal problems before the Hamas movement gained power in those areas where Fatah once enjoyed. It was obvious during these elections that the Fatah movement was suffering from a deep structural crisis. The features of this crisis began to emerge directly after the Israeli siege of the late President Arafat in the district building of Ramallah. To make matters worse, the leading institutions of the movement (the Central Committee and Revolutionary Council) did not deal seriously with this crisis. As a result, the crisis deepened substantially, further exacerbating the divisions within the leadership and creating discord among Fatah’s followers.⁷⁵ The most compelling evidence for the depth of this crisis was Fatah’s participation in the legislative council elections, with two lists headed by Marwan Barghouti, who remained in an Israeli prison. The crisis within Fatah and its inability to decisively address its internal challenges pushed the movement into the cycles of violence and disintegration.⁷⁶ The primary elections in the Fatah movement, held without properly organizing the movement’s structure, further perpetuated the crisis. As a result, the structures of the movement and its organizational framework were transformed into an arena of confrontation, an absurd line-up process and a battleground to settle accounts among the different centers of power. In this situation, Fatah did not properly evaluate the political experiences since Oslo, and therefore failed to develop a consistent plan in their dealings with American-Israeli pressures. This crisis was deepened by the absence of security,⁷⁷ the continuation of the centers of corruption, and a general lack of accountability. The third factor that played a role in determining the results of the local elections was the splintering of the forces of the democratic block and their inability to unify their ranks. Instead, most factions joined the Fatah movement (Fida, the people’s party and the Democratic Front) and in doing so they lost their color and credibility.⁷⁸

The 2005 Palestinian presidential election

The 2005 Palestinian presidential election, the first to be held since 1996, took place on 9 January 2005, in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazan) was elected as a new President of the Palestinian Authority after Arafat's death on 11 November 2004. The election was held in accordance with the Palestinian Election Law of 1995, which necessitated carrying elections for selecting a new president within 60 days after the death of the sitting president. The Central Election Commission supervised the elections process acting as an independent body consisting of lawyers led by Dr. Hanna Nasser, former President of Birzeit University.⁷⁹ Despite the negative environment created by the continuous Israeli belligerent occupation and attacks launched by Israeli Occupation Forces against Palestinian civilians that directly impacted the electoral process in the preceding weeks, Palestinians insisted on participating in the elections. They ended up demonstrating a spirit of determination to exercise their electoral right in the face of occupation.⁸⁰

Two factors were working in the 2005 presidential election, a landmark in post-Arafat Palestinian politics. First, the smooth conduct of the poll throughout the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, except East Jerusalem, disproved predictions of a power vacuum and civil war within the Palestinian community⁸¹ following the death of Yasser Arafat. Second, by electing the president through a free and internationally observed election, the Palestinians proved that they were capable of ensuring a smooth transfer of power and were committed to a democratic process to run their affairs. The Palestinian *sawt* (Arabic for vote) may be an example worth emulating by other countries in the Arab world.⁸² The election was boycotted by Hamas and Islamic Jihad because it was based on the 1996 elections. In the Gaza Strip, where Hamas was strongest, it is estimated that about half of the eligible voters voted.

Palestinians (including Yasser Arafat before his death) had been demanding presidential elections for some time. The Palestinian Authority called for a national, legislative, and presidential election as part of a 100-day Reform Plan initiated in 2002. However, the International Community failed to support these elections until after Arafat's death. As late as September 2004, the Quarter (US, UN, EU, and Russia) issued a statement welcoming "steps toward well prepared, free and fair, Palestinian municipal elections,"⁸³ with no mention of legislative or presidential elections. This apparent reluctance to give Arafat electoral legitimacy undermined the US campaign for democracy promotion in West Asia.⁸⁴ The Palestinian legislative council successfully fulfilled the legal requirements by arranging elections within 60 days of Arafat's death on 11 November 2004. Local elections were set for 23 December and the presidential election for 9 January 2005.⁸⁵

There were 1,757,756 eligible voters, of whom 1,092,407 persons⁸⁶ were actually registered, while the rest were estimated by using the civil record. In all, 775,146 persons voted on Election Day. Voter registration started on 4 September 2004. The first stage, completed by late October 2004, resulted in the opening of 2,007 registration centers in the areas. The second phase of registration took place in late December 2004 and ended on December 2004.⁸⁷ During the two phases, an overall number of 1,092,407 persons were registered (see [Table 4.3](#)). The Central Election Commission allowed local and international observers, representatives of candidates, and political parties to supervise the entire process. At the end of the candidate registration and withdrawal period, seven eligible candidates remained. The two leading contenders were Mahmoud Abbas, also known as Abu Mazen, and Moustafa Barghouti (see [Table 4.4](#)).

Table 4.3 Voter registration and turnout

1,757,756	Palestinians eligible to vote
1,282,524	People who registered to vote
662,883	Qualified Palestinians who did not register, whose names appear on the civil registry
The breakdown of the final voter turnout is as follows:	
26,365	Number of votes in East Jerusalem (out of 120,000 eligible voters)
71%	West Bank population who voted
64%	Gaza Strip population who voted
22%	East Jerusalem population who voted

Source: Council for Arab–British Understanding (CAABU) (2005), <http://www.caabu.org>

Table 4.4 Palestinian presidential candidates

S. No.	Candidate name	Affiliation
1.	Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen)	Fatah (The Palestinian Liberation) Movement
2.	Mustafa Barghouti	Independent
3.	Tayseer Khalid	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP)
4.	Bassam El-salhi	Palestinian People’s Party (PPP)
5.	Abdel Halim Al-Ashqar	Independent
6.	Al-Said Baraka	Independent
7.	Abdel Kareem Shbeir	Independent

Source: Central Election Commission (CEC), Palestine (2005), www.elections.ps

Yasser Arafat’s group, Fatah, selected Abu Mazen as their candidate. Marwan Barghouti, the jailed Fatah leader, had announced his intention to run as a presidential candidate, potentially splitting the Fatah vote, but he withdrew his nomination in December 2004.⁸⁸ The Palestine Center for Human Rights (PCHR) noted violations of the neutrality of the Palestinian National Authority in the run-up to the elections. They attributed this to the chronic problem of a lack of clear separation between the PNA and its major party, Fatah.⁸⁹ There were approximately 800 international observers and 22,000 national observers. The question was raised as to whether there were in fact too many international observers, with worries about overcrowding in some polling stations, especially in East Jerusalem. There was no clear plan for where observers should be based, or any comprehensive training regarding the actual monitoring process.

The ability of candidates to campaign in Jerusalem was entirely controlled by the Israeli authorities. Candidates had to have Israeli approval for all campaign-related activities. Moreover, candidates intending to open campaign offices in Jerusalem had to obtain Jerusalem passing permits.⁹⁰ These permits could be obtained by applying to the Ministry of Civil Affairs through the CEC, which was passed on to the Israeli authorities. Again, travel restriction impeded the ability of candidates to campaign. In line with the precedent set in 1996, the numbers of people allowed to vote in East Jerusalem were again severely limited. Only 6,000 out of approximately 12,000 Jerusalem ID holders were eligible to vote in Jerusalem. Six Israeli post offices were rented as polling stations within Jerusalem city for this purpose.⁹¹ As a result, the majority of Jerusalem ID holders could not vote near their homes and had to travel approximately 10 miles to one of the 12 Jerusalem voting centers in the surrounding areas. In contrast to counting procedures in the rest of Palestine, ballot boxes were transported to the Jerusalem District

Electoral office in the Al-Dahiyeh suburb, where counting was conducted. As the ballot boxes were moved, international observers were not permitted to be at the counting.

Hamas's response

As its official announcement indicated, Hamas did not participate in January's elections to replace Yasser Arafat as the head of the Palestinian Authority. The movement's leader in the Gaza Strip stated, "The presidential election is illegal." Mahmoud Zahhar informed reporters he would resume talks with the new head of the PLO, Mahmoud Abbas.⁹² The announcement had been widely expected, as Hamas had consistently rejected the 1993 Oslo Accords, which paved the way for the creation of the PA. The decision of Hamas was a major boost to Abbas's hopes of being voted in as a replacement for Arafat, who won the first and only presidential election in 1996.⁹³

Although the dominant Fatah faction agreed on Abbas as its candidate, it faced opposition from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades which had chosen Marwan al-Barghouti.⁹⁴ While polls showed that Fatah remained the most popular of the Palestinian parties, its support had eroded in recent years amid growing disillusionment with the performance of Arafat's administration. Some polls even revealed that Hamas enjoyed more popularity than Fatah in Gaza. Meanwhile, Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades groups in the northern West Bank threatened on 16 November 2004 to establish "revolutionary courts" in order to try Palestinian authority figures and Fatah officials who had served under Arafat and were suspected of corruption. They threatened to take the law into their own hands and alluded to the public hanging of officials found guilty in their courts.

With the announcement by the group, Fatah's military wing included the names of senior PA figures and those who had held senior positions in the past and who were allegedly involved in corruption while the late Palestinian leader was in power:

We are presenting you with our demands and hope that you will take them seriously. We are expecting substantive and quick results within one month. If this does not happen, the Brigades will use their rifles to put an end to all expressions of corruption. They will take the law into their own hands and will establish revolutionary public courts and hanging scaffolds in city squares.⁹⁵

The announcement, headed by a demand to reveal the causes of Arafat's death, was written as an open letter to PLO chairman Mahmoud Abbas, the chairman of the Palestinian National Council Salim Al-Za, and interim PA chairman Rouhi Fattouh.

Abbas, a former prime minister who was also seen as a likely candidate for the chairmanship of the Palestinian Authority in the 9 January 2005 election, met with leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza and requested that they halt attacks before the election, but he did not request a truce outright. Hamas and Islamic Jihad were behind suicide bombings that had killed hundreds of Israelis in the four-year-old uprising. "There was a general talk about the need for calm in the coming few months to enable the elections and the Israeli withdrawal," a senior Palestinian official said.⁹⁶ Hamas official Mahmoud al-Zahar told reporters before the meeting that a "truce could not be considered until Israel stopped raids and assassinations in Palestinian areas." "Although there is great challenge that requires fundamental change in the Palestinian reality," said Ismail Haniyeh, "[a] truce is not an issue for discussion in Hamas right now."⁹⁷

In the meeting, the Hamas representatives also asked Abbas to hold local elections on that

date. Abbas and opposition groups were holding a series of talks relating to elections for PA leaders.⁹⁸ According to Palestinian sources, it became clear during the meeting that Hamas did not intend to participate in elections for PA leaders. Abbas would run for the position as they were vigorously preparing for legislative council elections in 2006, and it was not beyond the realm of possibility that they would run directly against Fatah members in these elections. The option of creating a “united national leadership” was also discussed at the meeting. Hamas and Islamic Jihad members called for the creation of such a body and said that it needed to be based on the PLO as well as on their organization. Abbas rejected this demand and told the Hamas representatives that their participation in the PLO or a united leadership would be made possible only after they—together with Islamic Jihad—would recognize negotiations with Israel as a method of recovering Palestinian lands which Hamas rejected.⁹⁹

Election result

As expected, Mahmoud Abbas won with 62.52% of the total vote, while Mustafa Barghouti received 19.48% (see [Table 4.5](#)). Afterwards, Barghouti, the jailed popular Palestinian leader from the West Bank, withdrew from the elections. There was little doubt about the outcome. Abbas’s percentage of votes stood nowhere near that of Arafat’s 88.2% in the 1996 Palestinian presidential election. There are other positive indicators that distinguish the latest elections.¹⁰⁰

Table 4.5 Presidential election final results

<i>Sequential no.</i>	<i>Name of candidate (category)</i>	<i>Political affiliation</i>	<i>No. of votes</i>	<i>Percentage (%) of total voters</i>
1.	Mahmoud Abbas Abu Mazen	Fatah Movement	501,448	62.52
2.	Mustafa Barghouti	Independent candidate	156,227	19.48
3.	Tayseer Khaled	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine	26,848	3.35
4.	Abd Al-Halim Al-Ashqar	Independent candidate	22,171	2.76
5.	Bassam Al-Salhi	Peoples Party of Palestine	21,429	2.67
6.	Sayyed Barakeh	Independent candidate	10,406	1.30
7.	Abd Al Karim Shbair	Independent candidate	5,717	0.71
8.	Invalid papers	–	30,672	3.82
9.	Blank papers	–	27,159	3.39
Total number of voters		802,077	100.00	

Source: Central Election Commission (CEC), Palestine (2005), www.elections.ps

In 1996, Arafat faced a symbolic challenge from a 72-year-old woman social activist Samiha Khalil. In the January 2005 presidential election, there were as many as seven candidates. These included Mahmoud Abbas and one each from the Palestine people’s party (PPP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). An independent candidate, Mustafa Barghouti, received the second-highest votes. Thus, the elections nationally reflected Palestinian plurality, but also underlined the ingrained democratic spirit of the Palestinian community. For a people who have fought for their rights for more than 85 years, this is not a one-person

achievement.

Hamas did not participate in the elections not because it opposed the democratic process but because it challenged the very basis of the elections, the Oslo framework. Hamas fully participated in local elections and won 77 of 118 municipality seats. Despite the boycott, Abbas's victory was a victory of the people. Abbas faced three daunting challenges: reviving the moribund peace process, respecting the broad Palestinian national consensus, and providing good governance. Ironically, however, the outcome of the Palestinian council elections held a year later undermined the prospects of achieving Palestinian national consensus on the future course of their struggle for statehood.

Palestinian Legislative Council elections, 2006

Hamas won a surprise victory in Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) elections held on 25 January 2006. It emerged as a popular political party in Palestinian politics and changed the Palestinian political structure. Hamas secured 76 out of 132 seats, while rival Fatah won 43 seats. A serious debate started in autumn 2005 in the West Bank and Gaza about the date for this election. The Fatah organization had suggested delaying the elections again until summer 2006; however, there was no valid reason to support this delay and Fatah and the Palestinian Authority (PA) had already delayed the elections from the summer of 2005 until January 2006. Hamas had insisted that elections be held as planned on 25 January 2006. Mahmoud Abbas, the PA President, had ignored the advice of his Prime Minister, Ahmad Qurei, that there were serious divisions among the Fatah candidates after being advised by Omar Suleiman, the Egyptian intelligence chief. Abbas was eager to form a list of candidates which included a considerable representation of veteran and senior members and also new blood within the PA.¹⁰¹ It was clear that there were divisions even between the Fatah candidates, and Omar Suleiman was trying to convince Fatah to contest the elections under one united list.¹⁰²

The Palestinian Authority, however, was focusing on the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The withdrawal was organized by Israel without any serious contact with the PA. Both Hamas and Fatah considered this withdrawal a direct result of their resistance. Inevitably, there was conflict over who would eventually rule Gaza after the withdrawal. Fatah and the PA were wary of Hamas replacing them as an alternative to the existing government. This notion was not entirely incorrect, as Hamas saw this event as an opportunity to prove its power in Gaza.¹⁰³ Gaza was considered a real example of the challenge that the PA faced, such as law and order, unemployment, infrastructure, education, and health services. Hamas needed this opportunity to demonstrate its power through elections instead of through violence. In the mid-December 2005 local elections, Hamas had in fact won al-Bireh, Ramallah's adjacent municipality. It also won a majority in most Gaza cities. It was clear that Hamas's candidates were well organized, and their election strategy was also well planned.¹⁰⁴

Interestingly, Hamas's election campaign centered mainly on six issues: corruption, negotiations with Israel, use of violence, Jerusalem, refugees, and borders. Every candidate tried to focus on these issues in order to convince the voters. Candidates also had to be careful in reflecting their opinions. It was very important to keep a balance between the voters' needs and appealing to the international community.¹⁰⁵ The campaign issues requiring to be dealt with were all interrelated, and therefore, skills and experience were needed to cover all of them successfully. More importantly, handling those issues relied heavily on the experience of the

candidates as well. Hamas was in need of an image change, so it did not want to promote its performance on a military/resistance basis.¹⁰⁶ Fatah was also in need of an image change, but it was also necessary for it to focus on its previous mistakes as well as on how to rectify them. Most important of all, Fatah was apparently concerned with the issue of widespread corruption within the organization that weakened its chances of it gaining a majority.¹⁰⁷

Hamas began preparing for this election early; its first step was in offering a truce (*hudnah*) to the Israelis. It was suggested that Hamas would not attack Israel as long as Israel ceased its offensive against Palestinian cities. Hamas had also prepared a very clear manifesto, named the “Change and Reform List,” focused on the Palestinians’ concerns and daily life issues as well as on corruption, unemployment, and security. It also suggested a comprehensive plan to reform the Palestinian administration. Hamas appointed Nashat Aqtash as Media Advisor to help change its image from that of militant organization to that of a political player.¹⁰⁸ Hamas avoided mentioning the destruction of Israel or its suicide bomber operations in its manifesto. Its language was open, specific, and concentrated on daily life issues.

Fatah used many tactics to change its image, including using Marwan Barghouti as a first candidate who was already in Israeli jail. Israel had allowed Al-Jazeera satellite TV and Al-Arabia TV to interview him in prison.¹⁰⁹ It was very clear that not only was the PA feeling the pressure of Hamas’s progress, but also Israel and the USA. Fatah tried hard to admit that it was guilty of corruption but accused Israel of creating problems which affected the performance of the PA and Fatah. It was clear that Fatah was concerned, but it did nothing to change public opinion after more than 40 years in power. Fatah and the PA were attacked by Hamas and its supporters for talking \$2 million. It was reported that the US Agency for International Development (USAID) had given this money to help Fatah boost its image before the elections.¹¹⁰ Israel also aided PA and Fatah when the Israeli government decided to allow 100,000 Palestinians who live in East Jerusalem to vote.

Hamas and Fatah were tying, and at times Fatah was ahead of Hamas, but this did not mean that only these two parties were competing. Other parties—such as “Independent Palestine,” headed by Mustafa Barghouti, and “The Alternative,” which is a coalition of the “People’s Party,” the “Palestinian Democratic Union” (FEDA), and independent candidates who were targeting corruption and corrupted politicians—were also involved. Other parties included the “Third Way” party headed by Salama Fayyad, former finance minister; and the “National Coalition for Justice and Democracy,” led by Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj.¹¹¹ There were more than 700 candidates to be elected by around 1.3 million registered voters.¹¹² The poll, supervised by Birzeit University, predicted Fatah would win 63 seats and Hamas 58 seats. Other polls by the Palestinian center for policy and survey research had predicted that Fatah would win 58 seats and Hamas 35 seats.¹¹³

There is no doubt that Fatah is always seen as the only Palestinian organization which has represented the Palestinian people and defended their rights. Fatah leaders assumed the support they were accustomed to in the past, when Yasser Arafat was alive and headed the organization. In fact, these elections and the previous elections showed that the Palestinian people were supporting Fatah because Arafat was its leader. It was clear that none of the Fatah leaders had the charisma to fill Arafat’s place. Losing the majority in the second parliamentary elections or legislative elections was a clear message that Fatah was no longer welcomed by the Palestinians.

Election campaign

The requirements for the eligibility in the PLC elections are stated in the Election Law Articles 9 and 10. According to these regulations, persons eligible to vote must be:

- Palestinian
- At least 18 years of age on Election Day
- Registered in the relevant constituency register
- Enlisted in the final electoral register
- Not deprived of the right to vote by a judicial sentence from a Palestinian court

The relevant constituency is defined where the voter resides (EL Art. 36, 4), but many voters still register at the traditional residence of the family. This means that many voters cast their ballot away from their actual place of residence. A total of 1,332,499 voters were registered to vote in the election, and this was an increase from the figures for the 2005 presidential election, which were 1,282,524 voters. According to the Central Election Commission, this constituted more than 70% of all estimated eligible voters.¹¹⁴ The public access to the final register of voters was restricted. The Central Election Commission did not publish the register before the polling day, but the register was available on demand by candidates. In this way independent cross-checking of the persons for double registration was not possible. The transparency of the registration of voters was thus limited in practice. Registration of an estimated 123,000 voters in East Jerusalem was not permitted by the Israeli authorities.¹¹⁵

The Election Law (Art. 11) prohibited PA employees (civil and military), anyone whose salary is paid from public funds, and employees of public institutions and international organizations to stand as a candidate unless they resign prior to the date set for the announcement of the final list of candidates. To stand as a candidate for the legislative council, the candidate must be a Palestinian, 28 years of age or older on the designated polling day,¹¹⁶ registered in the final voter register, and have permanent residence within the Palestinian territories (EL, Art. 15). Contestants could register as part of a national electoral list which is composed of a registered party, coalition of parties, or grouping of people for the purpose of conducting elections, or as an individual candidate on the district level. A national electoral list must be supported by at least 3,000 eligible voters and must make a deposit of \$6,000.¹¹⁷ If any member is elected, the deposit would be refunded.¹¹⁸ During the campaigning period, several independent candidates announced withdrawal of their candidacy. Some withdrew as late as 23 January even though the withdrawal had no effect on the candidate names on the ballot, as there was no legal possibility for a candidate to withdraw his/her candidacy after the registration had been closed and the CEC had published the final lists.¹¹⁹

The previous Palestinian Legislative Council election, which Hamas had officially boycotted, had taken place in 1996. The Council's four-year term was repeatedly extended by the Palestinian Authority, which claimed that the poor security situation and Israeli military incursions made elections impossible. The most recent postponement came in July 2005, following dispute over a new election law. Some observers suggested that senior members of Fatah had favored a delay to allow time to address the growing electoral threat posed by the younger, more militant wing of Fatah led by Marwan Barghouti and by Hamas.¹²⁰ In municipal council elections in December 2004 and January 2005, Hamas had made major gains, winning 77 of 118 available seats in Gaza and capturing 35% of seats in the West Bank.

Eventual resolution of the dispute over electoral reform led to the introduction of a new mixed

system, under which the number of Legislative Council seats was increased from 88 to 132, and the seats were split into two groups: half being elected from constituencies,¹²¹ the other half by party lists. The build-up to the January 2006 election took place against a backdrop of inter-factional violence in Gaza and splits within Fatah. These disputes had increased since the death in November 2004 of Yasser Arafat, whose authority and co-option of discontented factions had helped ensure some level of unity. Disputes over party primaries in late 2005 initially led a faction headed by the jailed Marwan Barghouti to register its own list of candidates, although a united list was eventually submitted at the end of December 2005 due to fears that disunity within Fatah would boost Hamas. Disagreements also arose with Israel over voting rights for Palestinians in East Jerusalem, which Israel claims as part of its own united capital, but which the international community views as an occupied territory. President Abbas had threatened to postpone the election if Israel failed to lift a ban on voting in the east of the city. In the wake of such threats, around 6,000 Palestinians were permitted to vote in East Jerusalem. The remaining 100,000 or more had to travel to other polling stations outside the city boundaries to cast their ballots.¹²²

Final result

As preliminary results came in, it soon became apparent that Hamas had performed far better than most commentators had anticipated. The final distribution of seats showed Hamas (running under the name “Change and Reform”) had won 76 seats in the 132-seat chamber (57.5% of the seats), with Fatah in second place with 43 (32.5%).¹²³ This represented a slight change over the preliminary results, with Fatah gaining an extra two seats in the final count. Turnout was 77%. The final distribution of seats is presented in [Table 4.6](#). Some observers highlighted a disparity between the number of seats won by Hamas and the size of its popular vote, with many noting that Hamas did not win a majority of the popular vote. Khalil Shikaki, a leading Palestinian polling expert and director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, argued that despite all the hand-wringing over whether Palestinians had suddenly taken a more extremist turn, a closer look at the numbers reveals a more complex picture.

Table 4.6 Final result: distribution of PLC seats

	<i>Political affiliation</i>	<i>No. of seats in the lists</i>	<i>No. of seats in the districts</i>	<i>Total no. of seats</i>
1.	Change and Reform (Hamas)	29	45	76
2.	Fatah Movement	28	17	43
3.	Martyr Abu Ali Mustafa	3	0	3
4.	The Third Way	2	0	2
5.	The Alternative	2	0	2
6.	Independent Palestine	2	0	2
7.	Independents	0	4	4
Total		66	66	132

By comparison, the 1996 election results were as follows:

Fatah: 55 seats

Independent Fatah:	7 seats
Independent Islamists:	4 seats
Independent Christians:	3 seats
Independents:	15 seats
Samaritans:	1 seat
Others:	1 seat
Vacant:	2 seats

Source: Central Election Commission (CEC), Palestine (n.d.), [http://www.elections.ps/pdf/FinalResult distribution of PLC seats-EN2.pdf](http://www.elections.ps/pdf/FinalResult%20distribution%20of%20PLC%20seats-EN2.pdf)

For one thing, Hamas received only 44.45% of the popular vote (see Table 4.7). The nature of the electoral system, which magnified the existing fragmentation of Hamas's opposition, was what gave the Islamist movement the 58% of the seats it won.¹²⁴ The divided Fatah and four other secular parties won a majority of the popular vote, 55%, but only 39% of the seats. (A handful of independent candidates won the rest.)

Table 4.7 Final results for the electoral lists

No.	Electoral lists	No. of valid votes	Percentages%	No. of seats*
1	Change and Reform (Hamas)	440,409	44.45	29
2	Fatah Movement	410,554	41.43	28
3	Martyr Bu Ali Mustafa	42,101	4.25	3
4	The Alternative	28,973	2.92	2
5	Independent Palestine (Mustafa al-Barghouthi and Independents)	26,909	2.72	2
6	The Third Way	23,862	2.41	2
7	Freedom and Social Justice	7,127	0.72	0**
8	Freedom and Independence	4,398	0.44	0**
9	Martyr Abu al-Abbas	3,011	0.30	0**
10	The National Coalition for Justice and Democracy (Wa'ad)	1,806	0.18	0**
11	The Palestinian Justice	1,723	0.17	0**
Total (95.05%)	990,873	100.00	66	
Total no. of invalid papers (2.86%)	29,864			
Total no. of blank papers (2.08%)	21,687			
Total no. of electors	1,042,424			

* Parliamentary seats were allocated according to the Sainte Lague method.

** Less than the threshold percentage, which is 19,817 votes.

Source: Central Elections Commission, Palestine.

Five years of *intifada*, starting in September 2000, bolstered Hamas's image. Many Palestinians supported Hamas's bombing attacks against Israelis, which they viewed as a justified response to Israel's disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the civilian population. The unfulfilled expectations that followed the election of Mahmoud Abbas as president of the Palestinian Authority the previous year—for better governance, economic

prosperity, and progress in the peace process—increased support for Hamas by 40% during 2005.¹²⁵ Yet even that translated into only 35% support among the public as a whole. Hamas's remarkable showing in the elections demonstrates that its supporters were more determined to vote than Fatah's, and perhaps that some former Fatah supporters were lodging a protest vote. Then Hamas had offered a clear alternative on the two central issues for voters, namely tackling corruption and the inability of the PA to enforce law and order; moreover, the main area of support for Fatah, the peace process, had not featured very high on voters' list of priorities.

Jerome Segal of the Center for International and Security Studies and a founding member of the Jewish Peace Lobby commented that the outcome of the elections presented a more complex picture than first appeared. In particular, he noted that substantial powers would remain with President Abbas, which would dispel the perception that Hamas won the right to govern the PA even though it won 74 out of 132 seats in the Palestinian Parliament. Despite Fatah's humiliating defeat, President Abbas spared no efforts to assert his official position by retaining significant governing powers. At the same time, he consolidated presidential control over the security services by revoking his decree from the year before that had placed the Preventative Security Service, the police, and civil defense under the command of the Interior Ministry. Additional powers were transferred to the presidency by the outgoing parliament on 13 February, allowing Mr. Abbas to appoint a constitutional court that could cancel future legislation. The judges to the court can be appointed by the President, without the need for parliamentary approval.¹²⁶ Furthermore, the parliament approved a decree that would automatically make members of the incoming parliament members of the PLO parliament in exile.¹²⁷ The PLO charter recognizes the state of Israel, which Hamas criticized, calling it illegitimate.¹²⁸

All these changes and President Abbas's manipulation of his position were criticized by Hamas, which promised to overturn the new parliament. Consequently, a dangerous conflict over state power between the rivals ensued, paving the way for the outbreak of a bloody fratricidal war that culminated in the fragmentation of the PA into two territorial and political entities in West Bank under Fatah and Gaza under Hamas. What fueled the intra-Palestinian conflict was the dubious role played by outside actors, especially the Western donor countries in league with Israel. The motives of these actors behind a well-orchestrated campaign against Hamas despite having won the elections to rightfully claim to form the government are explained at length in the next chapter.

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5

THE SECOND PARTITION OF PALESTINE

As noted in [Chapter 4](#), Fatah was out of power for the first time in its history following the stunning victory of Hamas in the 26 January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections. Winning 76 out of the 132 seats, Hamas, which had been designated a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union (EU),¹ prepared to lead the Palestinian parliament. The group had never entered the political realm prior to its 2006 victory, and thus it would have to be politically accommodating to retain its governing authority. Immediately after the elections, the US and the EU indicated that assistance to the PA would continue if Hamas renounced violence, recognized Israel, and accepted previous Israeli-Palestinian agreements, which Hamas refused to do. Implicit in this policy approach was the Western attempt to thwart the political change in Palestine regardless of the popular mandate in favor of Hamas. Worse still, the non-recognition of the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority (PA) helped deepen the schism between the two Palestinian factions, resulting in open hostility and the de facto partition of the already truncated entity. The discussion of this chapter is, though, largely confined to the role played by the external actors, namely the US, EU, and Israel, in fueling the intra-Palestinian conflict; it would highlight the reconciliation initiatives of regional actors like Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Egypt so as to prevent the fragmentation of the decade-old Palestinian nationalist movement.

Armed conflict of 2007

After Hamas's surprise victory in the 2006 elections, a prominent Fatah leader, Saeb Erakat, argued that "We have lost the elections; Hamas has won and he was visibly stunned. His surprising announcement came even before the final election tally had been made."² The Palestinian Central Elections Committee shocked the world on 26 January 2006, when it announced that Hamas (Islamist party) had won a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament.³ There was no refuting the fact that Hamas had earned a legitimate landslide victory; the election was considered by observers to be as free and fair as elections can be in the Arab world. In other words, Hamas's victory was a political earthquake for Fatah as well as its supporters. The response of the international community to Hamas's electoral victory over its archrival Fatah was divided. While some countries, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, China, and Russia recognized Hamas's victory, others, including Israel, the US, and the EU, boycotted

and imposed economic sanctions on Hamas.⁴ The latter, instead, supported Fatah against Hamas and played a catalyst role in the outbreak of the bloody fratricidal war in 2007 that culminated in the Palestinian division between West Bank and Gaza Strip, or the Second Partition of Palestine.

The political polarization in Palestine was so deep that clashes between Hamas and Fatah broke out immediately after Hamas's electoral victory in front of the Palestinian parliament building in Ramallah.⁵ The fighting between the two rival factions spread to other parts of the PA in the weeks and months that followed. According to the Palestine Center for Human Rights (PCHR), there were reports of "attacks on public institutions; armed personal and clan disputes; attacks on international organisations; abductions of internationals ... armed conflicts between security services and armed groups; and attacks on officials."⁶ During the Palestinian armed conflict, 350 Palestinians were killed in the clashes, including 20 children and 18 women, while 1,900 were wounded.⁷ The violence grew worse after the creation of the Executive Force (EF), a new military unit deployed on 20 April by Hamas Interior Minister Said Sayyam, a teacher for 20 years in the Gaza Strip with a long history of Hamas involvement. For weeks, Sayyam had complained that forces loyal to Fatah and the PA were not following Hamas directives.⁸ Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, as it turned out, had actually ordered Gaza's police officers to stay home in exchange for receiving their salaries as a means to deny Hamas the power that it had earned at the ballot box.⁹

It soon became visible, however, that the EF was not a legitimate police force. Rather than filling the void left by the PA forces and restoring law to the streets of Gaza, the EF became an authoritarian tool that Hamas used to threaten and exterminate its political foes. The EF adopted many of the extremist views associated with Hamas's military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades. As one new recruit noted, "I'm not Qassam, but I'm in the police force. It's considered jihad."¹⁰ When Hamas decided to deploy the EF, Fatah correctly viewed the move as a direct challenge to Abbas's PA forces, raising the specter of an all-out armed conflict. Severe clashes erupted for nearly an hour between the two sides on 22 May, as the two factions exchanged fire in front of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) building near the police headquarters in Gaza.¹¹ In early June, more brutal fighting was reported between Hamas fighters (including the al-Qassam Brigades) and Fatah fighters (including the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade). Assaults launched by the two opposing factions against each other continued throughout the month, with reports of abductions, grenades, and rocket fire.¹²

The new Legislative Council was convened on 18 February when President Abbas offered "full cooperation and encouragement in the task of forming a new government, expressing the hope that the government would be formed as quickly as possible since it had important tasks ahead."¹³ President Abbas also outlined his political platform, saying that he was elected on its basis and remained committed to its implementation. He reiterated that both the presidency and the government remained committed to negotiations as a strategic political option, noting, however, peaceful forms of popular resistance. Besides, President Abbas also expressed his apprehension that Israel's "Iron-fist policy" would lead only to further deterioration, and urged the Quartet and the US administration to make serious efforts to restore peace negotiations.¹⁴ Commenting on the domestic policy, he promised to help and support all reform initiatives which would strengthen the rule of law and order, "one legitimate weapon" and political pluralism.¹⁵ The Palestinian president addressed the Israeli people, stressing that "the age of unilateral solutions is over." He condemned the "dismemberment" of the West Bank, the "confiscation" of the Jordan Valley, and the isolation of Jerusalem and pointed out that the

Palestinians would reject any partial, unilateral or temporary solution.¹⁶

Responding to the President's reconciliatory gesture, Aziz Duaik, Hamas's senior leader, said they would prefer a government of national unity with Fatah, but that they would govern alone if necessary.¹⁷ Haniyeh had told supporters earlier that: "When we are calling for unity and partnership it is not because we are afraid or weak or incapable of facing the challenges ahead, but because we believe in unity."¹⁸ Such statements of Hamas leaders clearly indicated that Hamas was wary about governing alone, not least because the next Palestinian government would face considerable domestic challenges and have only limited resources to tackle them, but also because it would complicate relations with the international community and obstruct the delivery of crucial aid. In late February 2006, President Abbas indicated that he would resign if he felt unable to pursue his agenda with the new government, warning that "We could reach a point where I cannot perform my duty. I will not continue sitting in this place, against and in spite of my convictions. If I can do something I will continue, otherwise I won't."¹⁹

Response of Israel

The victory for Hamas initially caught the Israeli government off guard.²⁰ Acting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on 29 January 2006 announced that Israel would not engage with a Palestinian Authority that included Hamas unless certain conditions were met. He added:

We have made it clear that without giving up its ways of terror, recognizing Israel's right to exist in peace and security, and honoring all the Palestinian National Authority accords towards Israel—including, of course, annulling the Hamas charter calling for the destruction of the State of Israel. And Israel will not hold any contact with the Palestinians.²¹

In early February the Israeli government released \$54 million (£31 million) of customs and VAT revenue from the previous month, revenue that Israel collects and transfers to the Palestinian Authority. The formal announcement on 18 February that Hamas had been asked to form the next government, however, prompted the Israeli cabinet to impose a range of sanctions that included withholding future monthly transfers of tax revenue.²² At the same time, the cabinet resolved to support the approach of the international community to discontinue all financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority, not including humanitarian assistance provided directly to the Palestinian population. In this regard, Israel agreed to expand its assistance for the operations of humanitarian organizations that work with assisting the Palestinian population.²³ Other measures were introduced to restrict the movement of Hamas members, including new MPs, through areas under Israeli control, to ban the transfer of equipment to Palestinian security forces and to strengthen security checks at crossing points from Gaza into Israel. Again, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declared:

It is clear that in light of the Hamas' majority in the PLO and the instructions to form a new government that were given to the head of Hamas, the PA is—in practice—becoming a terrorist authority. Israel will not hold contacts with the administration in which Hamas plays any part—small, large or permanent.²⁴

In response, Hamas officials regretted the Israeli shift by asserting that Israel "should have

responded differently to the democracy expressed by the Palestinian people,” adding that the Palestinians had lots of alternatives if Israel and the international community decided to withhold aid.²⁵ The Hamas legislative victory severely dampened any hopes that Prime Minister Olmert may have harbored for peace. The unilateral withdrawal from Gaza had backfired. After the victory, Hamas became the representative of the Palestinian people through a free and fair election. Above all else, Hamas rejected the existence of the State of Israel and refused to negotiate that point. If there had been any doubt about Hamas’s intentions, its leaders stated immediately after the elections that they had no plans to pursue peace talks or disarm the party’s armed wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades.²⁶

Israel was alarmed at the prospect of a government ruled by the same figures who had ordered suicide bombings against its civilians over the years. Questions arose over what Hamas might be capable of doing with a territory of its own. In an attempt to minimize the dangers posed by the Hamas government, Israel quickly adopted a combination of sanctions aimed at restricting Palestinian travel, goods, and finances.²⁷ After a long cabinet meeting, Israel announced tougher security measures at checkpoints between Israel and Gaza, although this was largely symbolic, since it had imposed strict travel bans on the Palestinians since the second *intifada* in 2000.²⁸ The Israeli government issued an urgent appeal to international donors not to transfer funds to the Hamas-led PA. Israel also elected to freeze the customs duties it collected on Palestinians’ behalf, which amounted to about \$50 million a month, or about one-third of the PA’s annual budget. Nayef Rajoub, a prominent Hamas leader, described the decision as “theft in broad daylight.”²⁹

Israel was not the only state to impose sanctions, however. In March 2006, the major aid donors to the Palestinian Authority, like the US and the EU, cut off aid as well. Their decision stemmed from the fact that Hamas refused to renounce violence, recognize Israel, or even acknowledge the previous agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinians. The legal basis for US sanctions stemmed from the fact that the US Treasury and State Departments had officially labeled Hamas a terrorist organization. Therefore, it was illegal for the US to provide financial assistance to the new Hamas government in either the Gaza Strip or the West Bank.³⁰ President Abbas was less confident, warning that the PA was in a real financial crisis: “The pressures have begun and the support and the aid started to decrease.”³¹ It is believed that the 140,000 people employed by the PA (at least 58,000 of whom are members of the security forces) are breadwinners for as much as one-third of the Palestinian population, so financial restrictions could have a significant social impact in the Palestinian territories.³²

The UN Special Coordinator for the “Middle East Peace Process,” Alvaro De Soto, argued that the revenues collected belong to the Palestinians and should not be suspended. He also pointed out that the formation of a new government and the approval of its programs should be awaited and that actions prior to that would be premature.³³ The former US president Jimmy Carter, who had led a team of international election observers, also criticized the Israeli actions. He argued that they would present “significant obstacles” to the effective governance of the Palestinian territories, adding that efforts by Israel or the US to undermine Hamas would only encourage its standing both domestically and internationally.³⁴ Opinion polls from late 2005 suggested the Israeli public was more relaxed about establishing official relations with Hamas. Polls also suggested more than half of Israeli citizens would be willing to negotiate with Hamas in order to conclude a peace agreement.³⁵

Uncompromising approach of the US and the EU

Hamas's electoral victory put the international community in a serious dilemma. It provided crucial financial assistance³⁶ to the Palestinian Authority and had supported free and fair elections in Palestine, but now faced the prospect that Hamas, a movement that both the EU and US view as a terrorist group, would play a major role in the next Palestinian government.³⁷ The international approach has been to welcome the conduct of the elections, while reiterating the mantra that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the democratic process. On 26 January 2006, the day after the elections, the EU Election Observation Mission (EOM) stated that the elections were as democratic, free, and fair as possible under occupation.³⁸ A statement issued on the same day outlined for the first time the Quartet's³⁹ three conditions for engaging with Hamas:

- Renounce violence and disarm.
- Recognize Israel's right to exist.
- Respect previous agreements between Israel and the PA.⁴⁰

The EU General Affairs and External Relations Council meeting on 30–31 January endorsed the Quartet statement and stressed the need for the continuous commitment of all parties to the Palestinian constitutional process while emphasizing the central role of President Mahmoud Abbas in ensuring stability in this transitional period.⁴¹ It reiterated its full support for President Abbas's determination to pursue a peaceful solution of the conflict with Israel. The Council underlined that violence and terror are incompatible with democratic processes and urged Hamas and all other factions to renounce violence, to recognize Israel's right to exist, and to disarm. The Council expected the newly elected PLC to support the formation of a government committed to a peaceful and negotiated solution of the conflict with Israel based on existing agreements and the Roadmap as well as to the rule of law, reform, and sound fiscal management. On this basis, the European Union decided to continue its support for the Palestinian economic development and democratic state building.⁴²

As with the EU, there were limited options for US after Hamas's surprise victory. The Bush administration characterized the election as a healthy process that had shaken up the old guard within the PLO, but it stressed there would be no contacts with Hamas unless it altered its position substantially. Reflecting the US dilemma, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held, "The US can't fund a government that is run by an organisation that it lists as a terrorist organisation. It's just a practical matter."⁴³ The position was reiterated by US President George W. Bush, who stated, "I have made it very clear, a political party that articulates the destruction of Israel as part of its platform is a party with which we will not deal."⁴⁴ He added by saying, "I don't see how you can be a partner in peace if you advocate the destruction of a country as part of your platform."⁴⁵ The US stance was not a surprise. The Hamas election was indeed an embarrassing black eye to US democratization efforts in the region. The Palestinian elections that brought Hamas to power had been bred by the Bush doctrine, which was designed to promote democracy throughout the Arab world. The US President viewed free elections and transparent governance as a means to battle the ideology of radical Islam, which continued to spread unabated and inspire violence against the US and the West.⁴⁶

Apparently unfazed, Hamas defiantly demanded that the US remove it from Washington's list of designated terrorist groups. Remarkably, Musa Abu Marzook of the Islamist organization's

political bureau insisted that keeping Hamas on the list was not justified, “because Hamas is a national liberation movement that confines its struggle to the occupied territories and had never targeted its weapons outside Palestine.”⁴⁷ However, Syria-based Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal did not help the Hamas cause when he traveled to Iran, another state on the US terrorism list, asking for financial assistance. Within the first year of Israeli sanctions, Iran was believed to have provided Hamas with some \$120 million in aid.⁴⁸ The statement on 7 February by the British foreign Secretary Jack Straw, however, revealed that the EU and its Quartet partners had expected “some clear indications of the direction in which it wishes to travel,” not a dramatic U-turn by Hamas on a long-established position.⁴⁹

Signs of differences of emphasis within the Quartet emerged in the weeks after the elections, with some criticizing the EU and US for their refusal to talk directly to the movement. Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose government held meetings with Hamas representatives in early March, clearly stated:

We need to recognize that Hamas has come to power as a result of a legitimate election and we need to respect the will of the Palestinian people. To burn bridges would be the simplest action, but it lacks perspective.⁵⁰

Likewise, Alastair Crooke, the Director of Conflicts Forum and a former EU negotiator with the Palestinian factions, commented,

Hamas now has more legitimacy than any ruling government in the West Asia. If you radiate hostility and negativity towards the outcome of the elections, it will seem very perverse and it will colour and damage engagement in the Middle East.⁵¹

Arab governments also expressed their confusion at the position taken by the EU and the US. The Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal commented:

The European Union insisted on having elections in Palestine, and this is the result of what they asked for. Now to come around and say [they] don't accept the will of the people that were expressed through democratic means seem an unreasonable position to take.⁵²

Arab governments were reportedly pressuring Hamas privately to moderate its position on the Oslo Accords and the peace process. Egypt and Saudi Arabia, in particular, urged Hamas to accept the Arab League peace initiative from March 2002, which offers full peace and recognition to Israel if it withdraws to its 1967 borders and accepts a just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue in accordance with General Assembly Resolution 194.⁵³ Adopting that approach would put a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority in line with the Arab League and boost its standing internationally.⁵⁴

Hamas–Israeli conflict

Amid the chaos, Hamas carried out a heroic raid on 25 June 2006 near the Kerem Shalom crossing on the Gaza border in response to the earlier Israeli attacks on Palestinian land.⁵⁵ Eight Hamas fighters reportedly utilized an underground tunnel to approach and ensnare an Israeli

tank, resulting in the deaths of two Israeli soldiers as well as the capture of Corporal Gilad Shalit. Hamas had knowingly crossed an Israeli red line. But when its soldiers were kidnapped, the IDF responded with stronger force. Thus, two days after Shalit's abduction, the IDF launched Operation Summer Rains against several key Hamas targets, adding to the racket that plagued the Gaza Strip.⁵⁶ Israeli Prime Minister Olmert declared,

Our aim is not to mete out punishment but rather to apply pressure so that the abducted soldier will be freed. We want to create a new equation—freeing the abducted soldier in return for lessening the pressure on the Palestinians.⁵⁷

Prior to the dawn raid, Israeli fighter planes attacked three bridges and the main power station in Gaza in order to limit the mobility of Shalit's captors. If they had not taken out those targets, the Israelis feared that the captured soldier could be removed from Gaza or transferred to another location. In the end, however, Shalit was not recovered. Seeking retribution, Israel continued to target Hamas in the Gaza Strip, even as the Islamist group tangled with Fatah forces.⁵⁸ Surprisingly, the Israeli temper over Hamas's kidnapping of one of its soldiers was almost a side plan during the summer of 2006.

While recovering the kidnapped soldier was a high priority for the IDF, the war with Hizbullah on Israel's northern border quickly overshadowed Israel's Gaza operations. The conflict raged until the UN brokered a cease-fire that took effect on 14 August 2006. The Lebanon war did not deter the Palestinian factions from warring with one another, however. Armed clashes continued between Hamas and Fatah throughout the summer and fall.⁵⁹ Even before, President Abbas made this call for early elections; Hamas complained that the Fatah-backed PA had refused to engage with it on issues of governance. There had also been reports of tensions between the Hamas appointees and Fatah functionaries in various ministries as well as fragmentation within the security services. Certainly, each faction retained and developed its own militias.⁶⁰ The political tensions that characterized the Hamas–Fatah power struggle had paralyzed the Palestinian legislature.

The Mecca accord of 2007

From January to February 2007, violence worsened between Hamas and Fatah, leading to a sense that the West Bank and Gaza were more lawless than ever. The violence in Gaza was also directly correlated to a rise in crime. While Hamas and Fatah forces were killing one another, no one was policing the streets.⁶¹ Indeed, the Palestinian media, not known for its honesty about negative developments within Palestinian society, reported that crimes, including car theft and abductions, had skyrocketed.⁶² The Palestinian violence had other negative consequences, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas enjoyed the most control. Foreign aid workers and armed military advisors, who initially sought to provide various forms of aid to the Palestinians, began to flee for their lives. Several Egyptian military officers stationed in the Gaza Strip were recalled to Cairo due to the raging hostilities.⁶³ The United Nations even considered declaring the Gaza Strip a “dangerous zone,” a move that would prompt the evacuation of nearly all foreigners, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and other international aid organizations that have provided handouts to the Palestinians for decades.⁶⁴

In an effort to stop the fighting, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia intervened and invited the

leaders of Fatah and Hamas to Mecca to engage in a dialogue designed to end the armed conflict through reconciliation process. Parenthetically it may be noted that Abdullah's reconciliation initiative was partly driven by his regional ambition of restoring Saudi Arabia at the center stage of Arab politics after being eclipsed by Egypt in the wake of the 9/11 terror attacks.⁶⁵ Some analysts also saw the Saudi peace initiative as part of its diplomatic efforts to placate its strategic ally, the US, who was already critical of the Saudi role in financing terror and the propagation of radical Wahhabism.⁶⁶ The top leaders of Hamas and Fatah represented their factions at the Saudi talks, demonstrating a seriousness of purpose and perhaps concerns about the future of Palestine. Fatah's representatives included Abbas and Dahlan, while Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Meshaal represented Hamas.⁶⁷ After three days, the two high-level delegations reportedly reached an understanding, leading to the 8 February 2007 Mecca Agreement. The agreement was based on the so-called Prisoners Document of May 2006. The Prisoners Document was penned by Marwan Barghouti of the Fatah faction and Abdul Khaleq al-Natshe of Hamas, as well as several other prominent Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.⁶⁸ According to the text of the Mecca Agreement, both Hamas and Fatah agreed on the following points:

- First: To ban the shedding of Palestinian blood and to take all measures and arrangements to prevent the shedding of Palestinian blood and to stress the importance of national unity as the basis for national steadfastness and confronting the occupation and to achieve the legitimate national goals of the Palestinian people and adopt the language of dialogue as the sole basis for solving political disagreements in the Palestinian arena.
- Second: Final agreement to form a Palestinian national unity government according to a detailed agreement ratified by both sides and to start on an urgent basis to take the constitutional measures to form this government.
- Third: To move ahead in measures to activate and reform the Palestine Liberation Organization and accelerate the work of the preparatory committee based on the Cairo and Damascus Understandings.
- Fourth: To stress on the principle of political partnership on the basis of the effective laws in the PNA and on the basis of political pluralism according to an agreement ratified between both parties.⁶⁹

Despite the strong Saudi backing and even initial signs of progress, the reconciliation agreement failed to yield the desired result partly because of the dubious role of the outside actors like the US, Israel, and the EU, and partly the conflict of interest among Palestinians. After brokering the Mecca Accord, the Saudis continued their diplomatic push at the Arab League Summit in Riyadh in March. During a speech at the Summit, Saudi King Abdullah called for an end to the international boycott of the PA in light of the agreement between Fatah and Hamas to form a unity government.⁷⁰ After the Mecca Accord, the Bush Administration expressed disappointment with the unity government platform and squarely blamed Prime Minister Haniyeh of Hamas for having "failed to step up to international standards." The Bush Administration, however, decided to keep its options open of meeting with non-Hamas members of the new government.⁷¹ A spokeswoman for the US Consulate in Jerusalem stated, "We won't rule out contact with certain individuals with whom we have had contact before. We will evaluate the situation as we go along."⁷² On 20 March, Jacob Walles, US Consul General in Jerusalem, met with Palestinian Finance Minister Fayyad in Ramallah, the first diplomatic contact between the United States and the Palestinians in a year. On 17 April, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice held a half-hour

meeting with Fayyad at the State Department. According to press reports, Fayyad separately controlled accounts held by the PLO, and US officials were examining regulatory ways to allow donor funds from Arab and European countries but not from the United States to flow to those accounts without violating US law.⁷³ The Bush Administration also sought to redirect some assistance to PA President Abbas. In late 2006, the State Department notified Congress of the President's intent to reprogram up to \$86 million in prior-year funding to support efforts to reform and rehabilitate Palestinian civil security forces loyal to the Fatah-led PA.⁷⁴

However, the House Appropriations Committee placed a hold on these funds, seeking more information on where and why the money was to be spent. After the Palestinians reached agreement on the Fatah–Hammas power sharing arrangement, other members of Congress reportedly expressed further doubts about where the money was going, fearing it may end up with Hamas. In March 2007, Secretary Rice informed the House Appropriations subcommittee that the Bush Administration had proposed the sum of \$59 million for President Abbas that included \$43 million for training and non-lethal assistance to the Palestinian Presidential Guard and \$16 million for improvements at the Karni crossing, the main terminal for goods moving in and out of Gaza.⁷⁵

The EU reaction to the Mecca Accord of 2007 tracked closely with the US stand. It is, however, important to note that the EU in the preceding years had some success in forging consensus among its members on its approach to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The EU viewed resolving the Palestinian–Israeli conflict as key to reshaping West Asia and promoting stability on Europe's periphery. In addition, EU member states were committed to maintaining a common EU policy on this issue to boost the credibility of the Union's evolving Common Foreign and Security Policy. While some EU members, especially France, Spain, and Italy, seemed more inclined to resume direct aid to the PA, others, notably the UK and Germany, were more wary.⁷⁶ A Quartet statement after the formation of the unity government made it clear that its aid to the PA would depend not only on the composition of the government, but also its political actions. Some European officials, however, reportedly wanted more flexibility, arguing that the government should not be judged purely on the semantics of its official platform but on the future actions of Hamas.⁷⁷ Many European policy makers, in fact, hoped that this strategy would encourage further moderation of Hamas's position and facilitate forward movement in the peace process. Defying the EU policy, European Parliament members met with Hamas Prime Minister Haniyeh in Gaza on 1 May, though the EU spokesman later denied of any change in the EU policy.

In any case, following the 9 February 2007 Mecca Accord, there were expectations among the Palestinians and the donor countries that the weeks of factional fighting in the West Bank and Gaza Strip would come to end. At the same time, this would bring a halt to a year-long international embargo against the Hamas government, by forming a national unity government with ministers from all parties represented in parliament.⁷⁸ Ismail Haniyeh, the disputed Palestinian prime minister (from Hamas in Gaza), resigned on 15 February 2007 as part of the process to allow for a national unity government between Hamas and Fatah. Despite the positive development towards reconciliation and end of Palestinian suffering, the Quartet reiterated its three previous conditions for engagement with Hamas. As Hamas remained defiant, declining to accept these conditions, the EU and US refused to resume aid to the PA government.⁷⁹ Likewise, the Israeli government all through maintained a complete ban on meetings with Palestinian ministers, including non-Hamas ministers, and continued to withhold tax and customs revenues that it collects on behalf of the PA. However, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met President

Abbas at regular intervals, and in mid-April the two reportedly discussed economic aspects of a future Palestinian state.⁸⁰ According to Olmert,

The emerging Palestinian Cabinet must abide by international demands, as President Mahmoud Abbas called on the Jewish state to accept the Palestinian unity agreement signed and to prepare for negotiations on a lasting peace. Israel neither rejects nor accepts the agreements, Israel could downgrade its generally positive approach to Abbas if the Mecca agreement goes ahead and Abbas joins a Hamas-led government, Israel would hold him responsible for the fate of Gilad Shalit.⁸¹

President Abbas responded by stating “it is not up to them to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ if the talk is about official negotiations between us and the Israelis.”⁸² After the Abbas statement, Olmert demanded that any new Palestinian government accept the three conditions set by a “Quartet” of West Asian peace mediators for ending the crippling economic sanctions.⁸³ The group wanted Hamas to recognize Israel, disarm, and accept existing interim peace accords. “At the end of the meeting in Mecca, as far as we are concerned, there was no Palestinian announcement that included an agreement on the three principles,” an Israeli official quoted Olmert as telling his Cabinet.⁸⁴

Palestinian civil war

Following the failure of the reconciliation deal reached in Mecca, factional violence once again flared up, continuing throughout 2007 with multiple kidnappings, bomb explosions, and direct confrontation.⁸⁵ As a result, both sides suffered many casualties. Sensing that the violence could get even worse and perhaps threaten regional security, the government of Egypt stepped in to attempt to broker a cease-fire on 19 May 2007. As was the case with previous Hamas–Fatah cease-fires, this one lasted only for a few weeks. Soon another round of armed conflict erupted, which quickly came to be known as the six-day Palestinian civil war.⁸⁶ On 7 June 2007, Hamas launched a military offensive to conquer the Gaza Strip. By 13 June, its forces controlled the streets and Palestinian Authority buildings, including the presidential compound of Mahmoud Abbas and the massive security compound known as *al-Suraya*. According to the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), the mid-June violence in Gaza was characterized by “extra-judicial and willful killing,” including incidents where Hamas fighters pushed two Fatah faction members from the roofs of tall buildings. Hamas also abducted and executed some political enemies. Apparently Hamas even killed PA supporters who were already injured,⁸⁷ or shot Fatah fighters at point-blank range to ensure permanent wounds.⁸⁸ PCHR further reported attacks against private homes and apartment buildings, hospitals, ambulances, and medical crews associated with the Palestinian Authority. All told, the June civil war claimed the lives of at least 161 Palestinians, including 7 children and 11 women. At least 700 Palestinians were wounded.⁸⁹ Consequently, Palestine again divided into two mini-states between Hamastan (Gaza Strip) and Fatahland (West Bank); the first partition was done in 1947, when UN passed the Resolution 181 partition plan of Palestine. After the Palestinian civil war, Hamas ruled Gaza while Fatah ruled the West Bank. It was a big loss for the Palestinian people as well as the Palestinian Question.

By late October 2007, as 3,500 PA security forces were deployed in the Hamas strongholds of Nablus, concern arose that these forces could be outgunned. Specifically, Abdullah Kmeil, the head of PA intelligence in Nablus, stated that there was only one rifle for every ten officers.⁹⁰ US

and Israeli military and financial assistance was the main cause of this problem, because both countries tried to create division among Palestinian. With US and Israeli support, Fatah set about addressing other security concerns in the West Bank. In December 2007, President Abbas dispatched an estimated 500 military recruits to the town of Tulkarem. At the same time, Fatah continued to shut down Hamas charities. However, due to international fears that dismantling Hamas services could spark a financial crisis among the Palestinian poor, Prime Minister Fayyad vowed to create 11 new government-approved charities to ensure continuity. In March 2008, the PA announced the creation of a new socio-economic network financed by the US, Israel, EU, and the United Nations to counter the Hamas dawa system by providing aid to some 60,000 persons in the West Bank.⁹¹ The success of this program, along with continued military assistance, was seen as critical to the survival of the PA's West Bank regime. Amidst sporadic fighting between the two political rivals and chaos prevalent in the PA, certain Palestinian civil society groups along with the intelligentsia tried hard to inject a sense of Palestinian nationalism to prevent further fragmentation.⁹² In doing so, they sought to expose Israel's divisive strategy.

Meanwhile, US President George W. Bush made an important announcement in front of a live television audience that he would call together an international meeting that fall of representatives from nations that supported a two-state solution, rejected violence, recognized Israel's right to exist, and committed to all previous agreements between the parties. The key participants in this meeting would be the Israelis, the Palestinians, and their neighbors in the region.⁹³ President Bush's announcement came as a surprise to many given his past policy of maintaining distance from the West Asian peace process. In a way, President Bush chose to follow his predecessor, President Clinton, who, despite his personal efforts to bring the two sides together, left office in January 2001 without a peace deal. When President Bush stepped in, he refused to meet with Arafat and the Palestinian leadership so long as the violence against Israel continued.⁹⁴ After the attacks of 11 September 2001, President Bush was even more determined to steer clear of any party that engaged in the tactic of terror. Seven years later, however, Bush appeared determined to bring the Israelis and Palestinians together. Finally, he announced that the peace conference would convene in Annapolis, at the venerated US Naval Academy on Maryland's eastern seaboard in late November 2007.⁹⁵

As the conference drew near, Bush announced that he would deliver a speech and personally conduct three rounds of diplomacy with the Israeli and PA representatives. The president also applied the full pressure of the White House to ensure that several Arab states, including the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, would attend. Surprisingly, Syria agreed to join the diplomatic roster at the last minute, in what was seen in State Department circles as a boost of credibility for the conference.⁹⁶ Critics, however, wondered why a designated state sponsor of terrorism had been invited to discuss Palestinian-Israeli peace in the presence of the President of the United States when it continued to provide support to Hizbullah and Hamas.⁹⁷ On the eve of Annapolis, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict fell into a familiar pattern: The PA and Israel began to jockey in the media for previously promised concessions, leading occasionally to angry responses and lines drawn in the sand.⁹⁸ Remarkably absent were any substantive adjustments to a new reality in Gaza. Neither side seemed to want to recognize that some 1.4 million Palestinians were under Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip. With two Palestinian mini-states warring over already disputed territory, many analysts began to wonder if the agreement reached at Annapolis would ever take hold.

Excluded from Annapolis, angry Hamas supporters wearing green hats, waving green flags, and chanting Hamas slogans gathered in Gaza City to protest the US. Hamas leaders on stage

bluntly rejected the notion of negotiating with Israel. Mahmoud al-Zahar declared, “Anyone who stands in the face of resistance or fights it or cooperates with the occupation ... is a traitor.”⁹⁹ Ismael Haniyeh urged Arab states to boycott the conference, saying “let the whole world hear us: We will not relinquish one centimeter of Palestine, and we will not recognize Israel.”¹⁰⁰ After the conference, Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal stated that Hamas was prepared to launch “a third and fourth *intifada* until the dawn of victory.”¹⁰¹ After the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007, the international community adjusted its sanctions. While the embargo against Gaza remained firmly in place, the international community allowed funds to flow freely to the new West Bank emergency government under PA President Abbas.¹⁰²

As categorically stated by the US Consul-general, Jacob Walles, “there won’t be any obstacles, economically and politically, in terms of reengaging with this Abbas-led government.”¹⁰³ He told reporters that Washington sought to provide significant financial assistance for West Bank economic development and Abbas’s security forces. The Israelis estimated that \$300 to \$400 million in frozen Palestinian tax revenues could be transferred to Abbas.¹⁰⁴ On one side, the West Bank began to enjoy the flood of international aid and easing Israeli restrictions, and on the other side the Gaza Strip suffered under continued sanctions. According to one Israeli human rights group, 59% of Gaza’s electrical power came from Israel,¹⁰⁵ and an estimated 95% of local production depended on imports of raw materials from there.¹⁰⁶ Gaza Strip residents also historically relied on Israel for high-level medical care that they could not get in their own dilapidated and neglected hospitals. Additionally, Hamas would need to work with Israel, much as the PA did, if foreign diplomats, aid organizations, and journalists were to enter the Gaza Strip. But working with Israel was dangerous for Hamas.

As the Hamas-led government in Gaza remained defiant, the Israeli government decided to resort to more repressive measures like the fuel cut to Gaza.¹⁰⁷ By early December, 100 of the Gaza Strip’s 150 gas stations had been shut down because of the fuel cuts. Owners of the remaining gas stations went on strike.¹⁰⁸ Hamas fighters were repeatedly accused by fellow Palestinians of stealing or diverting fuel from Gaza Strip hospitals to fill up their own vehicles. By January 2008, Israel halved the normal amount of fuel shipped to Gaza’s only electric plant.¹⁰⁹ The Israeli siege of Gaza was condemned by many countries in the Arab world and provoked street demonstration in Amman, Cairo, and the Gulf nations of Qatar and Bahrain.¹¹⁰ Hamas elicited even more sympathy by staging scenes of darkness for video journalists to capture as part of its campaign to end the political and economic sanctions against the Gaza Strip.¹¹¹ The Jordanian columnist Osama al-Sharif acknowledged that Hamas had become a responsibility for all Palestinians and that its desire to keep control of Gaza at any cost is dangerous, if not suicidal, mostly since it was Gaza’s “citizens who are long-term a huge humanitarian trial.”¹¹² Similarly, another columnist accused Hamas of “acting in a way that has made it more important than Gaza itself.”¹¹³ The paper’s editor reportedly stated that Hamas had “committed a stupid act” by firing rockets into Israel. A PA spokesman also argued that the crisis was all the result of Hamas’s “insistence on creating an Islamic republic in the Gaza Strip.”¹¹⁴ Thus, the sanctions appeared to be working.

Under intense domestic pressures, Egyptian President Mubarak ordered his troops to allow Palestinians to cross into Egypt because they were starving. He said, “I told them to let them come in and eat and buy food and then return them later as long as they were not carrying weapons.”¹¹⁵ There was also assumption that the Egyptian president issued this directive as a means to placate the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, given their historic ties to Hamas.¹¹⁶ It was

clear that any blockade designed to weaken Hamas through financial, and ultimately political, measures was in Egypt's hands. Ironically, the Egyptian government that had once condemned Israel for building a barrier to keep Palestinians out had little choice but to take the same measure.¹¹⁷

Sana'a, Accord of 2008

In early January 2008, Hamas violence against Fatah demonstrations reached its high point with the killing of seven Palestinians and 40 wounded in the armed conflict just outside of a mosque in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis. Hamas alleged that Fatah supporters instigated the clash by firing on worshippers leaving their prayers. The fighting soon spread to other areas around the Gaza Strip.¹¹⁸ Curiously, while some elements within Hamas continued to provoke Israel or to warn Abbas that he was "not authorized to make decisions on behalf of the Palestinian people," other factions within the group made a surprising effort to "renew its call for dialogue and restoring the unity of the Palestinian people."¹¹⁹ Sensing an opening, the Saudis and the Egyptians attempted to bring representatives of the two opposing Palestinian factions together for formal talks, following several rounds of talks with lower-level representatives from both sides.¹²⁰ In mid-December 2007, after the close of the Annapolis conference, a Fatah-sponsored news service reported that Hamas had, after a meeting between Meshaal and the Saudis, announced its willingness to engage in negotiations to form a central government with Fatah.¹²¹ Reaching out to Hamas, Palestinian Prime Minister Salaam Fayyad publicly called on Israel to ease the economic restrictions it had placed on Gaza. Meshaal stated in early January 2008 that Hamas was ready for "unconditional dialogue."¹²²

On 23 March 2008, Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzook and Azzam al-Ahmed from Fatah signed an reconciliation agreement in Sana'a named after the Yemeni capital under the auspices of the president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh.¹²³ The Yemeni initiative called for the normal situation in Gaza to return to the way it was before Hamas seized the territory in June after routing forces loyal to Abbas. A visible dispute broke out hours after the signing, with Abbas's office saying that the talks should be about implementing the Yemeni initiative.¹²⁴ "Resumption of dialogue ... must take place to implement the Yemeni proposal and not to agreement with it as a framework for dialogue because this will not lead to any result. We want the implementation of the proposal. We do not want talks over its articles," it said in a statement. According to Fatah leaders, it would agree to direct reconciliation talks with Hamas only if the Islamist group first agreed to relinquish its hold on Gaza, home to 1.5 million Palestinians.¹²⁵ Previous Arab-sponsored efforts to reconcile the Palestinians, including a Saudi-mediated agreement reached in the Muslim holy city of Mecca in 2007, had fallen by the wayside. The Yemeni plan, which called for a return to the framework accords, lay in Mecca, the creation of another unity government and the reform of security forces along national rather than factional lines and then holding new Palestinian elections.¹²⁶

Following the conclusion of the Sana'a Accord, the two delegations issued a statement following the agreement: "Fatah and Hamas have agreed to accept the Yemeni initiative as a framework for dialogue ... and a return the Palestinian situation to what it was before the events in Gaza."¹²⁷ Hours later, however, the two factions began to dispute over the meaning of the accord. Fatah believed it called for the implementation of certain demands, namely ceding Gaza, while Hamas believed it was simply a pledge to begin dialogue.¹²⁸ Fatah spokesman Yasir Abed

Rabbo said “ Hamas is trying to lead us to endless talks without backing away from its military coup.”¹²⁹ Days after the accord crumbled, President Abbas rejected a Hamas invitation to visit the Gaza Strip and attempt to jumpstart talks.¹³⁰ Although the majority of Palestinians—over 80% of the Palestinians living both in the West Bank and Gaza, according to an opinion poll taken in 2008—supported the unity talks, their hope for an early end to the civil strife between Hamas and Fatah proved to be short-lived.¹³¹

Israel’s Gaza siege

Due to Israel’s sanctions, stores in Gaza were out of many products, and hospitals ran low on crucial supplies, including anesthetics and antibiotics. Seeking to prevent a humanitarian crisis, the Israelis eventually allowed certain medical supplies into Gaza but vowed to withhold other nonessentials.¹³² Israel’s plans for sanctions against Gaza, approved in October 2007, also included the disruption of fuel supplies. Predictably, Hamas dubbed these sanctions a “crime” against the Palestinians. Hamas admitted on its Web site that “not every Palestinian who lives in the Gaza Strip fires Qassam rockets or even support[s] firing the Qassam rockets.”¹³³ Ban Ki-Moon, the UN’s secretary general, also weighed in, saying that cutting off energy from Gaza was unfair punishment. The rationale behind Israel’s sanctions, however, stemmed from the realization among Israeli decision makers that if Israel allowed goods to flow through Gaza, it would be providing assistance to its enemy.¹³⁴

After Hamas’s appeal to the Palestinians living in Gaza to rise against Israel, US President Bush realized that in order to stop the spread of Hamas rule to the West Bank, Fatah would need an infusion of both funds and weapons. Thus, when it became apparent that Abbas still maintained some control over the West Bank after the guns in Gaza fell silent, Washington lifted its embargo on direct aid to the Palestinian Authority government.¹³⁵ Both Israel and the EU also joined the United States in an expression of support for a moderate West Bank. By supporting the decimated Fatah organization when it needed it the most, Israel and America likely realized that they might be able to exact concessions for a Palestinian–Israeli peace agreement once Abbas returned to a position of strength. Thus began the flood of aid to the PA in the West Bank. On 18 June, Condoleezza Rice announced that up to \$86 million in US aid that been previously slated to aid the PA’s security forces against Hamas would be redirected to ensure the continued viability of a Fatah-controlled Palestinian government in the West Bank.¹³⁶ President Bush followed up in October by announcing a sixfold increase in aid promised to the Palestinians. He allotted \$435 million in aid to the PA in addition to the funds earmarked earlier in 2007. The funds were slated for stronger security capabilities but also to avert a possible financial crisis that would send the West Bank into a meltdown.¹³⁷

President Abbas appealed to the international community for even more funds. Indeed, international donors promised a total of \$7.4 billion, which amounted to nearly double the traditional combined PA budget for both Gaza and the West Bank.¹³⁸ As one analyst noted, the West Bank had not necessarily become stronger. Rather, it had become an “international” ward, which did little for its legitimacy.¹³⁹ After a Paris donors’ conference in December, the international community continued to promise cash infusions to the PA. Predictably, Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhum condemned the conference as a “dangerous conspiracy” to divide the Palestinians. He charged that Abbas was “cozying up to the Zionist enemy and the American project in exchange for millions of dollars to strengthen his security forces for his own personal

interests.”¹⁴⁰

The most surprising statement came from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who announced that he would allow Palestinian security forces in the West Bank town of Nablus to receive armored vehicles from the Israeli defense industry along with 1,000 rifles and 2 million rounds of ammunition.¹⁴¹ The move was shocking in that it was a reversal of Israel Defense Forces policy. Indeed, the Israelis had withheld military materiel from the PA for seven years, after Israel discovered that the copious amounts of rifles and bullets it had provided the PA during the Oslo years for internal Palestinian security purposes were used against it during the *al-Aqsa intifada* beginning in September 2000.¹⁴² Olmert’s decision was reflective of Israel’s lack of confidence in the long-term viability of Abbas’s government. Remarkably, the Likud Party politician Benjamin Netanyahu predicted that the new vehicles and weapons Olmert had pledged would also “eventually fall into the hands of Hamas.”¹⁴³

After all, Hamas inherited a windfall of weaponry after it sacked PA strongholds in the Gaza Strip, creating a security crisis for Israel. The Israelis soon began to question the logic of providing the PA with weapons. In March 2008, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak openly challenged General James Jones, the US Special Envoy, over the need to provide the PA with armored vehicles and weaponry. The fear, he stated, was that Hamas could conquer the West Bank, as it did Gaza, and reap another weapons windfall.¹⁴⁴ For the Israelis, Abbas’s successes were bittersweet. For years, the PA had claimed that the very presence of Israeli forces in the West Bank made it impossible to detain Palestinians linked to terrorist attacks. Believing that a sustained military attack might force Israel to accept a cease-fire, Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and the *al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades* continued to carry out suicide bombings and other attacks against Israelis.¹⁴⁵ In the course of the fighting, however, Hamas appeared keen on a rapprochement with the United States.¹⁴⁶ Following the Annapolis summit, Hamas sent a letter, written by Ahmed Yousef, the prolific advisor to Haniyeh, to Secretary of State Rice indicating the movement’s interest in starting a dialogue with Washington. The letter read:

Many people make the mistake of presuming that we have some ideological aversion to making peace. Quite the opposite; we have consistently offered dialogue with the U.S. and the E.U. to try and resolve the very issues that you are trying to agree with in Annapolis. ... We are not anti-American, anti-European, or anti-anyone. The root of the problem which neither Israel nor the U.S. is willing to acknowledge, let alone address, is the dispossession of the Palestinian people upon the creation in their homeland of Israel in 1948.¹⁴⁷

Yousef’s insistence that Hamas was “not anti-American” appeared disingenuous.¹⁴⁸ In early January 2008, with President Bush end route to the region, Hamas stated flatly that the American leader was “unwelcome” and that he was “providing political and material aid to the enemy and working to deepen the internal divisions to help one Palestinian faction confront another.”¹⁴⁹ As Bush worked to establish common ground between Abbas and Olmert, Hamas sponsored a mass protest in Gaza, in which protestors held up placards depicting the US president as a vampire drinking Muslim blood.¹⁵⁰ Upon Bush’s departure, Haniyeh announced that Hamas rejected the president’s vision of a “dwarfed Palestinian state”¹⁵¹ and indicated that the group remained intent on conquering all of what it considered to be Palestine. He also stated that Bush’s attempts to bring Olmert and Abbas together were “sowing the seeds of sedition” and an “attempt to create an atmosphere for internal Palestinian wars.”¹⁵²

On 3 January 2009, the Israeli army again attacked the Gaza Strip, and around 1,440 Palestinians died and approximately 5,000 were injured, mainly women and children. Human rights groups and aid organizations criticized it. The conflict came to an end after first Israel and then Hamas announced unilateral cease-fires,¹⁵³ and the Israeli army completed withdrawal from Gaza. International donors at a conference in Egypt pledged US\$4.5 billion for the Palestinians, mainly to rebuild Gaza after Israel's offensive. The Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Fayyad, thanked the donors but said reconstruction would be impossible without the lifting of the Israeli barrier.¹⁵⁴ The Hamas leadership welcomed the aid pledges while expressing their disappointment for not being invited to the Annapolis conference. Reassuring the PA, Mrs. Clinton, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, informed the conference in the Red Sea resort of *Sharm el-Sheikh* that Washington would donate \$900 million and forcefully seek to advance peace: "Our response to today's crisis in Gaza cannot be separated from our broader efforts to achieve a comprehensive peace."¹⁵⁵

American policy makers had adopted a soft approach towards Palestine by the time Barack Obama was elected President of United States in 2008. From the beginning of his administration, Obama pledged his support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. He declared, "Palestinians should not have to confront the daily indignities that come with occupation. US want a viable and contiguous Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state of Israel. The only way to achieve that is through negotiations."¹⁵⁶ President Abbas visited the White House on 28 May 2009 and 9 June and September 2010. In July 2010 the Palestinian assignment was upgraded and renamed PLO General Delegation to the United States. In December 2010, the US government and the Palestinian Authority launched a joint project in information technologies capacity building.¹⁵⁷ After the milestone role of President Obama, the UN General Assembly resolution recognizing Palestine as a non-member observer state passed on 29 November 2012.¹⁵⁸

The EU, like the US, justified its schizophrenic attitude towards democracy promotion in the Palestinian territory by reiterating that Hamas was on its terrorist organization list and thus "the EU cannot legally deal with Hamas unless the latter renounces violence."¹⁵⁹ But that does not explain the EU's double standards, manifested in supporting (emerging) authoritarian regimes in the region—such as Fatah—and in exempting Hizbullah (despite its similarity to Hamas) from being black-listed as well. "This is not a matter of definitions or norms as much as it is a matter of strategic interests, for these decisions are highly politicized."¹⁶⁰ The EU lists al-Qaeda and Hamas as terrorist entities, but not Hizbullah because several EU governments with interests in Lebanon's stability (including France, Spain, and Britain) are worried about upsetting delicate confessional negotiations by measures that would cripple finding a solution.¹⁶¹ On the contrary, the US includes al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Hizbullah on its terrorist list, indicating a strong commitment to both Israel's security and its own interests in the region.¹⁶² Consequently, the EU's policies and even rhetoric concerning the region reflect its predominantly realist approach as opposed to a normative one.

In July 2009, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana called for the UN to recognize the Palestinian state by a set deadline even if a settlement had not been reached.

After a fixed deadline, a UN Security Council resolution should proclaim the adoption of the two-state solution. It would accept the Palestinian state as a full member of the UN, and set a calendar for implementation. It would mandate the resolution of other remaining territorial disputes and legitimize the end of claims. If the parties are not able to stick to it [referring to the UN-imposed timetable], then a solution backed by the international community should be put on the table.¹⁶³

In December, the Council of the EU authorized a set of conclusions on the Hamas–Fatah conflict which forms the basis of present EU policy. It reasserted the objective of a two-state solution and declared that the union “will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.”¹⁶⁴ It recalled that the EU “has never recognized the annexation of East Jerusalem”¹⁶⁵ and that the State of Palestine must have its capital in Jerusalem.

As proved that the dubious role of outside actors like the US, Israel, and the EU fueled the Hamas–Fatah rivalry, which was responsible for the bloody civil war in 2007 and killed thousands of innocent Palestinians. After the Palestinian civil war, Palestine once again split into Hamastan (Gaza Strip) and Fatahland (West Bank). The ideological conflict between the two organizations has been a major obstacle in the path of the Palestinian Question. Therefore, Palestinian people want to stop the Hamas–Fatah conflict. The year 2011 brought hope for the Palestinians as the Arab Spring had a great influence on regional politics. During the Arab Spring, people came out of their homes and protested against their leaders. Consequently, the Arab Spring was a revolutionary wave of demonstrations for human rights against autocracy or dictatorship in the Arab region, sparked by the first protest in Tunisia on 18 December 2010. The means for the current growth of protests was the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, which brought together various groups that were dissatisfied with the existing system. These groups included many unemployed, political and human rights activists, labor, trade unionists, students, professors, lawyers, and others. With the success of the protests in Tunisia, a wave of unrest struck Egypt, Libya, and Syria then spread to other countries in the region. During the revolution, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi were overthrown by their citizens. Hence, the Palestinian people successfully put pressure on Hamas and Fatah to sign a national unity deal. Consequently, the Islamic movement Hamas and the secular nationalist Fatah Party signed a unity deal in Cairo in 2011. The next chapter will deal with the political landscape of Palestine in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

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6

THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF PALESTINE

Aftermath of Arab spring

In [Chapter 5](#), we discussed the division of Palestine into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in the aftermath of the Islamic movement Hamas's landslide victory in the 2006 elections. After the Palestinian Election Commission confirmed Hamas's victory, the United States, Israel, and the EU were shocked, as they were very sure that Fatah would win. Consequently, all states boycotted Hamas's victory and imposed economic sanctions on Hamas's government, wanting to punish the Palestinian people for supporting Hamas's agenda against the United States and Israel in regional politics. After Hamas's victory, the Quartet supported Fatah against Hamas, thus helping to lead Palestine into civil war in 2007. During the June war, Hamas conquered the Gaza Strip, while Fatah remained in the West Bank. Due to the power struggle between Hamas and Fatah, the Palestinian Question has been ignored. But the Arab Spring brought some hope for Palestinians to end armed conflict between Hamas and Fatah because it had a great impact on regional politics.

The Arab spring and its impact on Palestinian politics

The revolutions that had erupted across West Asia and North Africa to create the "Arab Spring" of 2011 had left almost no corner of the region untouched. From Qatar and Algeria to Syria and Tunisia, a surge of newfound pride and energy fundamentally reshaped the political landscape of West Asia and forever altered the course of the region's history. It was hardly surprising, then, that the dynamic of the region's universal issue—the question of Palestine—had also been affected. But just what the Arab Spring will bring for Palestine remains to be seen: the Arab Spring might herald a new trend of non-violence on the tentative path toward peace; just as likely, it may portend a summer of resurgent violence and misery. Just a few days after the upheaval of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak following massive popular protests, President Mahmoud Abbas sought to demonstrate that he was aware of the changes sweeping West Asia and the ramifications they could have for the legitimacy of his own leadership.¹ Abbas accepted the resignations of all of the members of the Palestinian cabinet and instructed Prime Minister Salam Fayyad to quickly assemble a new cabinet. At the same time, Abbas called for new

elections for the PA to take place by September. Predictably, Hamas immediately announced that it would not participate in the elections. Hamas claimed that Abbas had no legitimacy to call elections and refused to lend legitimacy to the vote by participating.² Elections were already cancelled in 2010 because of the continuing rift between Hamas and Abbas's Western-backed Fatah. The Palestinian parliament had not been able to sit for four years, which has put "democracy on hold."³

Although the Arab Spring has not manifested itself in the Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, its effects have still been reflected locally, and as Beverley Milton-Edwards argued, the Arab Spring has strengthened Hamas's domestic position in several ways. First, Hamas can strengthen its own position by exploiting and dominating the emerging narrative of change associated with the changed ideological environment. One key example of this is the way Hamas has appropriated the narrative of the Arab Spring as an extension of the liberation of Palestine through jihad.⁴ Therefore, Hamas leaders and cadres had constantly cultivated support for the regional Islamist dominance that the Arab Spring appears to herald. Hamas Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed Awad argued, "Any victory in Egypt for the Ikhwan equals a victory for Hamas here in Gaza."⁵ Here, Hamas emerged as a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and is pursuing its agenda in Palestinian politics. This theme features prominently in Hamas's nationalist narrative and finds support among Palestinians. Second, the Arab Spring has had negative consequences for Hamas's enemy Israel as well as its secular counterpart Fatah. Hamas has not only publicized but sought to incorporate these negative consequences into its narrative of increased power. Consequently, both Israel and Fatah were condemned because they could be portrayed as weakened by the events surrounding the Arab Spring.⁶ Third, though in large part explanations of the Arab Spring highlight the inherent challenge to the legitimacy of authoritarian rule in the region, few perceive the threat that regional events present in terms of any contested legitimacy of Hamas's own governance of the Gaza Strip. Hamas has been losing support because it is increasingly authoritarian in particular areas of its governance. Indeed, in the wake of the Arab Spring, it can be argued that Hamas has in fact stimulated its authoritarian tendencies, particularly in the realm of social control. The leadership of Hamas had recognized the regional turmoil that could present itself in a challenge to them and their governance of the Gaza Strip.⁷

The huge numbers of Palestinian students inspired by the movements in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya called for huge public demonstrations on 15 March 2011 to force an end to the internal Palestinian divisions that have crippled united action; like the other young revolutionaries they sought to emulate, the organizers of the movement used Facebook to mobilize supporters and spread information. The rallies held in March met with decidedly mixed results. Only a couple thousand Palestinians attended the demonstration in Ramallah in the West Bank, and fewer than 10,000 attended a parallel demonstration in Gaza City.⁸ However, the movement has already seen some gains as both Hamas and Fatah attempt to blunt public pressure: both sides felt sufficient public pressure that each made very public moves toward unity. Ismail Haniyeh, Prime Minister of Gaza, issued an invitation to Abbas to visit Gaza. Abbas accepted, and as of this writing, the details of the journey were being arranged. Hamas and Fatah were also threatened enough by the demonstrations in March that they chose to co-opt them, flooding the demonstrations with loyalists chanting party slogans and waving flags and signs. The demonstrations were supposed to be nonpartisan, but members of both factions arrived with loudspeakers and microphones and tried to turn the events into public rallies in support of their faction. Hamas even went so far as to break up the Gaza City protests. The demonstrations might

not have gone as intended, then, but they had certainly touched a nerve.⁹

Cairo agreement of 2011

After the domestic pressure, Fatah and Hamas finally managed a reconciliation agreement under the Egyptian auspices after countless mediation efforts. The agreed document, the Palestinian National Reconciliation Agreement, was signed in Cairo on 4 May 2011.¹⁰ At that time, both President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas leader Khaled Mishal announced their intention to forge a power-sharing agreement.¹¹ The two leaders indicated that this would enable them to create a unity government of independent technocrats under a mutually acceptable Prime Minister; cooperate in holding new presidential and parliamentary elections to replace the legislators whose terms expired over a year ago; release political prisoners; and hold new elections to the PLO, in which both parties would be able to field candidates.¹²

The failure to implement the agreement could not be blamed on Fatah alone, though. The Cairo agreement implied that, in order to enter the PLO, Hamas risked giving away its power in Gaza if it lost the next the Palestinian Legislative Council elections. As some of Gaza's powerful Hamas leaders saw it, PLO membership was not worth such a sacrifice.¹³ According to the agreement, legislative, presidential, and PNC elections should have been conducted within a year. There were clearly a few obstacles to arranging elections to the PNC for all Palestinians inside and outside Palestine. Arranging elections in the West Bank was problematic as long as Hamas's candidates were arrested by Israel. Arranging PNC elections in Jordan and Syria could be even harder; there was a civil war in Syria, and the Palestinian Jordanians risked losing their citizenship if they participated in PNC elections in Jordan. Nonetheless, for movements seeking to liberate Palestine, these obstacles were not impossible if the political will existed to implement the agreement. As for elections in the West Bank, a proportional system could be used, while Palestinian delegates from Syria and Jordan could be selected rather than elected to the PNC, according to Fatah leader Nabil Shaath.¹⁴ But with political motivation lacking, practical solutions were not sought.

As elections had not been held, an increasing portion of the Palestinian population blamed Hamas in Gaza for the lack of progress. Veteran Hamas leader Ahmed Yousef in Gaza denied that Hamas's hegemony over Gaza was an asset that its members refused to abandon, and he further argued:

You will hear this from people in Fatah, but I assure you that we are serious about ending the division and going to elections and unify our people. It is not our ambition or ultimate goal to have Gaza. Our national Islamic project is totally different. Our goal is to have our own Palestinian State with unified people and to guarantee the Right of Return of our people from the diaspora. This is our goal, it is not just to stick with Gaza and to be under siege and do nothing.¹⁵

However, Yousef acknowledged that there was political division within Hamas and that he represented the moderate faction, which had experienced setbacks since the 2006 elections. In a reversal of previous alliances and positions, Hamas moderates in Gaza and Khaled Mishal are pursuing conciliation rather than confrontation. Mishal said, the Arab Spring had conveyed a message to the Palestinians, "that we Palestinians must deal with our domestic affairs."¹⁶ In a

conciliatory meeting with Fatah in December 2011, he reportedly even referred to “popular resistance” instead of “armed struggle,” indicating a shift in Hamas’s preferred strategy.¹⁷ The political reorientation implied in Mishal’s wording with regard to regional diplomacy and popular resistance was met with harsh criticism from Hamas leaders controlling Gaza. At the same time, an official Hamas statement declared: “We underline our devotion to our right to the struggle in all its forms, particularly the armed struggle.”¹⁸ The statement included a call for the PLO to return to its original political platform, apparently reversing Hamas’s new strategy of joining the PLO without preconditions.¹⁹

Doha agreement of 2012

Hamas, represented by Khaled Mishal, and the Fatah Movement, represented by its head and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, signed the Doha Agreement on 6 February 2012, where they reviewed the steps that had been taken to that point to implement the reconciliation agreement’s mechanisms, and the obstacles that impeded its implementation; and the need to overcome those obstacles was stressed. The agreement was arbitrated by Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Emir of Qatar, and was projected to achieve the formation of a Palestinian unity government headed by Mahmoud Abbas.²⁰

With a spirit of responsibility, bluntness, transparency, and assertion on the honest and accurate implementation, the reconciliation agreement was signed by Mishal and Abbas. Some major articles in the agreement were mentioned in text as follows:

- First: Affirms the need to continue the steps of activating and developing the Palestinian Liberation Organization through the reformation of the Palestinian National Council simultaneously with the presidential and legislative elections.²¹
- Second: Forming the Palestinian National Reconciliation Government of independent technocrats under President Mahmoud Abbas and which will be in charge of facilitating the presidential and legislative elections and starting the reconstruction of Gaza.²²
- Third: Stresses the need to continue the works of the committees that were formed, namely the General Freedoms Committee, assigned to addressing the issues of detainees, institutions, and the freedom to travel, the return of the national staff to the Gaza Strip, the passports, and the freedom to work; and the Community Reconciliation Committee.²³
- Fourth: Asserting the implementation of what was agreed upon in Cairo to begin the work of the Central Election Committee of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem.²⁴

Regarding hope of success of the unity deal, Palestinian President Abbas said, “The Palestinian reconciliation is no longer a Palestinian interest but also an Arab interest.”²⁵ At the same time, Khaled Mishal, Head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, expressed his views: “Both parties are serious in moving forward to fold the page of strife between both parties and to strengthen the Palestinian national unity government.”²⁶ Independent Palestinian lawmaker Mustafa Barghouti said the agreement represented progress.

What we see is a slow movement, and we hope that this meeting will give a push to reconciliation to go faster. I hope that the most important thing that this agreement will

lead to is actual activation of (a) real democratic system and that all obstacles that are still in the way of election will be removed.²⁷

Prime Minister Salam Fayyad expressed hope that a government headed by Abbas will be formed quickly and hold elections, “which would consequently end the internal division.”²⁸

The move, following the failure of exploratory Israeli–Palestinian talks aimed at reviving stalled peace negotiations, was likely to be condemned by Israel and the United States, who said the Islamist Hamas cannot be part of any peace efforts. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed “deep concern” over the US reaction to the reconciliations, and she urged,

We respectfully urge you to remain steadfast in demanding that Hamas must meet the Quartet requirements prior to any cooperation or joint governance with the Palestinian Authority, and make clear to President Abbas there will be consequences to proceeding with a unity government with a pro-violence, anti-Israel Hamas.²⁹

It can be argued that the Arab Spring emerged as a big threat in Palestine for US interests because both the rivals’ factions were ready to conduct reconciliations under domestic pressure.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clearly said, “Hamas is a terrorist organisation that strives to destroy Israel, and which is supported by Iran.”³⁰ He further argued, “Over the past few weeks, Israel and elements in the international community have made great efforts to advance the peace process.”³¹ If Abbas implemented the deal signed in Doha, Netanyahu said,

he will have chosen to abandon the way of peace and to join with Hamas, without Hamas having accepted the minimal conditions of the international community. Not only does Hamas not recognize Israel and the (previously signed) agreements, it has not abandoned terrorism. It is continuing with terrorism and to arm itself in order to perpetrate even deadlier terrorism.³²

Prime Minister Netanyahu added a message to Abbas: “It is either peace with Hamas or peace with Israel; you cannot have it both ways.”³³

Finally, due to ideological differences and the power struggle between Hamas and Fatah, the agreement failed. The growing schism within Hamas continued to be displayed in front of TV cameras following a February 2012 meeting between Khaled Mishal and Mahmoud Abbas in Doha, Qatar. Reportedly, Mishal had not consulted with the leadership in Gaza ahead of the agreement signed in Doha. The agreement was condemned as “foolish” and “a mistake” by Mahmoud al-Zahar in Gaza, who went on to declare the Doha agreement to be “dead” only a month later.³⁴

One specific difference in the wording of the 2012 Doha agreement was significant. The 2011 Cairo agreement had called for elections to the PA (PLC and presidency) and the PNC alike. In the Doha declaration, only PA elections were explicitly mentioned. “Palestinian National Council elections,” in the wording of the May 2011 Cairo agreement, had in the Doha agreement become “reforming the Palestinian National Council.” Reforming the PNC is obviously something other than electing it. It could refer to the PNC admitting new members, while the mechanism for admitting the members continues to be the appointment system rather than elections. If so, the PLO would be reformed without being democratized. This point, referring to reforms of, and not elections to, the PNC, was part of the criticism leveled at Mishal by the

Hamas leadership in Gaza. But the Gazans who were calling for PNC elections were at the same time obstructing preparations for PLC elections in Gaza. Hence, their criticism smelled of opportunism. However, when the Hamas and Fatah leaders met again in May 2012, the original text of the 2011 Cairo agreement, calling for PNC and PA elections simultaneously, was reinstated.³⁵ On the other hand, the fact that Mishal had agreed to reforming the PNC (rather than demanding elections to it) without internal consultation was significant. It indicated that Mishal's top priority was for Hamas to join rather than democratize the PLO. For the Gaza leadership, however, staying in control of Gaza clearly had priority over entering the PLO. "Gaza is holding the national movement hostage to its interests," a Hamas leader in exile told the International Crisis Group (ICG).³⁶ Thus, there were strong internal forces against implementing the 2011 Cairo agreement within Hamas as well as within Fatah. While Hamas in Gaza wanted to avoid PLC elections in order to maintain their power in Gaza, Fatah wanted to avoid PNC elections to maintain their power in the PLO.

In the series of unity deals, Hamas and Fatah once again signed an agreement in Cairo in May 2012. The Cairo agreement came three and a half months after a wide reconciliation pact was signed by the leaders of the two factions in Doha, Qatar, in February 2012, and a year after they first reached a unity accord. The new agreement essentially takes steps to carry out the previous one, particularly the registering of new voters in Gaza and the formation of an interim government under the terms of the Doha Declaration. Both were to begin on 27 May, and Egypt would "follow each party's commitment to the deal,"³⁷ according to Fawzi Barhoum, a Hamas spokesman. The agreement was signed by Azzam al-Ahmad of Fatah and Musa Abu Marzouq of Hamas at Egyptian intelligence headquarters. Sakher Bseiso, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, and Mohammed Nasser of the Hamas political bureau also attended the negotiating session.³⁸

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas did not issue a statement or any reaction. But he had repeatedly said the reconciliation process was on ice because Hamas leaders had refused to allow the registration of new voters in Gaza, where officials estimated that as many as 300,000 had not signed up for the last election in 2006. He clearly said "Without elections there will be no reconciliation,"³⁹ President Abbas said in a meeting with a delegation of Americans. He also said then that until the elections, the interim government he had promised to set up would be "transitional, technocratic and independent"⁴⁰ and would not include representatives of Hamas. He further said, "Everybody in the government should recognize Israel, denounce terrorism, Hamas is the opposition. If I allow them to be in the government, it will not work."⁴¹ Due to personal rivalry and ideological differences between Hamas and Fatah, the agreement was never implemented, and a unity government was finally formed in June 2014. Here it might be argued that both Palestinian organizations are fighting for their individual interests, not for the Palestinian Question, and it has betrayed the dream of the Palestinian people.

Israeli operation returning echo

In March 2012, Israeli Defense Forces launched a military operation in the Gaza Strip against Hamas, called "Operation Returning Echo." It was the worst eruption of violence covered by the media in the region since the Israeli "Operation Cast Lead" or Gaza War of 2008–2009. On 9 March, Israel launched a targeted air strike in the Gaza Strip that killed Zohair al-Qaisi, the secretary general of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), and another militant. The Islamic

Jihad militant group said 10 members of its military wing, the al-Quds Brigades, were also killed.⁴² According to an Israeli army spokesperson, al-Qaisi was the mastermind of southern Israel cross-border attacks of 2011, in which eight Israelis including six civilians were killed, and he had been planning the final stages of a new mega-attack.⁴³ His Hamas-linked PRC was also behind the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who was held captive in Gaza for more than five years and freed in a prisoner swap in exchange for more than 1,000 Palestinians.⁴⁴

Hamas retaliated by launching rocket attacks on Israel, including over 300 Grad missiles, Qassam rockets and mortar shells, of which 177 struck the major Israeli urban centers of Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Beersheba, as well as smaller communities. During this attack, twenty-three Israelis were injured, all of them civilians. The Israeli government shut down schools to protect students from rocket fire. Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system disrupted several Palestinian launched projectiles aimed at large cities, shooting down 56 rockets in 71 attempts.⁴⁵

The Israeli army responded to the rocket fire with multiple airstrikes on what it said were weapons factories and rocket-launching squads in Gaza. Some hit heavily populated areas in the crowded coastal enclave, and approximately 20 people were injured, several of whom were civilians. During this attack, five of those killed were PRC members, and 10 were fighters with the Islamic Jihad militant group. Regarding Israeli actions on Gaza, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clearly said, "We will continue to hit whoever plans to attack citizens of the state of Israel."⁴⁶ Israel directed air strikes on Gazan weapons storage facilities, rocket launching sites, weapon manufacturing facilities, training bases, posts, tunnels, and militants.

In response to the Israeli military operation in Gaza, PRC spokesman, Abu Mujahid said, "The cowards Zionists have committed an ugly crime and they know the price that they are going to pay, we call on our fighters to respond to the Zionist enemy with all our strength." he further said. "We shall avenge our leader and the response, God willing, will be equal to the size of the heinous crime."⁴⁷ Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum blamed Israel for sparking a new escalation, saying, "The blood of our martyrs will not go in vain."⁴⁸

Hamas, the Islamist organization that rules Gaza, condemned the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza, as did neighboring Egypt, whose foreign minister said he was "making crucial calls for an immediate end to this Israeli escalation to end bloodshed of our brothers." Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri called for Egyptian aid, saying Gaza was "sinking in darkness and in blood."⁴⁹ Hamas said it did not fire rockets into Israel, but the Israeli armed forces said that the group "enables" firing by other Gaza-based militant factions and would "bear the consequences."⁵⁰ Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged restraint on both sides. He charged Israel was responsible for the "serious deterioration" but urged militants to avoid an escalation that could hurt efforts to renew talks for Palestinian statehood.⁵¹

The world communities criticized the armed struggle between Hamas and Israel. Following the old position on the Israel-Palestine conflict, the United States and France condemned the Hamas attacks on Israel, and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned the rocket fire from Gaza onto Israel. Meeting with opposition leader Tzipi Livni in New York, Clinton said Israel has the right to defend itself. Livni thanked Clinton, then said "the international community must speaking out clearly, in one voice, against terror against the citizens of Israel's South."⁵² She continued, "Israel must continue to act to eradicate Kassam firings and attack terror operatives."⁵³ EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton expressed concern. "I urge all sides to re-establish calm," she said in a statement. Richard Miron, a spokesman for UN Middle East envoy Robert Serry, called for "both sides to exercise maximum restraint" and condemned

rocket firings at Israel.⁵⁴

The Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Arab League, Syria, Egypt, and Iran condemned Israel's receptive air strikes on Gaza. Egypt's foreign minister condemned the air strikes and called for an immediate end to the attacks to prevent further bloodshed.⁵⁵ Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Cooperation Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu also strongly condemned the Israeli air raids on Gaza. He said, "The escalating military aggression which resulted in dozens of Palestinian civilian casualties constitutes a serious violation of the international law and a threat to security and peace in the entire region," and "the international community has to hold Israel fully responsible for results of this war crime against defenseless civilians."⁵⁶ He further called on the UN Security Council and the Quartet on the West Asian peace to shoulder their responsibility for protecting the Palestinian people and forcing Israel to respect the international humanitarian law.⁵⁷

Israeli operation pillar of defense

After few months of Operation Returning Echo, Hamas and Israel again were involved in war. On 14 November 2012, Israeli again launched a military operation against the Palestinians who were living in the Gaza Strip and supporting Hamas's anti-Israel agenda. The eight-day IDF military operation in the Hamas-governed Gaza Strip called "Operation Pillar of Defense" or "Pillar of Cloud," started with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, chief of the Gaza military wing of Hamas, by an Israeli airstrike.⁵⁸ Jabari was one of the leaders of Hamas and directly responsible for past attacks on Israel as well as the kidnapping and captivity of Gilad Shalit.⁵⁹ Over the eight days, approximately 175 Palestinians were killed and more than 1,000 were injured.⁶⁰ In the period prior to this operation, there were several Palestinian-Israeli responsive attacks. The Israeli government argued that the operation began in response to the launch of more than 100 rockets in Israel over 24 hours, a blast which occurred near Israeli soldiers on the Israeli side of a tunnel passing under the Israeli West Bank barrier, and an attack by Hamas fighters on an Israeli military patrol jeep within Israeli borders.⁶¹ On 20 November 2012, meeting with US Secretary Clinton, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said:

One of the things that we are doing is trying to resist and counter a terrorist barrage which is aimed directly at our civilians and doing so by minimizing civilian casualties, whereas the terrorist enemies of Israel are doing everything in their power to maximize the number of civilian casualties. Obviously, no country can tolerate a wanton attack on its civilians. Now if there is a possibility of achieving solution to this problem through diplomatic means, we prefer that, but if not, I'm sure you understand that Israel will have to take whatever action is necessary to defend its people.⁶²

In response to the attacks, Hamas said that "the occupation has opened the gates of hell."⁶³ Senior Hamas spokesperson Izzat al-Rishq said the assassination will not "break the will of our people, nor weaken our resistance."⁶⁴ The Palestinians blamed the Israeli government for the violence, accusing the IDF of attacks on civilians of the Gaza Strip in the days leading up to the operation. They cited the occupation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem and the blockade of the Gaza Strip, as the cause for the rocket attacks. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, many Palestinian families were displaced, 174

civilians were killed, and hundreds were wounded.⁶⁵ During the operation, the al-Qasam Brigade of Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) intensified their rocket attacks on Israeli cities and towns in the “Operation Stones of Baked Clay,” and both Palestinian militant groups fired more than 1,456 rockets from Gaza into Israel, and 142 fell down inside Gaza itself.⁶⁶ During this conflict, seventy Israelis were injured in rocket attacks since the IDF launched Operation Pillar of Defense in the Gaza Strip.⁶⁷

International reactions were mixed because the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada, Germany, and other Western countries expressed support for the Jewish state of Israel, as they always considered Israel’s right to defend itself. At the same time, they condemned the Hamas rocket attacks on Israel. On the contrary, China, Iran, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, and many other Arab and Muslim countries condemned the Israeli operation. The UN Security Council held an emergency session on the situation but did not reach a decision. After several days of negotiations between Hamas and Israel, a cease-fire was announced by Egypt on 21 November.⁶⁸ Both sides claimed victory. Israel stated that it had achieved its goal of crippling Hamas’s rocket-launching capability, while Hamas stated that Israel’s option of invading Gaza had ended. According to Human Rights Watch, both sides violated the rules of war during the fighting.

Palestine’s “non-member observer state” status in the United Nations

In the history of the Palestinian National Movement, 29 November 2012 was a milestone, when the State of Palestine was recognized by the UN General Assembly as a status of a non-member observer state in the United Nations, which served as recognition of Palestinian statehood. In this voting, 138 countries were in favor, 9 were against (Canada, Czech Republic, Israel, Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Panama, Palau, United States), with 41 abstentions.⁶⁹ After the UN resolution, Palestinian President Abbas said, “The moment has arrived for the world to say clearly: enough of aggression, settlements and occupation.” Indeed, following Israel’s latest violence against the Gaza Strip, the international community now faced “the last chance” to save the long mysterious two-state solution, he said, adding: “the window of opportunity is narrowing and time is quickly running out.”⁷⁰ Thousands of flag-waving Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip set off fireworks and danced in the streets to celebrate the vote. The assembly approved the upgrade despite threats by the United States and Israel to punish the Palestinians by maintenance funds for the West Bank government. UN envoys said Israel might not retaliate harshly against the Palestinians over the vote as long as they do not seek to join the International Criminal Court.⁷¹ The UN victory for the Palestinians was a diplomatic setback for the United States and Israel, which were joined by only a handful of countries in voting against the move to upgrade the Palestinian Authority’s observer status at the United Nations to “non-member state” from “entity,” like the Vatican.⁷² US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called the vote “unfortunate and counter productive,” while the Vatican praised the move and called for an internationally guaranteed special status for Jerusalem, something bound to irritate Israel.⁷³

In December 2012, in the aftermath of the UN status upgrade of the State of Palestine and the end of the Hamas–Israel conflict in Gaza, calls for a unified Palestinian front increased, and the political leaders of Hamas and Fatah took many steps to reconcile their differences. Palestinian

Authority spokeswoman Nour Odeh said:

The spirit of unity is being shown by the political strata from top to bottom ... There is a political commitment to enshrine this sense of unity in more than slogans following the UN bid. The public will no longer tolerate any obstruction or delay in achieving reconciliation.⁷⁴

He further argued, “No Palestinian group can survive on its own without being part of the larger political system. All factions must find a way to make it work.”⁷⁵ In a televised address, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas declared that “talks with Hamas would immediately follow the Palestinians’ bid to upgrade their status at the UN General Assembly—an effort that succeeded.” Abbas again stated, “I hope that all pending issues will be resolved so that Gaza enjoys safety, security and stability.”⁷⁶

On 13 December, Abbas-led Fatah allowed rival Islamist organization Hamas to hold its first rally in the city of Nablus in the Israeli-occupied West Bank since civil war, or second partition of Palestine, in 2007, and thousands of Palestinians had attended a rare rally to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the group’s founding and its recent victory over Israel in Gaza. Hamas MP Hosni al-Burini said in a press conference, “our message is that Hamas is here, on the ground and in the heart of our people.”⁷⁷ On 4 January 2013, Hamas, which ruled Gaza, had allowed Fatah, the ruling party of the West Bank, to celebrate its 48th anniversary by staging a rally in the Gaza Strip for the first time since its forces were ousted following the brutal civil war. Supporters of the late Palestinian President Yasser Arafat’s group, carrying unique black and yellow flags, arrived at the venue in a steady stream, many Palestinians living outside Gaza City overnight, extinguishing fires and celebrations and cars streamed the streets waving Fatah and Palestinian flags.⁷⁸ After this positive sign in Palestinian politics, because Hamas and Fatah were ready for a unity deal, Egyptian president Mohammed Morsi announced that Khaled Mishal and Mahmoud Abbas were holding renewed reconciliation talks in Cairo in 2014.

Cairo Accord of 2014

On 23 April 2014, Hamas and Fatah signed a historic reconciliation deal, nearly seven years after a schism between the rival Palestinian factions. The reconciliation deal was based primarily on the agreements signed by Hamas and Fatah in Cairo and Doha. Addressing reporters in Gaza, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said he was “happy to declare the end of the period of intra-Palestinian division.”⁷⁹ According to Haniyeh’s statement, “under the deal the two sides must uphold past agreements and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas will form an interim unity government within five weeks, followed by elections in six months.”⁸⁰ The Palestinian unity government was sworn on 2 June 2014, but due to its approval by the Legislative Council of Palestine, it was dissolved on 17 June 2015 after President Abbas said it was unable to operate in the Gaza Strip.⁸¹

Despite the Israeli anti-deal reaction, the US agreed to work with the Palestinian unity government. The US State Department said,

Any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognition of the state of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations

between the parties. If a new Palestinian government is formed, we will assess it based on its adherence to the stipulations above, its policies and actions, and will determine any implications for our assistance based on US law.⁸²

The international community expected the unity deal to have a significant impact on the ongoing peace talks between the PA and Israel. In a moment, Israel launched an airstrike in the northern part of the Gaza Strip that killed two Palestinians and injured 20. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu had warned that Abbas had to choose either peace with Hamas or peace with Israel. When a unity deal was signed, Netanyahu imposed sanctions against the PA.⁸³ Israel tried to disrupt the Palestinian national unity government between Hamas and Fatah by its operation. At the same time, three Israeli teenagers were abducted in the West Bank on 12 June 2014. The Israeli government blamed the abduction on Hamas, and the IDF stated that the two Palestinians were involved in kidnapping the teenagers and were known members of Hamas.⁸⁴ But there was no evidence of Hamas involvement in the kidnapping and their top leaders initially denied the group had any involvement in the incident. In response, the Israeli army launched Operation Brother's Keeper, a large-scale attack on what it called Hamas's terrorist infrastructure, especially in the West Bank.

Israeli Operation Protective Edge

On 8 July 2014, Israel launched "Operation Protective Edge" against Palestinian peoples specially living in the Gaza Strip. Israel was trying to punish them because they were supporting Hamas's political agenda in Palestinian politics against Israel. Another reason was the reconciliation deal Hamas signed with its political rival Fatah and consequent Palestinian unity government. In response to the unity deal, Israel announced it would not negotiate any peace deal with the new government and would push punitive measures,⁸⁵ and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu said, "The international community must not embrace it."⁸⁶ Despite the Israeli declaration, the EU, US, China, India, Russia, and Turkey all agreed to work with the Palestinian unity government.⁸⁷

Subsequently, seven weeks of Israeli bombardment, Palestinian rocket attacks, and ground fighting killed 2,104 Palestinians and 69 Israelis, and 108,000 homes were destroyed or damaged.⁸⁸ According to media, the main target of the Israeli military operation was to stop Hamas's launching of rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. This followed the Israeli crackdown on Hamas in the West Bank after the kidnapping and assassination of three Israeli teenagers by two Hamas members,⁸⁹ even though Hamas later declined this allegation. During this conflict, Israeli destroyed the Gaza tunnel system. After several round cease-fires under mediation and pressure from the international community, Israeli soldiers withdrew from the Gaza Strip, and an open-ended cease-fire was announced on 26 August 2014.⁹⁰ According to the Gaza Health Ministry, the UN and some human rights groups reported that 69–75% of the Palestinian casualties were civilians, but Israel argued that 50% were civilians. The mission of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) report also pointed out that 520,000 Gazans might have been displaced, of whom 485,000 needed emergency food assistance and 273,000 were taking shelter in 90 UN-run schools. In Israel, an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 citizens fled their homes due to the threat of rocket and mortar attacks of Hamas.⁹¹

International reaction to the Gaza war of 2014 was mixed. The United States, Canada, France,

and the UK supported the Israeli action in Gaza and criticized Hamas, but Arab states condemned the Israeli operation against innocent Palestinians. US President Barack Obama accepted Israel's right to defend itself but urged restraint by both sides. In the meantime, the US Congress expressed vigorous support for Israel. It passed legislation providing Israel with an additional \$225 million in military support for missile defense with a bipartisan 395–8 vote in the House of Representatives and by unanimous consent in the Senate. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell stated, "This is a good example of us being able to put aside partisan considerations and work together to help our good friend, Israel."⁹² The BRICS countries called for restraint on both sides and a return to peace talks based on the Arab Peace plan. The EU condemned the violations of the rules of war by both sides, while emphasizing the "unstable nature of the status quo," and called for a negotiation based on a two-state solution. Some countries, like Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Turkey, India, and most Latin American countries were critical of Israel, with some countries in the latter group withdrawing their ambassadors from Israel in protest.

After the Gaza War of 2014, Hamas and Fatah clearly understood that they had to be united, otherwise Israel would destroy the whole of Palestine and occupy all territories. Therefore, they had decided to seek reconciliation, which had failed in past years. In December 2015 and January 2016, Hamas and Fatah secretly participated in talks which were mediated by Qatar in Doha to try to balance the 2014 agreement. In this unity talk, Egypt was not involved.⁹³ Hamas issued a brief statement on 8 February 2016, declaring that both parties had reached a workable solution to discuss and implement. Fatah leader Abdullah said a solution would require Hamas to leave the Gaza Strip, and other leaders of Fatah, including Jibril Rajoub, made statements about not allowing Hamas to continue to seize the Gaza Strip. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri criticized Rajoub's statement, saying it increased tension and did not lead to reconciliation.⁹⁴ Hamas and Fatah finally signed a unity agreement in October 2017 after several rounds of negotiations.

In May 2017, one more political development had happened in Palestinian politics. Hamas published a new policy document, the first since its founding charter in 1988. The Islamic Movement declared for the first time a willingness to accept an interim Palestinian state within pre-1967 boundaries, without recognizing Israel.⁹⁵ Hamas affirmed that its "conflict is with the Zionist project not with the Jews because of their religion. Hamas does not wage a struggle against the Jews because they are Jewish but wages a struggle against the Zionists who occupy Palestine."⁹⁶ The founding charter of 1988 was condemned for its anti-Jewish language. The text is seen as an effort by Hamas, which rules Gaza, to soften its image. "The document gives us a chance to connect with the outside world," spokesman Fawzi al Barhoum said. He again said, "To the world, our message is: Hamas is not radical. We are a pragmatic and civilized movement. We do not hate the Jews. We only fight who occupies our lands and kills our people."⁹⁷ On contrary, a spokesman of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Hamas was "attempting to fool the world but it will not succeed."⁹⁸

Cairo Accord of 2017

On 12 October 2017, Palestinian rival factions Hamas and Fatah signed a reconciliation deal in Cairo by Fatah's leader Azzam al-Ahmad and Hamas's deputy politburo chief Salah al-Arouri under Egyptian auspices, as part of an effort to end a decade-long rift. The announcement came

after representatives from Hamas and the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority convened in Cairo to implement a unity agreement that was signed in 2011 and 2014 but not put into action.⁹⁹ Consequently, Hamas agreed to hand over administrative control of Gaza, including the key Rafah border crossing, a decade after seizing the enclave in the 2007 civil war.¹⁰⁰

One day before the agreement, Abbas told a Fatah Revolutionary Council meeting that reconciliation was a “priority that we seek to achieve by all means possible.”¹⁰¹ He further argued the two sides were going to Cairo “resolved and determined to make it happen and achieve concrete results in that respect.”¹⁰² During the signing ceremony in Cairo, Fatah delegation chief Azzam Al-Ahmed said “The legitimate government, the government of consensus, will return according to its responsibilities and according to the law.” He said the unity government would “run all institutions without exception,” including all border crossings with Israel and in Rafah, Gaza’s only access point with Egypt.¹⁰³ After the signing of the accord, Fatah Central Committee member Zakaria al-Agha expressed his happiness and said, “The dark division has ended. Thank God and our congratulations to our Palestinian people everywhere.”¹⁰⁴ The Hamas leader also indicated a positive sign because Saleh Arouri, the head of Hamas negotiators, said, “We in Hamas are determined and are serious this time and just like all other times ... We have dissolved the administrative committee (shadow government) ... We have opened the door to reaching this reconciliation.”¹⁰⁵ “The head of the Hamas political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, announced the agreement between Fatah and Hamas.”¹⁰⁶ And Azzam al-Ahmad said:

under the instructions of Abbas, the two groups would not return to the occupied Palestinian territories unless they had a final agreement that would put aside the rift forever ... to achieve the Palestinian dream, put an end to occupation, and to have a Palestinian, independent, sovereign state with East Jerusalem as the capital.¹⁰⁷

The Palestinian unity deal could also strengthen Abbas’s hand in any revival of talks on a Palestinian state in Israeli-occupied territory. Internal Palestinian conflict has been a major obstacle to peacemaking, with Hamas having fought several wars with Israel since 2008 and continuing to call for its destruction. Hamas’s accord to transfer administrative powers in Gaza to a unity government marked a major setback, prompted partly by its fears of financial and political isolation after its main supporter and donor, Qatar, plunged in June into a major diplomatic dispute with key allies like Saudi Arabia. They accuse Qatar of supporting Islamist militants, which it denies.¹⁰⁸

Israel retained its old position on the Hamas–Fatah reconciliation agreement. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu clearly said,

We expect everyone who talks about a peace process to recognize the State of Israel and, of course, to recognize a Jewish state and we are not prepared to accept bogus reconciliations in which the Palestinian side apparently reconciles at the expense of our existence.¹⁰⁹

Netanyahu further argued,

Whoever wants to make such a reconciliation, our understanding is very clear: Recognize the State of Israel, disband the Hamas military arm, sever the connection with Iran, which

calls for our destruction, and so on and so forth. Even these very clear things must be clearly stated.¹¹⁰

On the contrary, the United States gave a positive signal, because White House Special Representative Jason Greenblatt said “the United States welcomed efforts to create the conditions for the Palestinian Authority to fully assume its responsibilities in Gaza and would be watching developments closely while trying to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.”¹¹¹ He again argued, “The United States stresses that any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to non-violence, recognition of the State of Israel, acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties, and peaceful negotiations.”¹¹²

Trump’s declaration on Jerusalem

On 6 December 2017, a political earthquake came in Palestinian politics as well as world politics when US President Donald Trump announced that the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.¹¹³ During his announcement, President Trump clearly said,

I have determined that it is time for the United States to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. This long overdue recognition of reality is in the best interests of both the United States and the pursuit of peace between Israel and the Palestinians.¹¹⁴

Trump’s administration ordered the planning of the transfer of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and reversed seven decades of American foreign policy.¹¹⁵

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the decision and appreciated the announcement. In a televised message, Netanyahu thanked Trump for what he called a “courageous and just” decision. He said “This decision reflects the president’s commitment to an ancient but enduring truth. ... The president’s decision is an important step toward peace, for there is no peace that doesn’t include Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.”¹¹⁶ He strained there would be no change in the status quo at the holy sites and Israel will ensure “freedom of worship” for all faiths.¹¹⁷

After Trump’s announcement on Jerusalem, President Mahmoud Abbas said the decision was tantamount to the US “abdicating its role as a peace mediator. These deplorable and unacceptable measures deliberately undermine all peace efforts.” He insisted that Jerusalem was the “eternal capital of the state of Palestine.”¹¹⁸ The leader of Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, called for a new *intifada* against Israel. At press conference in Gaza, he said “The American decision is an aggression against our people. It’s a declaration of war against our Palestinian people... We should call for and we should work on launching an *intifada* in the face of the Zionist enemy.”¹¹⁹

On 7 December 2017, the UN Security Council held an emergency meeting, where 14 of the 15 members condemned Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as the Israeli capital, saying it violated UN resolutions and international law, but the motion was vetoed by the United States.¹²⁰ Islamic countries like Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen criticized Trump’s stand on Jerusalem. Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan condemned the move and said the move was tantamount to “throwing the region into a ring of fire. What do you want

to do Mr. Trump? What kind of an approach is this? Political leaders exist not to create struggles but to make peace.”¹²¹ Saudi Arabia’s King Salman told Trump by telephone that the relocation of the embassy or recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital “would constitute a flagrant provocation of Muslims, all over the world.”¹²² At the same time, a Saudi royal court statement called Trump’s decision “unjustified and irresponsible. The US move represents a significant decline in efforts to push a peace process and is a violation of the historically neutral American position on Jerusalem.”¹²³ Those views were echoed by Egypt’s President Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, who warned against “complicating the situation in the region by introducing measures that would undermine chances for peace in [West Asia].”¹²⁴ The Arab League called it “a dangerous measure that would have repercussions” across the region, and also questioned the future role of the US as a “trusted mediator” in peace talks. Iran said the decision risked a “new *intifada*,” or uprising. Its foreign ministry said the US had clearly violated international resolutions. Meanwhile, Jordan’s King Abdullah called for joint efforts to “deal with the ramifications of this decision” and a Jordanian government spokesman said Trump was violating international law and the UN charter. Lebanon’s President Michel Aoun said the peace process would be set back decades, while Qatar’s Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdul Rahman Al Thani said the move was “a death sentence for all who seek peace.”¹²⁵

World powers like Russia, China, the UK, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Sweden were among the countries who criticized Trump’s decision at the emergency meeting of the UN. Following a meeting with his Turkish counterpart Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Trump’s decision “does not do anything to help settle the situation in the Middle East and is instead destabilizing an already complicated situation.”¹²⁶ Putin further said that “Moscow believes the status of Jerusalem can only be settled through talks between the Palestinians and Israel in line with United Nations resolutions.”¹²⁷

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang reiterated China’s support for East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. He said,

China firmly supports and advances the Middle East peace process. We support the just cause of the Palestinian people to restore their legitimate national rights and stand behind Palestine in building an independent, full sovereignty state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. We call on all parties to remain committed to resolving disputes through negotiations and promoting regional peace and stability in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions.¹²⁸

French President Emmanuel Macron said he did not support US President Trump’s “unilateral” decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and called for calm across the region. He told in a conference in Algiers, “This decision is a regrettable decision that France does not approve of and goes against international law and all the resolutions of the U.N. Security Council.”¹²⁹ German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesman also said that she “does not support this position because the status of Jerusalem can only be negotiated within the framework of a two-state solution.”¹³⁰

The European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said the announcement has a very worrying potential impact. It is a very fragile context and the announcement has the potential to send us backwards to even darker times than the ones we are already living in... The worst thing that could happen now is an escalation of tensions around the holy places and in the region because what happens in Jerusalem matters to the whole region and the entire world.¹³¹

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres said that US President Trump's statement would jeopardize the prospect of peace for Israelis and Palestinians.

Jerusalem was a final status issue that must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties. Such negotiations must take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinians and the Israeli sides.¹³²

But some countries, such as Guatemala, Paraguay, the Czech Republic, Romania, and Honduras, supported Trump's declaration on Jerusalem and ready to relocate their embassy from Tel Aviv to the Holy City of Jerusalem.

After the Trump announcement on Jerusalem, protests were held in many places across the world. Crowds in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, Greece, Indonesia, Morocco, Poland, Pakistan, and the Netherlands gathered to protest against the decision. Finally, it might be argued that President Trump's announcement on Jerusalem regarding it as a new capital of the Jewish state of Israel was purely a political stunt because he wanted to check the international response on this controversial issue of the region. If there was no big reaction, then Israel declared its new capital and the United States approved it, which Trump promised during his presidential election campaign.

Palestinian protests against the United States and Israel

After Trump's declaration in December 2017, there were several demonstrations throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip against the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the moving of the United States Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. On 9 December 2017, two Hamas militants were killed in an Israeli airstrike in Gaza after a rocket was fired from Israel. The Israeli military said it had responded to rocket fire by striking four facilities belonging to Hamas in the Gaza Strip: two weapons manufacturing sites, a weapons store, and a military compound. Violent confrontations were reported elsewhere but were less widespread than a day earlier. Riots had broken out in about 20 locations in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the army said. About 450 protesters burned tires and threw rocks along the Gaza border fence, while 600 took part in unrest in the West Bank, it said.¹³³ By December 2017, several Palestinians had been killed in Israeli air strikes, and two demonstrators were shot dead when they were participating in a riot on the Gaza border fence. A 14-year-old Palestinian boy was placed in a medically induced coma after Israeli soldiers shot him in the face with a rubber bullet during a protest,¹³⁴ an act criticized by several human rights organizations.

In December 2017, a Palestinian rocket fired from Gaza was the most intense series of rocket attacks on Israel since Gaza War or Operation Protective Edge in July 2014. In response, the Israeli army launched a strike on Gaza, and an Israeli spokesperson said it attacked a Hamas training compound in Gaza in response to rocket strikes from the Palestinian enclave, which have surged since US President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital on 6 December 2017.¹³⁵ During the conflict, an Israeli security guard was stabbed and seriously injured by a Palestinian near Jerusalem's central bus station. Furthermore, Israeli defense forces reported that two rockets were fired into Israel from the Gaza Strip. Two Palestinian terrorists were killed in an explosion; initially claiming a drone attack, although the IDF denied it and later Islamic Jihad statements claimed that it was an accident.¹³⁶

By 1 January 2018, Hamas militants in Gaza had fired 18 rockets or mortar rounds in Israel, and six of the missiles were intercepted by the Israeli Iron Dome defense system. Israeli warplanes attacked Hamas bases in Gaza in response to a rocket from the Palestinian enclave targeting southern Israel.¹³⁷ The aircraft targeted a “military compound belonging to the terrorist organisation Hamas,” the Israeli military said. Palestinian security sources said the Israeli strikes were in Khan Younes in the south and Deir Al Balah in central Gaza, causing damage but no casualties.¹³⁸ According to the Palestinian health ministry, two Palestinian youths were killed in clashes with Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip and occupied West Bank on 11 January. The Israeli army spokesperson said that “troops had come under attack from a massive barrage of rocks and that they had fired at the main instigator.” But Palestinian Authority official Ghassan Daghlal told the Wafa news agency that Israeli soldiers manning a checkpoint there opened fire “without any reason.”¹³⁹

In March 2018, the Palestinians launched six weeks of protests in the Gaza Strip, near the Gaza–Israel border, which was called the “Great March of Return” by the organizers. The demonstrators demanded that Palestinian refugees and their children be allowed to return to the land, which was occupied by Israel in the 1967 war.¹⁴⁰ Palestinian demonstrator Abu Ratima emphasized that the protest will be “peaceful and nonviolent. We have even decided that no rocks will be thrown. We will be participating in a number of nonviolent activities.” On the other hand, IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. Gadi Eisenkot said, “If there will be a danger to lives, we will authorize live fire.”¹⁴¹ According to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, since the starting of the protests, “over 150 Palestinians were killed in the demonstrations. At least 10,000 others have been injured, including 1,849 children, 424 women, 115 paramedics and 115 journalists. Of those injured, 5,814 were hit by live ammunition.”¹⁴² According to Israeli media, one soldier was wounded due to shrapnel from a grenade thrown by a Palestinian from Gaza and one Israeli soldier was killed by Palestinians.¹⁴³

In mid-April 2018, thousands of Palestinians made their way to the fence to re-isolate Gaza from Israel, and Israeli troops again repeatedly crossed or blocked the barrier with tear gas and live fire. Scandalous attempts were made, injuring hundreds of protesters, and one person was killed during the protest.¹⁴⁴ Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh said,

Hamas will not recognize Israel and will not make any concessions. The demonstrations, in which the Palestinians say at least 30 Gazans have been killed, have catapulted the Palestinian issue back to the center of the international stage. Palestine and Jerusalem belong to us, Palestinians to preserve the peacefulness of the protests. We will break the walls of the blockade, remove the occupation entity and return to all of Palestine.¹⁴⁵

From May to October 2018, several Palestinians were killed by Israeli defense forces during protests. After six months, violence again erupted in November 2018, when seven Palestinians were killed and 18 were wounded by Israeli gunfire.¹⁴⁶ Palestinian fired 300 rockets and mortars into Israel. Israel responded with more than 70 attacks on what it said were targets related to Hamas and Islamic Jihad.¹⁴⁷ Thus, we can say that thousands of people lost their lives in the Hamas–Israel conflict, which is very sad. If both Hamas and Israel want to end the conflict, then both have to accept the legitimate demands of each other, otherwise nothing will be left.

On 13 April 2019, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formed the new government under the leadership of a loyalist of his Fatah Party, Mohammad Shatyeh, with twenty-one members of the cabinet, consisting mainly of ministers from factions linked to the PLO, especially Fatah, but

excluding Hamas and the Islamic Jihad movement.¹⁴⁸ Hamas criticized the formation of the new Palestinian government dominated by the Fatah Party, said such a government would ease the way for the imposition of the United States' yet-to-be-unveiled proposal on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Hamas warned that the new West Bank-based administration would further divide Palestinians.¹⁴⁹ Hamas underlined the need to form an inclusive national unity government, which serves all Palestinian people and puts an end to the oppression they have been enduring. The new government should invite to all leaders of Palestine to agree on a national strategy to fight all the challenges facing the Palestine issue.¹⁵⁰

Hence, it can be argued that the conflict between Hamas and Fatah was responsible for diluting the Palestinian Question, because the two organizations have many ideological differences. Since the Oslo Accords in 1993, Hamas has criticized the Fatah-led PLO policy regarding the Jewish state. Fatah recognized Israel during the Oslo Accords, while Hamas wanted complete destruction of the Jewish state. In 2006, Hamas won the election and Fatah lost power due to its credibility among the Palestinians. As a result, Palestine split into two parts after the 2007 civil war, with Gaza ruled by Hamas and the West Bank by Fatah. If Hamas and Fatah want to end the partition, then they have to unite; otherwise, there is no future for the Palestinian people as well as the Palestinian Question.

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CONCLUSION

After the First Partition of Palestine in 1947, with the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel, along with the Palestinian migration and the common experience of the Palestinian refugee Arabs, was mirrored in a loss of Palestinian identity. The institutions of a Palestinian nationality emerged slowly in the Palestinian refugee Diaspora. The most important milestone that preceded this development was the founding of Fatah in 1959, which consequently emerged as the leading Palestinian organization, and the formalization of Fatah's primacy when it assumed the leadership of the PLO. These historical developments along Fatah's process of institutionalization were substantiated by three complementary bases of legitimacy. The first base was the natural organizational core, which defined the organization and lent it its autonomy. The second was the organization's base of popular support, which formed the popular context for the organization. These two bases facilitated the consolidation of the third base, the international recognition of the PLO, headed by Fatah, as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It can be argued that Fatah was the first Palestinian organization to call for a direct armed resistance against the Jewish state of Israel. While it did so within the context of an all-Arab front, the organization specifically strained the particularistic Palestinian cause. In comparison to other such organizations of popular struggle, Fatah formed itself on the pattern of an organizational core with clearly defined boundaries of Palestine. Its unifying determinant lay in the aim to preserve the organization and establish its political status in its surroundings that had long been hostile both to its goals and to its very existence. This hostility was manifested by attempts to shape the political goals and operational limits of the organization, and in more extreme cases, by efforts to control or even destroy it.

To survive and grow within this complex and hostile environment, Fatah embraced a strategy of violent action. In the initial years, and before it had acquired external legitimacy, this was the only way that Fatah could find its place on the regional outline. The practice of violence was designed to provoke Israeli counteraction and to draw Arab states into a conflict with Israel. The armed struggle was also a primary means to mobilize popular support and to generate pressure on Arab governments to embark on the war to liberate Palestine. Popular support was further intended to strengthen Fatah's position among other Palestinian organizations active in advancing their own status in a similar manner. The armed struggle did in fact place the Palestinian issue on the regional agenda. It also made a vital contribution to the institutionalization of the Fatah-led PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people, because Fatah took over PLO in 1969 when its founder Yasser Arafat was elected as a chairman. This development reflected the growing support for Palestinian organizations in general, and for Fatah

—the largest and strongest of them all—in particular.

This organizational complexity evolved in the 1960s against the backdrop of the power struggle between PLO's factions, particularly Fatah, and the Jordanian monarchy. Following the expulsion of Palestinian organizations from Jordan in 1970, this process gained momentum in Lebanon, reaching its peak on the eve of the Israel Defense Forces invasion in 1982. A gradual and relatively delayed process of institutionalization of the Fatah leadership in the territories under Israeli rule took place at the same time. While popular support was superficially aimed at forming an infrastructure for the continuation and expansion of the armed struggle, in practice the popular base was managed by local organizations that, judging by their agendas and functions, were far removed from active involvement in the armed struggle. Consequently, Fatah was institutionalized as an organization based on firm social foundations with the PLO securing international recognition. By 1970, Fatah was supported by several Arab states and Eastern-bloc governments, some of which even accorded it material aid.

The PLO dominated by Fatah was officially recognized by the 1974 Arab summit conference as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. That same year, it was also recognized by the UN and invited to participate in its forums dealing with issues concerning the West Asian conflict. International recognition was used first and foremost to exert pressure on Israel. However, the institutionalization process could not actually advance beyond a certain point without US and Israeli recognition of the PLO. This threat became more tangible in December 1987 with the eruption of the first *intifada*, the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. The PLO did not initiate the riots. Indeed, the riots broke out no less in protest against the political stagnation of the PLO leadership than in protest of the occupation itself. To preserve its status, Fatah hastened to seize control of the uprising, assisted by the network of popular apparatuses established in the occupied territories of Palestine over the years, particularly since its expulsion from Lebanon. Within a year, the PLO was forced to deal with a challenge and pressure from inside the territories to use the uprising as a basis for retrieving its credibility by leading the popular resistance against Israeli illegal occupation.

In contrast, Islamic forces represented by Hamas emerged in the course of the first *intifada*, pursuing jihad as the only means to liberate Palestine, which it described as the *wakf*, and hence defense of the land becomes the “sacred duty.” A strong revisionist protest concerning national goals and means as well as social and moral rules marked Hamas's burst onto the center stage of Palestinian politics. It emerged as an Islamic alternative to the PLO, challenging the PLO's status as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and, later on, the Palestinian Authority established in the Gaza Strip. Hamas also rejected the PLO's secular nationalism and political program for Palestinian statehood. Hamas stressed Islam as the “only solution of [the Palestinians'] problem.” By invoking an Islamic-national vision and community activism, Hamas was able to combine religious doctrine with daily concerns, and in a broad perspective, it is representative of political Islam in Palestinian politics.

Hamas's political strategy can be described in terms of a natural difference between the fulfillment of the Islamic duty of holy war with armed struggle against the Jewish state of Israel and its awareness of the boundaries and constraints of the political and social environment in which it operates. Hamas has a secret agenda to secure a dominant public position among Palestinians by committing itself to promoting Palestinian national interests through violence against the Jewish state, while simultaneously maintaining its Islamic social institutions of education, welfare, and health; which, in turn, created confusion as regards its real character. Whether Hamas was a political organization, or a social religious movement, or a terror outfit, or

all in one, gave rise to a dilemma exemplified by its ambiguous response to the signing of the September 1993 Oslo Accord and the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Gaza and Jericho in June 1994. Hamas's awareness of its relative weakness compared with Fatah and the need to secure its presence and influence among Palestinians, often at the price of competing with the PA, necessitated a more flexible attitude toward a settlement with Israel. Oslo marked a momentous occasion where Israel and the PLO had managed not only to engage one another directly, but also to produce a framework that both agreed upon; and all this was accomplished without external influence or guidance. However, much was left undone. The extremely general and ambiguous language of the accord allowed both parties to bestow upon it whatever interpretation suited their actual desires and/or needs. The PLO saw a path towards statehood, and Israel viewed it as retention of the territories without the burden of having to administer them.

Both PLO leader Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Rabin came under harsh condemnation for what each leader's detractors viewed as a sacrifice of core philosophy. For the Israelis, this meant the goal of Greater Israel from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. For the Palestinians, it was statehood within the pre-1967 Green Line. From a Palestinian rejectionist viewpoint, Arafat had done what they had always feared—recognized Israel's existence without gaining mutual acknowledgement of a Palestinian right to self-determination. On the contrary, from an Israeli rejectionist standpoint, the very fact that the existence of a Palestinian people had been acknowledged, it would be prelude to a Palestinian state in areas they were determined to retain for Israel.

Ideologically opposed to any negotiated settlement with the Jewish state, Hamas bitterly opposed the peace process, the 1994 establishment of the PA, and the introduction of "autonomy" in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. The Palestinians inside the occupied territories—in sharp contrast to the diaspora—collectively authorized the Oslo peace process and, despite deep disappointments, largely continued to see no alternative to Oslo. This being the case, Hamas refrained from openly deriding the Oslo Accord to avoid accusations of splitting the Palestinian people. Thus, the movement did not openly challenge the PA, even though its aim of overturning the Oslo Accords implicitly called the PA leadership into question. Military operations, though Hamas's ultimate weapon, also became more problematic as a result of Oslo. At the time the Oslo Accords were signed, Hamas set itself up as the champion of resistance to Arafat's "sell-out of Palestine" through jihad and reiterated calls to resume the spent *intifada*. However, its most influential figures were perceptive enough to see the implications of the new situation and to introduce new elements into the debate.

From its inception, Hamas has participated in electoral politics. Its predecessor, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, took part in active elections in the 1950s. Even though the Brotherhood re-emerged in the 1970s and again entered electoral politics, it believed it was sufficiently strong to contest the other political factions in professional and student's union elections. Hamas inherited the Brotherhood's political network and built on it. By 1992, Hamas had become a significant threat to Fatah's dominance across the territories, winning a number of significant victories in professional and student union elections, including those which had hitherto been Fatah strongholds. Hamas continued to succeed in defeating Fatah in key student and professional elections for much of the 1990s, winning, for instance, all elections between 1996 and 2006 at the key universities of al-Najah (Nablus, Hebron, and the Islamic University Gaza) and even at the secular stronghold Birzeit. Hamas lost only three times to Fatah during this period. By the time the municipal and legislative elections were held in 1996–2006, Hamas could build on

twenty years of electoral experience and a decade of executive experience (longer in Gaza), including working in coalition with other political factions.

Support for Hamas and Islamic Jihad reached a nadir in 1996, when popular support for the two Islamic groups dropped to a mere 10% after their boycott of the legislative and presidential elections. Support climbed to 15.5% by April 2000, and to 19% by early September 2000, six weeks after the challenge of the Camp David II talks. Support for the two Palestinian political groups, especially Hamas (support for Islamic Jihad remained steady at about 3%) was consolidated during the second *intifada*, with the Islamists consistently commanding the support of at least a quarter of the population. So long as the peace negotiations were going somewhere and the PA was treated by Israeli leadership as a partner in peace-making, an independent Palestinian state seemed likely. But when the PA was reduced to a virtual authority without effective control over territory due to Israel's constant assaults, support for Fatah began to slide to 37% in April 2000, declining further to 29.5% in November of the same year (a month after the start of the second *intifada*). It reached as low as 25% during 2003 and continued at this level for most of 2004.

Support for Fatah rose again in late 2004, a reaction perhaps to Israel's tightening siege on Yasser Arafat and his defiance of Israeli and American pressures, and to his ambiguous illness and death. By mid-2005, Fatah support stood at 44%, giving it a clear lead over Hamas. Beyond the impact of Arafat's death, this rise in support for Fatah reflected in the smooth presidential elections of January 2005, which were boycotted by Hamas, and the general feeling that the new President, Mahmoud Abbas, with his program to activate political negotiations with Israel, was the most likely person to secure positive political and economic interests. Fatah also gained from the March 2005 agreement signed by all Palestinian factions to implement a "calming down of the situation" (*tahdia*) by ceasing military operations against Israel and to hold legislative elections throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. However, the hopes vested in Abbas's elections and the *tahdia* were dissolved by Israel's policy of assassinations, its ongoing construction of the separation wall, and the persisting draconian restrictions on the movement of goods and people in and out of the World Bank Group's. Meanwhile, US policy toward the Palestinians showed no perceptible change. All of these factors led to reduced levels of support for Fatah, which by now was seen as indistinguishable from the Palestinian Authority.

After presidential elections in 2005, the decline in Fatah's popular support and the increase in support for Hamas may be attributed to a large measure to the political impasse faced by the Palestinian national project with the collapse of the Camp David II, the final status of the negotiations in July 2000, and to the growing dissatisfaction with the performance of the Fatah-dominated PA, increasingly as corrupt and incompetent at a time when unemployment and poverty rates were skyrocketing after the start of the second *intifada*. Hamas was able to build support on these factors, as well as on the growing hardships and humiliation inflicted on the Palestinians by Israel. Hamas cashed in on these factors and declared to participate in legislative elections in 2006 based on change and reforms. Hamas won a surprising victory and formed a government in the Palestinian territories.

After Hamas's surprise victory in the 2006 elections, the Palestinian Central Elections Committee was shocked when it announced that the Hamas had won a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament. It can be argued that Hamas's victory was a political earthquake for Fatah and its supporters. After this election, the international community divided into two sides. On one side, some countries, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, China, and Russia, recognized Hamas's victory in the election; on the other side, some countries, namely Israel, the US, and the

EU, boycotted and imposed economic sanctions on Hamas. Immediately after Hamas's victory, Fatah and Hamas members clashed in front of the Palestinian parliament building in Ramallah. Conflict between the two Palestinian factions soon spread, continuing regularly in the weeks and months that followed. The violence grew worse after the creation of the Executive Force, a new military unit deployed on 20 April by Hamas Interior Minister Said Sayyam. For weeks, Sayyam complained that forces were loyal to Fatah, and the PA was not following Hamas directives. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, as it turned out, had actually ordered Gaza's police officers to stay home in exchange for receiving their salaries as a means to deny Hamas the power that it had earned at the ballot box. It soon became visible, however, that the EF was not a legitimate police force. Rather than filling the void left by the PA forces and restoring law to the streets of Gaza, the EF became an authoritarian tool that Hamas used to threaten and exterminate its political foes. The EF adopted many of the extremist views associated with Hamas's military wing, the al-Qassam Brigades.

The new Legislative Council was convened on 18 February when President Abbas confirmed that Hamas would be asked to form the next government as he offered full cooperation in the formation of the government at the earliest. Commenting on the domestic policy, Abbas promised to help and support all reform initiatives which would strengthen the rule of law and order, "one legitimate weapon," and political pluralism. The Palestinian President addressed the Israeli people, stressing that "the age of unilateral solutions is over." He condemned the "dismemberment" of the West Bank, "elimination" of the Jordan Valley, and isolation of Jerusalem while pointing out that the Palestinians reject any partial and unilateral or temporary solution.

The victory of Hamas initially caught the Israeli government off guard. On 29 January, Ehud Olmert, acting Prime Minister of Israel, said that Israel would not engage with a Palestinian Authority that included Hamas unless certain conditions were met. In February, the Israeli government released \$54 million (£31 million) of customs and VAT revenue from the previous month, revenue that Israel collects and transfers to the PA. The formal announcement on 18 February that Hamas had been asked to form the next government, however, prompted the Israeli cabinet to impose a range of sanctions that included withholding future monthly transfers of tax revenue. In addition, the Israeli government introduced restrictions on the movement of Hamas members, including new MPs, through areas under Israeli control. Israeli authority also banned the transfer of equipment to Palestinian security forces and to strengthen security checks at crossing points from Gaza into Israel. However, Israel was not the only state to impose sanctions. In March 2006, the major aid donors to the PA, such as the US and the EU, cut off aid as well. Their decision stemmed from the fact that Hamas refused to renounce violence, recognize Israel, or even acknowledge the previous agreements signed between Israel and the Palestinians. The legal basis for US sanctions stemmed from the fact that the US Treasury and State Department had officially labeled Hamas a terrorist organization. It was therefore illegal for the US to provide financial assistance to the new Hamas government in either the Gaza Strip or the West Bank.

Between January and February 2007, violence worsened between Hamas and Fatah, leading to a sense that the West Bank and Gaza were more lawless than ever. The violence in Gaza was also directly correlated to a rise in crime. While Hamas and Fatah forces were killing one another, no one was policing the streets. Indeed, the Palestinian media, not known for its honesty about negative developments within Palestinian society, reported that crimes, including car theft and abductions, had skyrocketed. The Palestinian internal conflict had other negative

consequences, particularly in the Gaza Strip, where Hamas enjoyed the most control. In an effort to stop the fighting, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia intervened and invited the leaders of Fatah and Hamas to Mecca to engage in a dialogue designed to end the armed conflict through a reconciliation process. After three days, the two high-level delegations reportedly reached an understanding, leading to the 8 February 2007 Mecca Agreement. The agreement was based on the so-called Prisoners Document of May 2006, penned by Marwan Barghouti of the Fatah faction and Abdul Khaleq al-Natshe of Hamas, as well as several other prominent Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails. It might be argued that the “role of the outside actors namely the US and Israel had played a partisan role in obstructing the process of reconciliation between the secular-nationalists and the Islamists in Palestinian politics.”

After the failure of the Mecca Accord, the Saudis continued their diplomatic push at the Arab League summit in Riyadh in March 2007. At the same time, the Bush Administration expressed disappointment with the unity government platform while the Israeli government maintained a complete ban on meetings with Palestinian ministers, including non-Hamas ministers, and continued to withhold tax and customs revenues that it collects on behalf of the PA. Once again Hamas and Fatah were involved in domestic violence after the failure of Mecca Accord. On 7 June 2007, Hamas launched a military offensive to conquer the Gaza Strip. By 13 June, its forces controlled the streets and PA buildings, including the presidential compound of Mahmoud Abbas and the massive security compound known as *al-Suraya*. On 16 July 2007, President George W. Bush announced that he would call together an international meeting of representatives from nations that supported a two-state solution, rejected violence, recognized Israel’s right to exist, and committed to all previous agreements between Palestine and Israel. Finally, he announced that the peace conference was to convene in Annapolis in late November 2007. Simultaneously, angry Hamas supporters wearing green hats, waving green flags, and chanting Hamas slogans gathered in Gaza City to protest the US-sponsored conference. Hamas leaders on stage bluntly rejected the notion of negotiating with Israel.

After the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007, the international community adjusted its sanctions. While the embargo against Gaza remained firmly in place, the international community allowed funds to flow freely to the new West Bank emergency government under PA president Abbas. The Israelis estimated that \$300 million to \$400 million in frozen Palestinian tax revenues could be transferred to Abbas. The economic and diplomatic embargo of Gaza, however, would remain. On the one side, the West Bank began to enjoy the flood of international aid and easing Israeli restrictions, while on the other side the Gaza Strip suffered under continued sanctions. In January 2008, Hamas’s violence against Fatah demonstrations reached its high point. Seven Palestinians were killed and 40 were wounded in the armed conflict just outside a mosque in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis. Hamas alleged that Fatah supporters instigated the clash by firing on worshippers leaving their prayers. The fighting soon spread to other areas around the Gaza Strip. On 23 March 2008, Hamas leader Musa Abu Marzook and Azzam al-Ahmed from Fatah signed a reconciliation agreement in Sana’a, the capital of Yemen, under the auspices of the President of Yemen, Ali Abdullah, Saleh to stop the ongoing armed conflict between Hamas and Fatah. Hamas seized the territory in June after routing its forces loyal to Abbas.

Before the Sana’a talks, several Arab newspapers reported that some members of Hamas were trying to persuade its military wing to stop firing into Israel, in an attempt to prevent a large-scale military Israeli raid. Due to Israel’s sanctions, stores in Gaza were out of many products, and hospitals ran low on crucial supplies, including anesthetics and antibiotics. Seeking to

prevent a humanitarian crisis, the Israelis eventually allowed certain medical supplies into Gaza but vowed to withhold other nonessentials. Israel's plans for sanctions against Gaza, approved in October 2007, also included the disruption of fuel supplies. Predictably, Hamas dubbed these sanctions as a "crime" against the Palestinians. Hamas appealed to Palestinians who were living in Gaza. President George W. Bush realized that in order to stop the spread of Hamas rule to the West Bank, Fatah would need an infusion of both funds and weapons. Thus, when it became apparent that Abbas still maintained a little control over the West Bank after the guns in Gaza fell silent, Washington lifted its embargo on direct aid to the PA government. Both Israel and the EU also joined the United States in an expression of support for a moderate West Bank. But a positive change came out in US foreign policy towards Palestine when Barack Obama was elected president of United States in 2008. From the beginning of his administration, Obama pledged his support for the establishment of a Palestinian state. He stated that Palestinians should not have to confront the daily indignities that come with occupation. The US wanted a viable and contiguous Palestinian state alongside a Jewish state of Israel. The only way to achieve that was through negotiations.

Due to the huge impact of the Arab Spring on Palestinian politics, as well as domestic pressure, Fatah and Hamas finally managed a reconciliation agreement under Egyptian auspices, entitled the Palestinian National Reconciliation Agreement and signed in Cairo. On 4 May 2011, President Mahmoud Abbas and Hamas Politburo Chairman Khaled Mishal announced their intention to forge a power-sharing agreement. Egypt was instrumental in bringing Fatah and Hamas together, hosting the talks in Cairo that led to the announcement of the reconciliation agreement. Egypt's motivations for brokering this agreement appear largely aimed at gaining leverage over the US, as well as to take the diplomatic initiative in the aftermath of the confusion created by the fall of Hosni Mubarak specifically and in the wider context of the Arab Spring. The reconciliation move was motivated by a desire to keep the Palestinians settled down to allow the transitional government to consolidate its power and rebuild the country. The unity agreement, however, required Hamas to refrain from renewing hostilities with Israel and possibly renounce jihad as a means to liberate Palestine.

Saudi Arabia appreciated the Fatah–Hamas unity deal, and responded positively by appealing to world leaders to support the reconciliation. Despite the fact that Hamas reportedly receives a considerable amount of funding from banks, charities, and private individuals from Saudi Arabia, the Saudi government has traditionally allied itself with Fatah, as it views the close ties Hamas has to Iran as a threat to its own hegemonic status in the region. In the context of the Syrian uprising, Assad's support of the Hamas–Fatah reconciliation agreement can be interpreted as a message that he remains a key component in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Conversely, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed disappointment with the development in Cairo by describing the deal as a stunning blow to the progress of the peace process. The Israeli response to the reconciliation agreement has been clear: as far as they are concerned, there is no way Israel can negotiate with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas. Hamas, however, continues to refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist. Interestingly, the US response has been officially one of muted disappointment, stressing the need for Hamas to accept the Quartet Principles if they are to be recognized as a legitimate Palestinian actor. Since his inauguration in 2009, President Obama has pursued a peace strategy largely based on pressuring the Israelis to make concessions to the Palestinians.

The Cairo breakthrough was followed by the Doha Agreement on 6 February 2012 signed by Hamas's chief Khaled Mishal and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Fatah Movement. This

agreement was sponsored by the Emir of Qatar and intended to achieve the formation of a Palestinian unity government headed by Abbas. According to the Doha Declaration, President Abbas was to serve as an interim prime minister of a unity government consisting of independent figures. The main objective of the government, the agreement stipulates, would be to prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections and to rebuild the Gaza Strip. But no date was set for the elections, and some Palestinians stated that the vote would take place 90 days after the formation of the new government. A year after they first reached a unity deal in Cairo, a broader reconciliation agreement was signed by the leaders of Hamas and Fatah in Doha, Qatar, on 20 May 2012. The new agreement essentially took steps to carry out the previous one, particularly the registering of new voters in Gaza and the formation of an interim government. Although Abbas did not issue a statement, he repeatedly asserted that the reconciliation process was on ice because Hamas leaders had refused to allow the registration of new voters in Gaza. The Cairo reconciliation deal came into effect days after Mr. Abbas announced a long-awaited reshuffling of the PA cabinet, which kept Salam Fayyad in place as prime minister. Meanwhile, the UN General Assembly voted to grant Palestine “non-member observer state” status at the United Nations on 29 November 2012, while expressing the urgent need for the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians leading to a permanent two-state solution. The resolution on the status of Palestine in the UN was adopted by a vote of 138 in favor to 9 against, with 41 abstentions by the 193-member UN Assembly.

A series of such dramatic developments in Palestinian politics paved the way for the signing of the Hamas–Fatah reconciliation deal on 23 April 2014. The reconciliation deal is based primarily on the agreements signed by the factions in Cairo and in Doha. Addressing reporters in Gaza, Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh publicly expressed his satisfaction with the end of the period of inter-Palestinian division. According to Haniyeh’s statement, under the deal, the two sides must uphold past agreements and Palestinian President Abbas would form an interim unity government within five weeks, followed by elections in six months. According to the deal, the vote for president, the legislative council, and the PLO would take place at the same time. The final date of elections would be set by Abbas. A special PLO committee will meet within five weeks to discuss what is expected of the organization from the initiation of the agreement. According to Palestinian sources, Abbas would issue two presidential decrees regarding the formation of the new government and the calling of elections. The possibility of an independent figure close to Hamas being tasked with forming the government has not been dismissed. The two sides have still not agreed on a few issues, including the future of Hamas’s security forces created after the Islamist group seized power in a bloody 2007 coup in the Gaza Strip. It is not yet clear whether Hamas would agree to dismantle the forces or to allow them to be under the supervision and command of the PA security forces.

In any case, the Palestinian unity government was sworn in June 2014, ending a seven-year-long dispute between Fatah and Hamas. Hamas was apparently agreeable to patching things up with the US, which was legally obligated to refuse aid to a new government since it included a designated terrorist group. The new Palestinian cabinet looked little different from its predecessor; Hamas’s input was limited to three independents, all in low-level ministerial positions. The appointment of a temporary government of technocrats is likely to be the easiest phase of the reconciliation agreed in late April. The deal has endured so far—unlike earlier agreements—because Hamas is more desperate than its rival given the unusual changes in the regional power configuration in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, especially in Egypt and Syria where the Islamists were fast losing political space.

Israel launched Operation Protective Edge against Palestinian peoples specially who were living in the Gaza Strip in July 2014. Israel was trying to punish them because they supported Hamas's political agenda in Palestinian politics against Israel. Another reason was the reconciliation deal Hamas signed with its political rival Fatah on 23 April 2014. International reaction to the Gaza war of 2014, was mixed because some states, like the United States, Canada, France, and the UK supported Israeli action in Gaza and criticized Hamas, whereas Arab states condemn the Israeli operation against innocent Palestinian people. After the Gaza war, Hamas and Fatah clearly understood that they had to be united; otherwise, Israel would destroy Palestine and occupy all territories. Therefore, Hamas and Fatah opted for reconciliation, an effort that had failed in past years. In December 2015 and January 2016, Hamas and Fatah engaged in secret talks mediated by Qatar in Doha to try to achieve balance of the 2014 agreement; Egypt was not involved.

As part of an effort to end a decade-long rift, Hamas and Fatah agreed to a reconciliation deal in Cairo on 12 October 2017, signed by Fatah's leader Azzam al-Ahmad and Hamas's deputy politburo chief Salah al-Arouri, under Egyptian auspices. The Palestinian unity deal could also strengthen Abbas's hand in any revival of talks on a Palestinian state in Israeli-occupied territory. Internal Palestinian conflict has been a major obstacle to peacemaking, with Hamas having fought several wars with Israel since 2008 and continuing to call for its destruction. Hamas's accord to transfer administrative powers in Gaza to a unity government marked a major setback, prompted partly by its fears of financial and political isolation after its main supporter and donor, Qatar, plunged in June into a major diplomatic dispute with key allies like Saudi Arabia. They accuse Qatar of supporting Islamist militants, which it denies. Israel retained its position on the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation agreement, as Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that a peace process must include recognition of the State of Israel and that "we are not prepared to accept bogus reconciliations in which the Palestinian side apparently reconciles at the expense of our existence."

On 6 December 2017, a political earthquake emerged in Palestinian as well as world politics when US President Donald Trump announced that the US recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in a televised message, thanked Trump for what he called a "courageous and just" decision. After Trump's announcement on Jerusalem, President Mahmoud Abbas said the decision was tantamount to the US "abdicating its role as a peace mediator. These deplorable and unacceptable measures deliberately undermine all peace efforts." He insisted that Jerusalem was the "eternal capital of the state of Palestine." Islamic countries like Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen criticized Trump's stand on Jerusalem. At the same time, the world powers Russia, China, UK, France, Germany, Japan, Italy, and Sweden were among the countries who criticized Trump's decision at the emergency meeting of the UN. Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang reiterated China's support for East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. After the Trump announcement on Jerusalem, protests were held in many places across the world. Crowds in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iran, United States, Germany, United Kingdom, Australia, Greece, Indonesia, Morocco, Poland, Pakistan, and Netherlands gathered to protest against the decision. Finally, it might be argued that President Trump's announcement on Jerusalem was purely a political stunt because he wanted to check the international response on this controversial issue of the region. If there was no big reaction, then Israel declared its new capital and United States approved it, enabling Trump to keep a promise made during his presidential election campaign.

After Trump's declaration in December 2017, there were several demonstrations throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip against the blockade of the Gaza Strip and the moving of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. By December, 2017, several Palestinians had been killed in Israeli air strikes, while two demonstrators were shot dead when they participated in a riot on the Gaza border fence. A 14-year-old Palestinian boy was admitted to a medically induced coma after Israeli soldiers shot him in the face with a rubber bullet during a protest; the shooting was criticized by several human rights organizations.

In March 2018, Palestinians launched six weeks of protests in the Gaza Strip, near the Gaza–Israel border, which called the “Great March of Return” by the organizers. The demonstrators demanded that Palestinian refugees and their children be allowed to return to the land, which was occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. Palestinian demonstrator Abu Ratima emphasized that the protest would be “peaceful and nonviolent.” In mid-April 2018, thousands of Palestinians made their way to the fence to re-isolate Gaza from Israel, and Israeli troops again repeatedly crossed or blocked the barrier with tear gas and live fire. Scandalous attempts were made, injuring hundreds of protesters, and one person was killed during the protest.

On 13 April 2019, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas formed the new government under the leadership of a loyalist of his Fatah party, Mohammad Shatyeh, with twenty-one member of the cabinet, consisting mainly of ministers from factions linked to the PLO, especially Fatah, but excluding Hamas and the Islamic Jihad movement. The Hamas criticized the formation of the new Palestinian government dominated by the Fatah party, said such a government would ease the way for the imposition of the United States' yet-to-be-unveiled proposal on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas warned that the new West Bank-based administration would further divide Palestinians. Hamas underlined the need to form an inclusive national unity government, which serves all Palestinian people and puts an end to the oppression they have been enduring. The new government should invite to all leaders of Palestine to agree on a national strategy to fight all the challenges facing the Palestine issue.

Like the other outside actors, the United States has played a dubious role in the Palestine–Israel conflict as well as the Hamas–Fatah conflict because it has only one agenda: to protect its national interests in the region on behalf of Israeli security. Despite the international intervention, Palestinians and Israelis have been fighting for their rights since the birth of Israel, but still, there is no political solution. As a powerful state, the US has been manipulating world politics according to its national interests. In the context of the Hamas–Fatah conflict, the US has a hidden agenda—if Hamas and Fatah, both factions, are engaged in internal struggle, then it will be better for Israeli security as well as US interests. With popular support, Hamas started its journey as a radical movement, but in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, it emerged as the largest political party of Palestine and won a landslide victory. Hamas emerged as a real representative of the Palestinians because it is fighting for their rights against Israeli atrocities, but the outside actors have boycotted Hamas's legitimacy in Palestinian politics and are following the divide-and-rule policy among Palestinians—therefore, they are supporting Fatah against Hamas. This policy runs counter to the Palestinian voice, which is supporting Hamas. Consequently, Hamas and Fatah have started killing their own brothers and sisters. Thousands of Palestinians were killed in the bloody war of 2007, and Palestine was divided into two entities —“Hamastan” (Gaza Strip) and “Fatahland” (West Bank)—called “the Second Partition of Palestine.”

To stop internal conflict and to create a permanent solution for the future of the Palestinian state, Hamas and Fatah have signed various unity deals, but these deals have failed because of

the dubious role of the US and other outside actors. In 2011, the Arab Spring emerged as a political earthquake in regional as well as world politics. After this regional political change and domestic pressure, Hamas and Fatah were ready for reconciliation. It is also to conclude that the main effect of the Arab Spring had been to eliminate this trend and to strengthen those within Hamas and Fatah who prioritize reconciliation and PLO reforms over government control in Gaza and the West Bank respectively. In the aftermath of the turmoil, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas was a remarkable achievement for the Palestinians, whose rivalries and divisions have diluted them and been exploited by their enemies, particularly Israel and the United States. If Hamas and Fatah want to end the internal division of Palestine, they must unite. Otherwise, the Palestinian people, as well as the Palestinian state, have no future.

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