

5. Hamas and Kin: The Terrorists

ON APRIL 12, 2002, Sheikh Ibrihim Madhi of the Palestinian Authority delivered a widely broadcast sermon at the Sheikh Ijlin Mosque in Gaza City in which he embraced the call for genocide against the Jewish people. Citing a *hadith* (narration of religious teachings) familiar to many Moslems he recited: “The Day of Judgment will not come about until Moslems fight Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say, O Moslems, O Abdullah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.”¹ The same hadith appears in Article Seven of the 1988 covenant through which a radical Islamic group calling itself the Islamic Resistance Movement—also known as Hamas—declared its existence. It was the unwillingness or inability of Fatah and the PA to move boldly against Hamas during the Second Intifada, instead, then and later, pursuing a policy of appeasement that gave Hamas the chance to seize political power through the ballot box, delaying indefinitely the commencement of serious negotiations aimed at resolving the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

Two years before Sheikh Madhi’s sermon, the PA—for purposes of conducting Intifada 2—made a de facto alliance with Hamas, widely viewed even in the Palestinian community as a terrorist organization. Its covenant oozes hatred for the Jews and reeks with the stench of blood libel. It claims, for example, that

1. USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts, “Sunnah and Hadith.” Available online at www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/.

Jews were behind the French and Communist revolutions, masterminded the First World War, and orchestrated the destruction of the Islamic Caliphate. “Additionally, Jews were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state.”² In Hamas’ eyes, the danger is of paramount importance simply because Jews aspire first to control all the land from the Nile to the Euphrates rivers and then expand even further, a plan embodied in the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” and of which “their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying.”³

The remedy is, accordingly, war, one in which “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it.” By proxy, “there is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad; diplomacy and peace treaties are all a waste of time and vain endeavors.”

In addition to the extinction of Israel, Hamas has a second strategic objective directly related to the first: the development of Palestine as an Islamic state. Its covenant, rooted in Islamic law and tradition, stands in direct contrast to the secular PLO “National Covenant.” Based upon its past record and role in the Palestinian community, it is today by far the largest, best financed, and most politically active of the Palestinian terrorist organizations. And as corruption, cronyism, and the inability to provide law and order or to win compassionate treatment from Israel have brought the Fatah-dominated PA to its knees, Hamas demonstrated its strength by successfully contesting local elections before winning an outright majority in the Palestine Legislative Council.

Hamas is an offshoot of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood,

2. “The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement,” 18 August 1988. Available online via the Avalon Project at Yale Law School at www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/mideast/hamas.htm.

3. Ibid.

itself a spin-off from the parent Egyptian movement. The original Muslim Brotherhood was a leading advocate of fundamentalist Islam and purveyor of the need for jihad throughout the Muslim world. Its Palestinian branch was formed in 1946 and evolved into a virulently anti-Israel force. Predicated upon this dual tradition of anti-Israeli and Islamic fervor, Hamas' immediate predecessor was a group known as Al-Mujamma Al-Islami (Islamic Association), formed in 1973 by the wheelchair-bound Shiekh Ahmed Yassin.

Regarded by his followers as both a spiritual and political leader, it was under Yassin's guidance that Al-Mujamma Al-Islami developed a system known as Da'wah, a massive social, religious, educational, cultural, and medical infrastructure throughout the territories. It registered as a charity in Israel in 1978 and received covert assistance from the Israelis, who were anxious to see groups develop that would drain support from the PLO. With hindsight, this would prove too easy for Israel's own good as Yasser Arafat and his longtime associates became increasingly isolated from the PLO's West Bank and Gaza constituents during their twelve-year sojourn in Tunisia.

Operating mainly from their base at the Islamic University of Gaza, Al-Mujamma began testing its muscle and developing a following. At the time its principal targets were those it felt were disseminating values antithetical to Islam in the Occupied Territories, a group including proprietors of cinemas, casinos, and liquor stores. When, during the First Intifada, the newly named Hamas began killing Israeli soldiers, Israel responded by arresting Yassin. He was released in 1997 by Prime Minister Netanyahu at the insistence of Jordan's king Hussein after the Mosad embarrassed itself and the king with a botched assassination attempt on Hamas leader Khalid Mashaal in Amman. Mashaal, now the recognized external leader of Hamas, today operates from his sanctuary in Damascus.

Hamas escalated its violent activities in 1990 when it announced an end to its policy of attacking only Israeli soldiers and declared every Israeli both inside and outside the Green Line a legitimate target. Notably, the immediate catalyst for this change was the 1990 attack on Jerusalem's al-Aqsa mosque by Israeli extremists. The Hamas Covenant thereupon declared all of Palestine to be a Muslim administrative center, subject to special laws and edicts. Accordingly, Hamas first employed suicide bombs in 1993 in opposition to the Oslo Accords.

This violent turn corresponded with increased regional support for the organization that grew out of events surrounding the 1990–1991 Gulf War. While both Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan were making trouble for themselves by backing Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Hamas was calling for both Saddam and the U.S.-led coalition to withdraw their forces. In response, several of the Gulf states, led by Saudi Arabia, switched their financial support for the Palestinian cause from the PLO to Hamas, bringing in revenues estimated at \$28 million per month and allowing Hamas to further expand Da'wah and related activities.⁴

Arafat, now perilously close to defeat and irrelevance, saved Fatah's dominance of the Palestinian movement by embracing UN Resolution 181, accepting through its partition mandate de facto recognition of the Jewish state, and then by accepting the 1993 Oslo Accords. As part of the accords, and pursuant to an agreement signed in May 1994, Israel permitted him, as head of the Palestinian Authority, to return to Gaza and Jericho and to govern areas where Palestinians predominated. He would later brag to an astonished western diplomat that he was greater than Moses, because whereas the great biblical leader could only look at the

4. Ami Isseroff, "A History of the Hamas Movement," MidEastWeb.org. Available online at www.mideastweb.org/hamashistory.htm.

Promised Land from afar, he, Arafat, had personally escorted his children home.⁵

In the deal permitting Arafat's return, PA security forces were capped at nine thousand members.⁶ They were permitted armaments including light personal weapons, 120 machine guns, and up to 45 wheeled armored vehicles. According to a study performed by the highly respected Strategic Assessment Initiative, "Israelis saw these forces as effectively augmenting Israel's security profile in the Occupied Territory while Palestinians saw the forces as the return of their national liberation cadre to the front-line."⁷ In 1995 the number of authorized security forces was increased to thirty thousand, including eighteen thousand in the Gaza Strip, with consequent adjustments for rifles, pistols, and machine guns. Before long many of these weapons would be turned against IDF forces and civilians.

Hamas opposed UN Resolution 181 and the Oslo Accords; it was intent on continuing the struggle against Israel. This attitude kept the organization out of political activity at a time when it might have complemented its social and religious work. It did, however, occasionally lead to violent clashes with the PA. In November 1994, for instance, PA police shot and killed fourteen Palestinians who had joined a Hamas demonstration outside Gaza's Palestine mosque.

Later, following the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin and during the resulting 1996 contest between Shimon Peres and the hard-line Binyamin Netanyahu, Hamas sought to discredit the pro-Oslo Peres, employing suicide bombers to kill and maim Is-

5. Interview with senior western diplomat, July 22, 2005.

6. Strategic Assessment Initiative (SAI), "Planning Considerations for International Involvement in the Palestinian Security Sector: Overview of the Palestinian Authority Security Forces," July 2005, p. 23. Available online at www.strategicassessments.org/ontherecord/sai_publications/SAI-Planning_Considerations_for_International_Involvement_July_2005.pdf.

7. Ibid.

raeli citizens on busy Jerusalem streets and buses. Arafat designated Muhammad Dahlan to crack down on the terrorists. Dahlan arrested hundreds and added sacrilege to injury by shaving the beards of many prisoners.⁸ During this period, Dahlan grew close to many in Israeli intelligence, individuals who would provide him with information on those planning and coordinating attacks; this made their subsequent antagonism during Intifada 2 all the more bitter. Still, Hamas succeeded in contributing to Netanyahu's victory, not the last time Palestinian activity would doom a Labor candidate to defeat by a rightist Likud candidate. But as the Strategic Assessment Report noted, terrorist activity injured very few Israelis during the 1996–99 period as the “political process and the expectation of an end to the conflict by a majority of the public remained the most significant factors in maintaining the unity and cohesiveness of the PA SF [Palestinian Authority Security Force] during this period.”⁹

To many Israelis, this brief period represented the high-water mark in Arafat's good faith effort to prevent terrorism from sabotaging the peace process. His work in this regard was aided by what Boaz Ganor, executive director of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, noted as broad agreement between Fatah and Hamas, plus Palestinian Islamic Jihad, on two sets of short-term interests. The first encompassed the so-called final status issues. Specifically, all parties were unified on the need for the “withdrawal of Israel to the '67 borders, the creation of an independent Palestinian state, the division of Jerusalem into two capitals, and the right of return for the Palestinian refugees to come and live within Israel in the '67 borders.”¹⁰ Though there existed the potential for long-run tension over Israel's right to

8. “Mohammed Dahlan,” Mohammed Dahlan Biography.” Available online at www.geocities.com/lawrenceofcyberia/palbios/pa05000.html.

9. SAI, “Palestinian Authority Security Forces,” p. 12.

10. Boaz Ganor, transcript of interview with author, Israel, July 26, 2005.

exist, and the future of Palestine as a secular or Islamic state, such conflicts could be finessed at the time on the basis of these parallel interests.

Ganor noted a second perception shared at the time: “Both sides agreed that the worst case scenario from the point of view of the Palestinians is a deterioration into civil war.” This, he maintained, gave Arafat leverage with the extremist groups, particularly during periods when for tactical reasons he wanted a pause in terrorist activity. During those periods he might invite a Hamas leader to his office and try to persuade him that a lull was in their mutual interest. Or Arafat might threaten him with violence up to and including civil war. Overall, the process was such that he would “threaten them, persuade them, and in many cases he succeeded to limit attacks for a period of time when he wanted to. In other places he didn’t use the threat and persuasion, and by that it was as if he was giving them the green light to launch terrorist attacks.”¹¹

Much of the rest was window-dressing or outright fraud. Weapons laboratories or storage centers would be “discovered” mysteriously on the eve of key PA meetings with the Israelis or Americans. The same occurred with the apprehension of terrorists. General Anthony Zinni, the first of the Bush administration’s top military representatives to the area, during a 2002 discussion at his Williamsburg, Virginia, home, told the author the story of a 2001 visit to a Palestinian prison where a prominent terrorist suspect was supposedly under lock and key. Zinni encountered the man in the prison courtyard directing subordinates via his cell phone.

Israelis who worked with PA security forces were repeatedly frustrated, finding no inclination on their part to abort terrorist attacks before civilians were killed. Avi Dichter, who ran Shin Bet

11. Ibid.

throughout the Second Intifada, complained that the PA rarely followed up on warnings provided by Israeli intelligence of imminent terrorist attacks, except to try to find the source of the leak. “When we handed over information about attacks that are going to happen, believing arrests would take place, they took the information, and instead of looking for terrorists, they looked for the sources. We burned some sources this way, and I don’t have to tell you what this means.”¹²

Colonel Erez Vinner ran military intelligence on the West Bank during much of the Second Intifada. Grounded in the daily operations of Israeli counterterrorism operations, he too was distressed at the collaboration between the PA and identified terrorists. As he said, “even when we were trying and giving names and giving them places, the only thing that happened is that they were warning those terrorists that we know of them and make sure that they have to hide.”¹³

Helped—or at least not harmed—by the PA, Hamas launched hundreds of terrorist operations against Israel. The political side of its operation is well coordinated, with branches in Gaza, the West Bank, and Damascus. Its intelligence arm, known as Al-Majd, spent part of its time assisting in the planning of attacks and part tracking and killing collaborators. The military wing has a cellular structure, the cells known as Izz al-Din al-Qassam squads. Journalists and others who have studied Hamas have generally been impressed by its political and operational coherence, particularly when compared to Fatah.

Early efforts to bridge the gap between Fatah and Hamas were unsuccessful. At a 1993 meeting in Khartoum, for example, Hamas offered to join the PLO only if it was awarded 40 percent of the voting delegates and if the PLO dropped its endorsement

12. Avi Dichter, notes from unrecorded interview with author, Israel, August 1, 2005.

13. Erez Vinner, transcript of interview with author, Israel, August 10, 2005.

of UN Resolution 242, which implicitly recognized Israel's right to exist. "I did not come to Sudan in order to sell you the PLO," Arafat snapped. The Hamas representative, Ibrahim Gusha, replied, "We have expressed willingness to enter the PLO and not become an alternative to it."¹⁴ A dozen years, one Intifada, and one "earthquake" of an election later, Hamas has yet to figure out whether it belongs inside the PLO or as an Islamic alternative to it.

Beginning with the success of large-scale Israeli military operations in the spring of 2002, the PA began to evince greater interest in the negotiating track rather than letting the violence continue unabated. Yet it found Hamas in no mood to cooperate and desist in its operations. Efforts that year and the next to forge a common policy came to naught. Worse still from the perspective of the PA leadership was the fact that Hamas was collaborating with other terrorist militias, including those nominally under Fatah control.

Not that Fatah—or Arafat himself—opposed terrorist attacks against Israel. Mountains of evidence, including papers seized by the Israelis from Arafat's Moqata refuge in Ramallah, attest to his personal endorsement of terrorist operations and participation in the financing needed to keep them going. Still, there is little question that Arafat's control over units previously long-subordinate to Fatah had eroded by that point. For example, some units might well be out launching suicide bombing attacks against Israel at moments when, for tactical or strategic reasons, Arafat would have preferred a suspension of such activities. During those periods, he had little to gain from terrorist plots that served mainly to advertise his lack of control.

Hamas' eclectic partners in terror now included the Palestin-

14. Danny Rubinstein, "A Turning Point? The National Dialogue between Fatah and Hamas," *Strategic Assessment* 8, no. 1 (June 2005): 8–9.

ian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), Tanzim, and the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade. PIJ was founded by Islamic intellectuals who split off from the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in the early 1980s. Although Sunni, they were strongly influenced by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, praising him for having put the Palestinian issue at the center of regional politics and for having installed Islamic law at the center of public life. Unlike Hamas, however, PIJ seeks no elective political role and has generally been content to leave Fatah in charge of the Palestinian government. This sufferance may provide the PA with a bit of breathing room, but it also gives PIJ less of a stake in the political and diplomatic process and makes it less likely for the organization to observe any sustained period of calm, or *tahdiya*.¹⁵

PIJ argues that the liberation of Palestine—the jihad for Palestine—should not be framed narrowly in terms of Palestinian nationalism. Rather it is the key component of a strategy to liberate, revive, and unify the Islamic world; this constitutes the global jihad. PIJ is led from Syria and receives funding from Iran. Like Hamas, its cell-based structure makes it challenging for the Israelis to get a precise fix on its strength. Still, targeted assassinations and other raids against PIJ leaders, bomb factories, and nerve centers have both limited PIJ's operational options and advertised the quality of Israeli intelligence on the West Bank. Colonel Vinner explained how this has forced PIJ to use ad hoc methods in conducting operations.

In Judea and Samaria this Islamic Jihad organization, this infrastructure around Jenin, has about ten regular or steady people—leaders—and the rest, they are collecting them. They go to the mosques, they find the guy who is stupid enough to commit to be the suicider—the “shahid.” They find somebody else

15. Ibid. See also SAI, “Palestinian Authority Security Forces,” p. 43.

who will help them to pass the checkpoints, and they build an operation.¹⁶

Tanzim, another armed faction, flowered briefly as a Palestinian youth organization during the First Intifada. It was reconstituted by Arafat's Fatah party in the mid-1990s as a mechanism for containing militant and fundamentalist opposition to the political, security, and economic regime implemented during the period of the Oslo Accords (1993–2001). Tanzim recruits were used in considerable numbers by Arafat as members of his Security Forces and the elite Force 17, two of the many militias Arafat maintained to do his bidding while keeping the security apparatus divided and unthreatening.

Tanzim's most illustrious leader was Marwan Barghouti, an alumnus of Israeli jails who taught himself flawless Hebrew while imprisoned and emerged to become a key early player in the triangular security consultations involving Israel, the PA, and the United States. He also became head of Fatah's Supreme Council on the West Bank, leading many Israeli observers to see him as a likely successor to Arafat. Many relished this prospect.

As Arafat moved to armed conflict, however, and emptied his jails of hundreds of Hamas and PIJ prisoners in the process, Tanzim dutifully switched to terrorism. Its specialties were drive-by shootings and, later, suicide bombings. Barghouti, still considered a pragmatic moderate in some Israeli circles, was the object of a failed Israeli assassination attempt in 2001.¹⁷ Captured in April the following year, tried in civilian court, and convicted of five murder counts, he was sentenced to five life terms plus forty years for other violent activity even as he was acquitted of thirty-three

16. Interview with Vinner.

17. Clyde Haberman, "Israeli Missiles Miss Leader of Convoy; Aide Injured," *New York Times*, August 5, 2001.

other murders.¹⁸ While shunning a complete defense at his trial, he did seek to rebut charges of terrorism, offering: "I am not a terrorist, but neither am I a pacifist. I am simply a regular guy from the Palestinian street advocating only what every other oppressed person has advocated—the right to help myself in the absence of help from anywhere else."¹⁹

The al-Aqsa Brigades, like Tanzim, emerged during the Second Intifada. In its September 2005 analysis of the Palestinian security sector, SAI described the Brigades not as a single organization, but as "loosely aggregated localized groups who were established at the beginning of the Second Intifada with informal Fatah support to undertake resistance activity against Israel."

Founded by a core of radicals from the Balata refugee camp on the West Bank, the al-Aqsa Brigades received much of their early political direction and material support from Tanzim. As offshoots of Fatah, both groups were at first regarded both by Israelis and Palestinians as moderates, as both echoed Fatah's call for a two-state solution. Yet as they warmed to the fight, some began invoking Islamic motifs, making Islam versus Judaism a central tenet of the Second Intifada. Their underlying claim was that the Oslo years proved the Israelis had no intention of withdrawing from the occupation of Palestinian territories and that Israel only understands violence. Leaders of the al-Aqsa Brigades accordingly contend that Israel should be wiped off the map and that Palestinian refugees should all be permitted to return to their former homes.

The Brigades and Tanzim have taken responsibility for three hundred terrorist attacks in which Israeli civilians were killed. Israeli officials maintain that since the Second Intifada erupted in

18. United Press International, "Israeli Court Sentences Palestinian Leader," *UPI*, June 6, 2004.

19. Marwan Barghouti, "Want Security? End the Occupation," *Washington Post*, January 15, 2002.

2000, the two groups have carried out or attempted more than fifteen hundred separate attacks, including suicide bombings, car bombings, shootings, kidnappings, and knife attacks. Some of these occurred in concert with Hamas and/or PIJ while others constituted organic affairs.²⁰

Whatever the result of these individual encounters, the PA and its own security forces were the big losers. When directly involved in the fighting they were targeted by IDF forces for retaliation. And as SAI reported:

When other organizations—Hamas, PIJ, Tanzim or the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades—initiated the actions, the Israeli government then embarked on a new policy of targeting official Palestinian institutions in the hope that this would encourage the PA SF [Palestinian Authority Security Forces] to take a more active role in quelling the increasing violence.²¹

This proved fortuitous for the other groups and particularly so for Hamas, which sought to eventually supplant Fatah as the leader of the Palestinian cause. For Hamas, the situation was such that “by increasing attacks against Israel, they could effectively dismantle the apparatus of their chief rival while placing all the blame on Israel.”²²

Chief PA negotiator Saeb Erakat later complained that the Israeli attacks against the PA SF left the field open to Hamas. “They did not create the militias,” he declared, “but the militias in the absence of Palestinian security forces grew naturally. . . . All you need are guns, five or six people, and you can impose your law in the street and at that corner. And that’s the story in Nablus, that’s the story in Jenin, that’s the story in Gaza.”²³

20. Yael Shahar, “The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades,” Institute for Counter-Terrorism, March 24, 2002. Available online at www.ict.org.il/articles/articledet.cfm?articleid=430.

21. SAI, “Palestinian Authority Security Forces,” p. 13.

22. Ibid.

23. Saeb Erakat, transcript of interview with author, Jericho, August 6, 2005.

At any point in time, the objectives of each group may militate against any particular actor initiating violence. During the periods immediately preceding and following the Gaza pullout, for example, the PA needed Israel's help on a host of "day after" issues, including access to Israel and the West Bank and economic development. An even greater concern involved the possibility that Israel would conclude the PA was hopelessly ineffective and adopt a far more onerous "disengagement" plan on the West Bank that would close some settlements while preserving a large Israeli security presence on the ground. To preempt that result, the PA had to show it could enforce the agreed-upon period of quiet not only through the Gaza pullout but months beyond that.

The other groups had reasons of their own to comply with the period of calm. Tanzim and the Brigades did not wish to bring the wrath of the Israelis on their heads. Hamas, on the other hand, needed to use the pullout to drive home its message that armed resistance works. Having also decided to compete in the political arena, it had to show that it could control its forces so as not to invite an unwanted Israeli response. PIJ, meanwhile, although pressed hard by Israel, could use a period of relative quietude to lick its West Bank wounds and start rebuilding its capabilities.

The bottom line is that nearly every affected Palestinian faction considered itself better off with the Israelis gone from Gaza than with their staying. Hamas still tried to reinforce its narrative of Israelis retreating in the face of armed resistance by firing some rockets in early July. Instead, it brought upon itself an angry response from the broader Palestinian populace.²⁴ Ahmad Abd Al-rahman explained that when the pullout was first announced many Palestinians saw it as a trick. "But when they looked to the

24. Deutsche Presse-Agentur, "Analysis: PA and Hamas in Power Struggle; Ceasefire in Danger," July 15, 2005; and Steven Gutkin, "Hamas, Ruling Fatah Agree to End Clashes after Tense Week," *Associated Press*, July 19, 2005.

Israelis taking their installations from the settlements, they began to believe that this disengagement means withdrawal, so they began to support the Authority, you see, and to tell Hamas and others, ‘Why are you hitting these stupid rockets? Why? The Israelis are leaving. What are you doing?’”²⁵

When we met in his Ramallah office, Hassan Yousef, Hamas’ leader in the West Bank, said the rocket attack that bothered Alrahman was in retaliation for several Israeli provocations, including two targeted assassination attempts and the killing of two Hamas members in the Balata refugee camp. But he left no doubt his organization was taking the tahdiya seriously. “We want Israel to withdraw from our lands,” he said, “and we are with this step. And we will not put any problem in front of their withdrawing. There will not be any shooting from our side during that disengagement.”²⁶

Beyond the Gaza disengagement, Hamas was waiting to see what Sharon would do on the remainder of the West Bank. Hamas was participating on the political track and needed a period of reduced tensions to organize its political machine. When Hassan suggested to the author that he would welcome a private unreported meeting with the U.S. ambassador, he sounded a bit grandiose but not illogical. Engagement with the United States at that time was much in Hamas’ interest. For one thing, the organization did not want the United States to press Abu Mazen to further delay the elections. Also, without active behind-the-scenes activity by Washington, Israel could use Hamas’ involvement to delegitimize the elections while remaining aloof from negotiations. Hence, Hamas wanted negotiations as a political tool to dramatize its role as a defender of *both* Palestinian interests and

25. Ahmad Abd Alrahman, transcript of interview with author, Ramallah, July 29, 2005.

26. Hassan Yousef, transcript of interview with author, Ramallah, July 28, 2005.

Islamic values but without the prospect of a treaty arranging an end to the violence.

Hamas, therefore, sought at least informal recognition by the United States not as a menacing terrorist clan but rather as a maturing political organization. "Yes," said Yousef, "So we are not like other movements such as the Fatah movement. We are one movement and to deal with a movement with one leader is much better than to deal with a movement with many leaders." It is, of course, one thing to seek quiet contacts as an "out" and something else to consider how to relate to those same nations as the elected government of a quasi state, the problem Hamas is now confronting.

Before its election, Hamas did not conceal the fact that it is merely biding its time for a renewal of the armed struggle against Israel. When the author asked Sami Abu Zuhri, chief spokesman for Hamas in Gaza, whether the Second Intifada was a military failure, he rejected the notion. Instead, he viewed it as vindication for the armed struggle: "First," he offered, "there is no freedom without paying a price. Secondly, we are witnessing the result of such resistance through the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, because this withdrawal is not a gift to the Palestinian people, but is an official escape from the Gaza Strip."²⁷

By endorsing the Road Map, the PA committed itself to dismantling the apparatus of terrorism. Abu Mazen issued a call for independent militias to merge with government security forces but the plan was summarily rejected by Hamas and the others. The PA did not press the issue. According to SAI, it was in no condition to do so. The following are excerpts from its seventy-eight-page report, "Planning Considerations for International Involvement in the Palestinian Security Sector," as noted above:

27. Sami Abu Zuhri, transcript of interview with author, Gaza, July 30, 2005.

- “There is considerable overlap in purpose and functional capacity within the PA SF. This is partly a legacy of Yasser Arafat’s fear of any one Service Commander becoming too powerful and thus presenting a challenge to his own authority.”
- “Several forces, particularly those which were created by Yasser Arafat to counter-balance perceived challengers, are not currently part of any clear chain of command.”
- “One of the most damaging aspects of the years of the Second Intifada has been the divergence of security organizations on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.”
- “Training capacity was severely eroded as a result of Israel’s destruction of Palestinian training facilities. Training resources are inadequate, and live firing practice is constrained by a lack of arms and munitions.”
- “All forces, but in particular the Civil Police and NSF [National Security Force], suffer from a degree of low self-esteem and public status as a result of years of being unable to protect the civilian population against IF [Israeli Forces] incursions, IF’s demonstrated ability to damage PA SF forces at will, and openly degrading treatment by Israeli soldiers in plain view of civilians.”
- “There is little standardization of vehicle types even among the same units. There is a shortage of 4-wheel-drive vehicles capable of negotiating the local terrain, particularly in the West Bank.”
- “Lack of repair and replacements, theft, Israeli military initiatives during the second Intifada and a lack of maintenance have left arms stocks depleted and dilapidated. . . . Ammunition is in very short supply and much of what is available is in poor condition and unreliable. The current ratio of per-

sonnel to weapons is 4:1. Meanwhile, non-state factions are, by contrast, relatively well-armed.”²⁸

Ironically in light of later events, it was the Israelis who facilitated the acquisition of small arms by the PA. Thus, every Israeli gunshot death and injury seemed to become a political issue after the Oslo process devolved into the Second Intifada. This time around, when the PA sought permission to bring weapons and military vehicles into the country, the Israelis said no to both lethal weapons and armored equipment. The reaction from Palestinians like Saeb Erakat was bitter:

I need bullets. If I'm attacked by militias, I cannot fight them with a speech. I cannot. Or a sermon. And the Israelis are saying no, we cannot allow you to have bullets. . . . They are tying my hands, they are tying my legs, they are throwing me into the ocean. “Hey Congress, look at them! They're not swimming! They are no partner! They're not doing anything! They're drowning! What good are they to me?”²⁹

Many Israelis argue that Abu Mazen doth protest too much. Avi Dichter said the PA should have begun to move against Hamas on the West Bank where, in his estimate, four years of sweeps, arrests, home demolitions, targeted assassinations, and related counterterrorism efforts left Hamas with a minimally functional base of operations in the territory. This analysis was confirmed in a recent study of Hamas conducted by the generally pro-Palestinian *Middle East Report*. As the study concluded, toward the end of Israeli counterterrorism operations, “sound intelligence, helicopter gunships and death squads proved thorough at wiping out what remained of Hamas' West Bank military cadre.”³⁰

28. SAI, “Palestinian Authority Security Forces,” supra.

29. Interview with Erakat.

30. Graham Usher, “The New Hamas: Between Resistance and Participation,”

In Gaza, by contrast, Israel tried less and accomplished less. Yes, Israel conducted targeted assassinations of Gaza-based Hamas leaders, including Ismail Abu Shanab, Sheikh Achmad Yassin, Ibrihim Maqadmeh, and Abd al-Aziz Rantisi. Most of its Gaza military actions, however, were in response to terrorist attacks on Israeli settlers. In other words, Israel undertook only limited measures to undermine the long-term capabilities of terrorist groups *before* attacks occurred. As a result, terrorist militias continued to thrive in Gaza, becoming even larger and better armed after the pullout.

During the August 2003 cease-fire following the appointment of Abu Mazen as prime minister, a suicide bomber linked to Hamas detonated a bomb aboard a bus in Jerusalem.³¹ Although leaders of the organization condemned the attack, and some analysts insisted the perpetrators were a rump group based in Hebron, the international reaction was devastating. Within days, the PA, Britain, and the United States froze the bank accounts of Islamic charities within their respective jurisdictions. Funding from most countries besides Iran all but dried up. And in September, the European Union put the entire organization—not just its military wing—on its terrorism blacklist.³²

Some experienced analysts argue that such moves to undermine Hamas come at the precise moment when it seeks to change its terrorist ways and move in the direction of conventional politics. By this logic, it seeks reform and good government, propor-

Middle East Report, August 21, 2005. Available online at www.merip.org/mero/mero082105.html.

31. Peter Mackler, "20 Dead, More Than 100 Injured in Massive Jerusalem Bus Blast," *Agence France Presse-English*, August 19, 2003.

32. See, for example, "Palestinian PM Condemns 'Terrible' Bus Bombing, Calls Off Hamas Talks," *Agence France Presse-English*, August 20, 2003; "Britain's Foreign Secretary Condemns Jerusalem Bomb Blast," *Agence France Presse-English*, August 20, 2003; and "Bush Freezes Assets of Hamas Leaders," *Economic Times*, August 24, 2003.

tional representation and an end to corruption. Moreover, according to these analysts, its desire for a window to Washington is probably sincere. Hamas, according to Sheikh Ahmad Hajj, a member of the organization's governing Shura Council, is willing to go even further:

We would negotiate with Israel since that is the power that usurped our rights. If negotiations fail, we will call on the world to intervene. If this fails, we will go back to resistance. But if Israel were to agree with our internationally recognized rights—including the refugees' right of return—the Shura Council would seriously consider recognizing Israel in the interests of world peace.³³

While the statement has more caveats than a prescription drug advertisement, the change in tone, particularly when viewed in conjunction with its embrace of the March 2005 Cairo Declaration and the decision to participate in elective Palestinian politics could be significant. Of course, the history of the "right of return" fouling negotiations begs for caution, as does the organization's genocidal charter and its stated commitment to a single Islamic state.

Before the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Hamas consistently captured about 17 percent in "beauty contest" polls against Fatah. That percentage doubled during the period of fighting. At a Gaza rally in 2002 marking the fifteenth anniversary of the organization, forty thousand heard Shiekh Yassin predict the demise of Israel within twenty-five years. The organization had also developed a political agenda. Its three main items were electoral reform, including proportional representation, the conduct of elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council, and the restructuring of the PLO to guaranty Hamas 40 percent of the elected positions.

33. Usher, "New Hamas."

In local elections held in December 2004 and January and May 2005, Hamas won a majority of all contested seats plus separate majorities in 30 percent of all councils. It scored its most stunning victories in Bethlehem and Qalqilya, the latter surrounded by the new Israeli security fence. The upsets led Abu Mazen to postpone legislative council elections initially scheduled for July 2005 until January 2006 in the hope that economic benefits from the Israeli Gaza withdrawal would bring the voters back to Fatah by the new date. Unfortunately for Fatah, pervasive criminal and political violence and the failure of many “day after” benefits to reach the people of Gaza did not help Abu Mazen’s case. Strong Hamas showings in local November balloting, including outright wins in both Nablus and Jenin, called Fatah’s move into question. The tremors, largely discounted as local responses to local issues, were in fact rumblings of the great January earthquake to come; this topic will be analyzed in detail in chapter 7.

In Qalqilya, the Hamas municipal victory was followed by edicts canceling a scheduled dance and concert as well as the consideration of other measures to make the town more “Islamic.” To Palestinian liberals, the notion of an Islamic fundamentalist state on Palestinian soil in the vein of Saudi Arabia or Iran is almost unbearable. Hanan Ashwari, running for the legislature as a reform “Third Way” party candidate, blamed the PA for part of the problem in that it ignored nation-building and institution building, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. She worried that the power struggle in Gaza among militias operating outside government control might lead to internal disintegration. And she predicted that the longer the conflict with Israel remains unresolved the more likely it is that one form of tyranny will replace another; as she concluded:

So we’re seeing in this something more important than just a political process—we’re seeing a struggle over the soul of Pal-

estine. What kind of system are we going to have? What kind of a society? A society that prevents festivals and music and creativity, and separates the sexes, and coerces people into strong closed systems—or a society that's open, democratic, pluralistic, tolerant. To me this is important.³⁴

Ms. Ashwari won her seat only to find that it gave her a ring-side view of the new Hamas-dominated legislature.

34. Hanan Ashwari, transcript of interview with author, Jerusalem, July 29, 2005.