

HAMAS THE ARMED WING OF IRAN

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Brief Summary

By winning the legislative elections of January 2006 and then taking control of the Gaza Strip during a bloody Putsch in June 2007, Hamas became a power to reckon with on the Palestinian political scene. Since then, the Islamic resistance movement has never ceased to be a terrorist organisation,¹ responsible for the death of hundreds of Israeli civilians – and now of Palestinian civilians. Its founding charter as well as its ongoing and constant propagandist call for violence and the destruction of the Jewish state.

At the present hour, when the future of the Middle-East is still playing out in Gaza – despite the unilateral cease-fire decreed by the Israeli security cabinet, followed thereafter by Hamas, - we propose to shed some light on the origins of the Islamist movement right up to today, its doctrine, its objectives, its resources and the support which it receives.

I. Hamas – the Muslim Brotherhood: is this the same fight?

The day after the Second World War, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Said Ramadan, created the first branch of the Brotherhood in Jerusalem. During the war of independence (1948), hundreds of members of the Muslim Brotherhood took part in battle alongside other Arab nations. The victory of the Jewish state appreciably weakened the organisation and it was only in 1956, during the Suez crisis, that it was able to recover a certain influence by fighting once again against the Israeli Army.

The Six Days War (1967) marked a new turning point for the Brotherhood, a time when the Arab world experienced an expansion of Islamism. Little by little, the Muslim Brotherhood built a vast network of social institutions through mosques² to establish their influence. The

¹ Hamas is on the US, Canadian and, since 2003, the European Union black list of terrorist groups.

² ‘ Between 1967 and 1987, the number of mosques rose from 400 to 750 in the West Bank and from 200 to 600 in Gaza,’ in Alain Gresh and Dominique Vidal, *Les 100 Portes du Proche-Orient [The 100 Gates of the Near East]*, Editions de l’Atelier, Paris, 1996. p 172.

day after the Yom Kippur War (1973), the Islamic Centre of Gaza – directed by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and financed mainly by Saudi Arabia – added somewhat to this influence.

In 1987, the outbreak of the first Intifada saw, at the initiative of the Muslim Brotherhood,³ the creation of an Islamic resistance movement, Hamas. The Egyptian brethren, who for a long time focused on the reform of society and on charitable activities, was convinced that the wait-and-see policy that it had observed till then was no longer tenable and that the Intifada would henceforth require a veritable Jihad against the occupiers.

On 9 December 1987, the Muslim Brotherhood gathered around Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Abed al-Aziz Rantissi and Doctor Mahmud Zahar issued the first tract⁴ of the Islamic resistance movement (IRM) calling for intensification of the uprising. But the Brotherhood, with care to preserve their organisation in the face of the Israelis and concerned by their determination to win the loyalty of the young Palestinian population, did not acknowledge it had spawned the IRM⁵ until February 1988. As Gilles Kepel explains, the uncertainties of the brethren ‘*also reflected the discomfort of a movement directed by religious clerics, medical doctors, pharmacists (...) i.e., intellectuals drawn from the pious middle classes, facing a spontaneous and violent initiative of poor youths.*’⁶

In August 1988, the charter⁷ of Hamas was unveiled. It showed an unparalleled virulence with regard to the Jews. We will reproduce below just a few of the more explicit articles of this charter. We believe that no commentary is needed:

Israel exists and will continue to exist until Islam annihilates it as it has annihilated others before.. (The Martyr, Imam Hassan al Banna, of blessed memory).

The Prophet, may Allah bless him, has said: ‘The Day of the Last Judgment shall not come before the Muslims fight the Jews. The Jews hide behind the rocks and the trees. The rocks and the trees will say, Oh Muslims, Oh Abdallah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. (Article 7)

The initiatives and the so-called peace solutions of international conferences contradict the principles of the Islamic Resistance. To violate any part of the Palestine is an attack on the religion. The nationalism of the Islamic Resistance Movement is part of the religion. (...) the Islamic Resistance Movement believes that these conferences are unable to fulfill the demands, namely the restoration of rights and justice for the oppressed. These conferences are aimed solely at installing non-believers as arbiters in the Muslim lands. Since when do non-believers render justice on believers? (Article 13)

The day when the enemies usurp a land of Islam, Jihad becomes the individual duty of every Muslim. Confronted with the usurpation by the Jews of the land of Palestine, it becomes obligatory that one raise the standard of Jihad. (Article 15)

II. From the first to the second Intifada

During all of the first Intifada, Hamas and its military branch, the Ezzedine al-Kassam Brigades, positioned themselves as serious competitors to Fatah and the PLO.⁸ Condemning

³ See the ESISC analysis article dated 12/09/05 (www.esisc.org).

⁴ See J-F Legrain, *The voices of the Palestinian uprising 1987-1988*, Cedej, Cairo, 1991, p.15. Original text of the communiqué p. II/12, trad. p. I/7.

⁵ Islamic Resistance Movement.

⁶ Gilles Kepel, *Jihad*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 2003, p. 247.

⁷ See <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/Hamas.htm> ou <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/Hamas.htm> for the full text of the Hamas charter.

first the Madrid Conference, then the Oslo Accords, Hamas faced a dilemma at the start of the 1990s: how to continue armed struggle for the total liberation of Palestine and to preserve its associated network. For this purpose, a timid dialogue was established with the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the movement failed to even participate in the legislative elections of January 1996.

Following the 1996 suicide attack campaign which dealt a heavy blow to the Israeli civilian population, the Jewish state demanded that the Palestinian Authority curb Hamas. The dismantling of the organisation and arrest of many leaders quickly took precedence over the fragile dialogue that Hamas had established with the PA. Notwithstanding the efforts of Mohammed Dahlan, Hamas remained de facto in place. In 1997, the historic leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, was released by the Israelis. This liberation initiated a new *modus vivendi* between the Islamic movement and Yasser Arafat. Generally speaking, Hamas was tolerated insofar as it did not oppose the PA.

During the second Intifada, Hamas grew in both political and military influence, joining forces with those of the al-Aqsa Brigades in armed action and many suicide attacks resulted in hundreds of deaths.⁹ The movement further extended its popularity when Israeli forces murdered Sheikh Ahmed Yassin on 22 March 2004 and Abdel Aziz Rantissi, who was Yassin's chosen successor, on 17 April 2004.

In September 2005, Israel completely evacuated the Gaza Strip, leaving absolute control of the narrow band of land to the Palestinian Authority. Several weeks later, the Israeli authorities announced the arrest of Yakub Mohammed Etzev, an Israeli Arab and Hamas activist who played a central role in fund-raising and contributed to the transfer of hundreds of thousands of dollars to the Hamas headquarters in Saudi Arabia for the charitable network of the Islamic Resistance Movement in the West Bank. Etzev also participated in the creation of local committees of Hamas in many cities and villages of Saudi Arabia.¹⁰ Whatever the case may be, the substantial aid that Hamas received from Saudi Arabia was considerably reduced thanks particularly to international pressure.

III. From the decay of Fatah to the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections

In December 2005, Hamas beat Fatah in the main cities of the West Bank. This breakthrough was no accident. Following the example of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the members and sympathisers of Hamas – present en masse – organised themselves around the voting centres, distributing prospectuses and accompanying the voters right up to the door.

The collapse of Fatah in the municipal elections and then in the legislative elections was as much due to its reputation for corruption as its negligence of the disorder within, among other groups, its own militia. Ever since his accession to power, Mahmoud Abbas showed himself to be unable to transform the party and worst of all, the party split into 'two groups': the big bosses of Tunis and Beirut, and the young generation.

⁸ Palestine Liberation Organisation.

⁹ Between 29 September 2000 and 1 December 2005, the Israeli Red Cross recorded a total of 7,950 persons killed or wounded. The breakdown is as follows: 976 killed; 621 seriously wounded; 907 moderately wounded and 5,086 lightly wounded, among them 11 staff members of the Israeli Red Cross. Israeli soldiers treated by Army medical personnel are not included in these figures. This list also includes 18 Israelis killed abroad in attacks that were specifically directed against Israeli targets, as well as 3 American diplomats killed in Gaza. Source : <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa>

¹⁰ Matthew Levitt, 'A Hamas Headquarters in Saudi Arabia?' September 28, 2005 in The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

While Hamas positioned itself as the party of 'clean' methods and campaigned against corruption, Fatah was rent between two separate candidate lists. One, named by Mahmoud Abbas, was made up of old leaders while the other represented the 'young guard,' in particular, Mohammed Dahlan. The Fatah electoral lists were brought together in a unified list only on 26 December 2005, shortly before the deadline for submitting them. But that did not put an end to the chaos within the party. Let us say straight away that the Islamic Jihad and many factions linked to Fatah declared 31 December 2005 to be the end of the truce with Israel negotiated several months previously by Egypt. Hamas, which had made the fight against the Jewish state its principal campaign slogan, followed suit several days later and also declared an end to the truce with Israel.

Called upon to renew the Palestinian Legislative Council for the first time since 1996 (when it was boycotted by Hamas), Palestinian voters of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem went to the polls. The rate of participation was exceptional (78% of the 1.35 million registered). And though one expected a breakthrough of the Islamists, it was a green tidal wave that passed through the Palestinian Territories: with nearly 74 seats out of 132¹¹, they henceforth had an absolute majority in the Palestinian Parliament. On 21 February 2006, Ismael Haniyeh was named as Prime Minister by President Abbas

After having suspended its direct assistance to the PA since the election of Hamas, the Quartet charged the European Union on 9 May 2006 with the task of creating a 'temporary' mechanism for bringing in aid without going through the Hamas government.

But at the moment when Europe finalised its aid mechanism, President Abbas froze the accounts of Hamas following repeated clashes between Hamas and the Fatah forces. Meanwhile, after a long trip to raise funds, principally in the Arab capitals (Cairo, Damascus) but also in Tehran, Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs Mahmoud Zahar (Hamas) brought back nearly 20 million dollars in his baggage and passed through the border checkpoint at Rafah after the office of the President of the PA had authorised the transfer of money to the Ministry of Finance! Protests from European observers present at the border terminal did not change anything. And as proof, the day after the arrival of Mahmoud Zahar it was the turn of his colleague responsible for Information, Youssef Rizqa, to pass through the same border terminal with more than 2 million dollars.

IV. From the radicalisation of Hamas to the formation of a government of national union

Since its accession to power, Hamas has not changed. It turns a deaf ear to the three criteria¹² established by the European Union for resumption of direct aid to the Palestinian Authority. The incessant firing of Qassam rockets on Israeli territory prompted the Jewish state to act on 1 November 2006 in Beit Hanoun. Tsahal launched the largest offensive since the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and reoccupied the city of 30,000 inhabitants located in the north of the Gaza Strip.

1. The use of human shields

On 2 November 2006, a group of Hamas fighters took refuge in the Nasser Mosque. The building was quickly encircled by Israeli forces. Mobilised like human shields by fundamentalist Palestinian radio, many women undertook to resist the Israeli Army in order to facilitate the flight of members of Hamas. Exchange of fire followed between the Israeli

¹¹ See <http://www.elections.ps/>

¹² 'To recognise the existence of Israel, to renounce violence and to undertake to respect the earlier accords concluded by the Palestinian Authority'

forces and male Hamas militants dressed up as women and concealed among the others! In the end, two activists and two Palestinian women were killed. The Prime Minister hailed “*the women of Palestine who conducted a protest to put an end to the siege at Beit Hanoun.*” Most of the media covering the scene spoke of the death of the two women instead of how they were used cynically by Hamas. The next week, a female kamikaze, Merfat Masoud, 18 years old, blew herself up in Beit Hanoun.

In November 2006, several hundred demonstrators joined by the Prime Minister of Hamas formed a human shield around and on the roof of the house of Mohamed Baroud, a member of the Committee of Popular Resistance. Several hours earlier, the Israeli Army had summoned his family to leave the premises pending a raid. Out of concern not to repeat the same blunder and wound civilians, the Israeli Army finally suspended the operation while denouncing ‘*the cynical use of innocent civilians by terrorists who turn them into human shields*’¹³ A similar scene repeated itself several hours later at the home of a Hamas leader, Mohammed Nawajeh.

This was confirmed not only by the Israeli forces but also by the inhabitants of Gaza and certain partisans of the Palestinian cause. Thus, Luisa Morgantini, European Deputy and champion of the Palestinian cause in the European Parliament, upon her return from an observation mission in the Gaza Strip explained: ‘*We know and Palestinian doctors have confirmed to us that the terrorists take children in their arms to avoid being killed.*’¹⁴

By acting in this way, Hamas violates not only the first protocol of the Geneva Convention (article 51, which stipulates that the parties must abstain from using the civilian population to protect military targets from attack or use them as a screen for military operations) but it demonstrates – yet again – that in their view life (whether that of a civilian or a candidate kamikaze) has very little significance. These are methods which were widely applied again during the Operation ‘Cast Lead’ and they contributed appreciably to increasing the number of civilian victims as we shall see further on.

2. The tragedy of Beit Hanoun and the formation of a government of national unity

While negotiations going on between Ismael Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas to form a government of national unity and name a new Prime Minister were nearly dead for several months, the tragedy of Beit Hanoun completely changed the factors. On the morning of 8 November 2006, an unfortunate shot by Israeli defence forces – due to a technical failure¹⁵ – caused the death of twenty or so Palestinian civilians.

On the next day, the highest Israeli officials acknowledged the blunder and offered humanitarian and medical aid. But Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Livni, reminded people in a press release about the circumstances surrounding the Israeli action: ‘*Israel left Gaza in order to give the Palestinians the opportunity to control terrorism and to take charge of it. Unfortunately, this has not happened. Israel has to deal with constant attacks by Palestinian terrorist groups who are incessantly firing Qassam rocket at Israeli civilian areas. Israel does not wish to injure innocent people, only to protect its citizens. Unfortunately, in the course of battle some regrettable incidents like the one this morning can happen.*’¹⁶

¹⁴ Hearing on Gaza, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 14 November 2006.

¹⁵ The Israeli inquest conducted by Major General Meir Kalifi, Deputy Commander of the Israeli Defence Forces, concluded quickly that there was a technical failure of the ignition system that led to firing several hundred metres from the initial target (see the *website of the Israeli Defence Forces*).

¹⁶ Statement by Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Mrs Tzipi Livni, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 8th November 2006.

At the same time, Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian PM had numerous meetings and made an unprecedented show of unity. The Palestinian President did not stop there. He arranged a telephone conference with Khaled Mechaal, with whom he had not been in contact for several months, in the presence of the Prime Minister and other high officials of Hamas as well as Fatah. On the same day, a high Palestinian official told the *Jerusalem Post*: ‘*The slaughter at Beith Hanoun was a good thing for Palestinian unity ;’ ‘in an ironic and sad way, something good has come out of all that. I think we are now just a few days away from the signing of a final accord on a government of unity (...).*’¹⁷

It took until 8 February 2007, under the aegis of King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, for an accord on a government of national unity to be reached by the protagonists. One month later, on 15 March, the government of Ismael Haniyeh was installed.

1. The Putsch of June 2007

Despite this fragile accord, the cohabitation was strained and the situation continued to deteriorate in the Gaza Strip, where Fatah tried to maintain its control over the security forces. On 15 June, there was a clash. In a bloody coup d’état, Hamas turned against the armed forces of Fatah. There was pillaging, destruction of the infrastructure and official buildings, many of them having been erected thanks to money from European taxpayers, summary executions, the stopping of ambulances, breaking into hospitals, kidnapping and the murder of civilians, a *fatwa* against the political and security chiefs of Fatah and murder of UN functionaries. There were truly war crimes that went on for a week marked by incredible violence.

Two days later, on 17 June, Mahmoud Abbas dismissed the Prime Minister from Hamas and named in his place the Minister of Finance, Salam Fayyad (whose party won just 2% of the votes in the elections). One notes that this strong action by the Palestinian President is against the Palestinian constitution, which requires that the Prime Minister be a member of the parliamentary majority (meaning from Hamas). He also proceeded to make official the split between Gaza and the West Bank, two territories which would now be run by two distinct governments.

V. The period of absolute control of Gaza by Hamas

1. Muzzling the opposition, arbitrary arrests

The direct and open clash between the two groups during the taking of power gave expression to a dormant struggle and now there was more violent and profound fighting. According to the reports of the spokesman of Fatah in mid-August 2007, Hamas was guilty of the following abuses: ‘*shootings, the murder of Fatah activists at Khan Younes and Rafah, shooting during the marriage of a Fatah member etc.*’ For Hamas, these exchanges of fire and other incidents were part of the struggle to bring order and security to Gaza. And it must be said that this succeeded, since a relative calm returned to Gaza, and the host of armed groups were no longer attacking one another in a climate of anarchy.

Aside from the summary executions and arrests of supporters of Fatah, Hamas in particular deposed and arrested Dr. Saka, iconic director of the Shifa Hospital in Gaza. As a consequence, as Sami El Soudi of MENA emphasised, it henceforth became difficult to keep track precisely of the clashes¹⁸ between the various factions. Sami El Soudi also told us in his

¹⁷ *Jerusalem Post*, November 9, 2006.

¹⁸ ‘Negotiations-Gaza: an understanding accessible, but not to everyone,’ Sami El Soudi, *Metula News Agency*, 6 September 2007.

article that despite heavy pressure Dr. Saka refused to support the version by which Mohammed Al-Dura was killed by Israeli forces on 30 September 2000.

After the seizure of power, the political police suppressed many demonstrations. At the end of 2007, Hamas forces fired many rounds to disperse a crowd of several dozen persons demonstrating against the repressive measures taken by the caliphs of Gaza. Other major incidents also broke out all during the year 2008.

2. Propaganda from all sides

After the cartoon *Farfour*, a figure like Mickey that inspires children to hatred and which was finally prohibited, it was *Nahoul the bee* which took over. From the very first episode, the new character from Hamas says he wants: *'to take Farfour's path, the path of Islam, heroism, martyrdom and the Mujahideen (...) to take revenge on the enemies of Allah, the assassins of the prophets and of innocent children right up to the liberation of Al-Aqsa from its impurity.'*¹⁹

The Hamas television station *al-Aqsa TV* then decided to broadcast a cartoon intended for a wider audience in order to denounce Fatah. The Fatah supporters are represented there in the form of rats who infest the West Bank and Gaza, while Hamas is symbolised by a powerful, pure-hearted lion. Political speeches during which the leaders of Hamas denounce Fatah are conveyed by a cartoon which, as Bissan Al-Cheik explains, is aimed at *'those who do not share the point of view of Hamas on Palestine, and those to whom Hamas wants it to be clear they will ruin their future fate if they oppose it.'*²⁰

3. 'Religious proselytism,' control of the educational apparatus and the judiciary

During this period, Islamisation was accentuated. In its more visible part, this process was characterised by the obligation – or at least by its incitement – for inhabitants of Gaza to follow the radical precepts, the Islamic social codes. Alcohol was prohibited. Many video rental shops and Internet cafes (showcases of Western depravity) were destroyed by the Islamists. Women were encouraged to wear the veil and to observe 'good morals,' while men were exhorted to wear beards. As for the Islamic courts, they were working now full time.

A division responsible for religious education of inmates created at the Al-Saraya prison of Gaza decided to reduce the punishment of all prisoners who learned five sections of the Quran by heart. At the end of July 2007, an Islamic Legal Committee directed by Marwan Abus Ras, a Hamas deputy, was set up; this was intended to replace the office of the attorney general.

Hamas never stopped asking the religious authorities questions relating to running the 'state' either to justify from the religious point of view measures of doubtful legality (authorising wire tapping or authorising arbitrary searches of the domiciles of opponents), or to legitimise actions of the Executive Force such as the 'morals police.' That followed the example of Pasdarans in Iran and the political police of Saudi Arabia, and it checks to see that the population respects the codes of Islam in daily life. Its actions take the form of various intrusions into the private life of the population to check on good moral behaviour. During the month of August 2007, the Executive Force acted both to seize alcoholic beverages, to break up marriage ceremonies where *'songs are sung with "inflamed ardour"*²¹ and to repress the Christian minority in Gaza.

¹⁹ In order to see the video in its entirety: <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1510.htm>

²⁰ 'And the lion of Hamas will crush the rats of Fatah,' op. cit.

²¹ Report of the Information Centre on Intelligence and Terrorism, Centre of Special Studies, 30 August 2007 in

In phase with the religious authorities, Hamas also accorded a very special importance to the status of women as the movement decided in the month of August 2007 to create a female police force. Like the Executive Force, it has responsibility to monitor observance of behaviour recommended for women by Islamic law. According to a report by HRW²², the status of women was never so alarming as it is has been since the accession to power of Hamas. The organisation criticises the way women who have been raped are forced to marry their torturers and the light prison sentences meted out to men who have murdered their wives on suspicion of adultery. Far from participating actively in the struggle for national liberation, Palestinian women are simply being used by Hamas and other terrorist groups.

Finally, and certainly most important, Hamas very quickly took control both of the entire traditional educational system (primary and secondary schools, as well as universities) and the informal system (youth movements, extramural activities, etc...). The collusion between instruction, religion and extremist propaganda is striking. Certain mosques in Gaza are used for meetings of the Executive Force and thus contribute to maintaining the complicity between the religious authorities and the repressive force of Hamas.

VI. Is this a movement capable of transforming itself?

1. Hamas and the peace process

The day after the Putsch, Ismael Haniyeh tried tirelessly to persuade people of his determination to continue the path of dialogue: *'We are committed to respecting the accords passed by, signed by the Palestinian Authority. We wish to implement a reciprocal, overall and simultaneous process with Israel.'*²³ This speech struck a false note when compared to all the actions of the political leadership of Hamas when it expressed itself in Arabic. Here is one example among many others illustrating the position of the Islamist movement: *'As far as we are concerned, recognition of Israel has been solved once and for all. It has been dealt with by our literature, by our Islamist thinking, by our Jihadist culture on which we base our actions. Recognition of the state of Israel is out of the question.'*²⁴

Aware of the impact any possible peace accord would have and given that it was unable to prevent Mahmoud Abbas from participating in the conference in Annapolis, Hamas tried to deny the legitimacy of the President to negotiate in the name of the Palestinians. By means of public statements of condemnation, the Islamist movement insisted that any possible accords reached in the United States would be illegal. On 7 November 2007, Hamas managed to gather the necessary quorum within the Palestinian Legislative Council and to have it make a statement denying the legality of the decrees issued by the President since June 2007, including the nomination of Salem Fayyad to head the Palestinian Authority. The Legislative Council also threatened to dismiss the PM of the West Bank and stated that it had never given a mandate to Mahmoud Abbas to negotiate with Israel.

At the same time, Hamas threatened to take power by force in the West Bank and to scupper the summit by launching attacks against Israel. To be sure, this was not a very serious threat given the nearly non-existent military capabilities of Hamas and the presence of Israeli forces in the Territories. The movement nonetheless continued to conduct operations targeting Israeli interests and against Fatah officials.

http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/fr_n/pdf/islamisation.pdf

²² Human Right Watch, (for more information, see the report at the following address:

<http://hrw.org/reports/2006/opt1106/>

²³ *Le Figaro*, Saturday 16 – Sunday, 17 June 2007

²⁴ Interview of Palestinian Prime Minister Ismael Haniyeh with the Saudi newspaper *Al-Jazeera*, 2 April 2007.

2. *Military and propaganda capabilities*

We should recall first of all that ever since its creation Hamas has never stopped increasing its military capabilities. Many reports have examined the planning and preparation of attacks including chemical substances. In 2000, Mohammed Abu Tir, chief of the military branch of Hamas in the West Bank, revealed that an attack aimed at contaminating Israeli water resources had been prepared. In February 2000, George Tenet, then Director of the CIA, testified before the US Senate's Intelligence Committee as follows: '*Hamas continues to strengthen its capability of conducting terrorist actions including toxic chemicals.*'²⁵ In June 2002, a communiqué from Hamas explained: '*When we reach the stage of using chemical weapons, with the help of Allah, the gates will be open for perpetrating suicide attacks.*'²⁶

More significantly, ever since the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip (September 2005) and especially during all of 2008, Hamas considerably strengthened its military capabilities thanks to smuggling of arms coming from Egypt through dozens, if not hundreds, of tunnels dug in the south of the Gaza Strip. Clearly, this is the main objective of continuing the 'resistance' and using mortar shells, rockets and missiles with ever higher performance (up to 60 km with the Iranian Grad model). The other objective has been to supply itself with the means to respond with mines, anti-tank rockets, etc. in case of possible Israeli invasion of Gaza.

Hamas propaganda videos have always reminded viewers that the movement never will stop its fight so long as Israel has not been destroyed. Thus, the group has continued to spread its destructive ideology by all means.

A report by the Institute of Intelligence, Centre of Terrorism Studies²⁷ highlights the branches, especially in Europe, which Hamas has to relay its propaganda on the Internet. This document explains how the movement chooses its access providers in various countries '*considered to be resistant to external pressure that might be applied to stop the services rendered by these providers and close down the websites in order to prevent proliferation of terrorist propaganda and hate by Hamas.*'²⁸

This is propaganda which is exported, as we have seen in the past several weeks during the pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Europe, and which succeeded not only in seducing Arab public opinion as a whole but also a broad audience among immigrant Muslim populations in Europe.

3. *Martyrs as the role model*

In September 2005, Hamas created women's units within its armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades. In an interview with the weekly publication *al-Rissala*,²⁹ the head of one of these units says that the women aspire to martyrdom and that the role of the Palestinian women is '(...) *to educate children in the Jihad.*' The example of Um Nidal, who was chosen as a candidate on the Hamas electoral lists is striking. This Palestinian mother sent three of her sons on suicide operations in Israel. In the video³⁰ of the farewell ceremony for one of

²⁵ Jamie Chosak and Julie Sawyer, "*Hamas's Tactics: Lessons from recent Attacks*", October 19, 2005 in The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

²⁶ Jamie Chosak and Julie Sawyer op. cit.

²⁷ See '*Promotion of terrorism by the Internet: Hamas continues to make use of Internet service providers in Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia for its principal websites*' in http://www.intelligence.org.il/fr/fr_n/pdf/internet_mo05fr.pdf

²⁸ Ibidem, p 6.

²⁹ Al-Rissala (Gaza), 18 August 2005 in <http://www.palestine.info/inf/arabic/palestoday/reports/report2005/qassameyoon.htm>

³⁰ See the video at the following address http://www.pmw.org.il/asw/um_nidal.asx

these sons, she *'orders [him] not to return except as a shahid (martyr).'*³¹ After learning about the death of her son, Um Nidal said: *'My son is no more 'sacred' than Islam itself. I have offered him as a gift and as a sacrifice to Allah, may he be glorified (...).'*³²

By raising Um Nidal to the rank of national heroine, Hamas is well aware of the long term repercussions this will have on the Palestinian subconscious. But what transformations can one hope for on the part of Hamas given that the PA has also too often emphasised the importance of the Shahid? As Itamar Marcus and Barabara Crook explain: *'The Palestinian Authority has underlined in various ways the importance of the 'joyous' sacrifice of sons for Allah, particularly by giving the name 'al-Khansa'³³ to 5 girls schools. By sending this clear signal to young and impressionable girls regarding their future role as mothers of Shahids.'*³⁴

These past few weeks, during Operation 'Cast Lead,' Hamas repeatedly carried out suicide operations by launching kamikazes against Israeli tank units. More generally, the whole Gaza population consists of martyrs in the view of Hamas. During the entire operation, the leaders of Hamas never stopped insisting that both their militia and the civilian population preferred to die as martyrs than to give themselves up.

4. Syrian and Iranian support

We emphasise straight away that Hamas, acting through the chief of its political bureau in Damascus, Khaled Mechaal, has always applauded anti-semitic statements by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad: *'What the Iranian officials say may not please certain persons, but they are just courageous statements.'*³⁵ Not being content to support these revisionist and anti-semitic positions, Hamas has also promised to support Iran if Israel were to attack the Islamic Republic: *'Just as Islamic Iran defends the rights of the Palestinian people, we defend the rights of Islamic Iran (...)* We are part of a united front against the enemies of Islam.³⁶

Since the beginning of the second Intifada in October 2000, Iran and Syria have never stopped supplying massive support to Hamas and more generally to Palestinian terrorism. Despite belonging to two different families of Islam, Sunni Hamas and Shiite Iran share the same conviction that 'resistance' is the principal weapon of the Palestinians to lead the fight for liberation. They both reject the process of negotiations and have a common profound hatred for the United States and the West.

For Iran, Hamas represents a strategic interest of the first magnitude since on the ideological level the Palestinian movement intends to establish a 'caliphate' in the Gaza Strip. On the strategic level, it offers Tehran an opportunity to weaken Israel thanks to the nearly daily bombardment of cities in the South. Finally, Hezbollah and Hamas are two powerful tools to reinforce the position as regional power of the *Syrian-Iranian* axis and thus their influence on the Muslim Arab world. In Iran, a large part of the political and religious establishment is involved in assistance to Hamas, from the leader Ali Khamenei to the Ministry of Intelligence

³¹ Itamar Marcus & Barabara Cook, *'Mother sent sons on suicide missions, becomes Hamas candidate : Indicates value of terror in Palestinian Society*, December 20, 2005, Palestinian Media Watch Bulletin in <http://www.pmw.org.il>

³² Ibidem.

³³ al-Khansa is a heroic figure in Islamic history who is glorified and venerated for having celebrated the death of her 4 sons as martyrs.

³⁴ Itamar Marcus and Barbara Cook, op. cit.

³⁵ PIC (Palestinian Information Centre) 15 December 2005 in http://www.palestine-info.cc/french/printer_6729.shtml

³⁶ Ibidem.

and Security and the head of the Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Suleimani and, of course, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

VII. The behaviour of Hamas during the Operation ‘Cast Lead’

The 6-month truce negotiated by Egypt in June 2008 was not respected. Indeed, rockets and missiles fired from Gaza continued to hit Israeli cities. Hamas put an end to this truce several days before the start of the Israeli Operation ‘Cast Lead.’ However it may be, the truce allowed Hamas to restock its supply of munitions and armaments via the tunnels dug between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. After more than three weeks of operations by the Israeli forces, the military and civilian infrastructures of Hamas – and of other terrorist factions – were subjected to enormous damage. This was sufficient damage to prompt the Israeli security cabinet to declare a unilateral cease-fire on Saturday, 17 January. Hamas has deplored the death of many of its leaders – both political and military, including, notably, Dr. Nizar al-Rayyan (the initiator of the human shields and of many suicide attacks in Israel). Hundreds of kamikazes that Hamas said it was ready to launch against the aggressor³⁷ were neutralised or simply deserted, since just several abortive attacks were recorded. But during the entire operation, Hamas demonstrated yet again its brutality and its total lack of respect for human life.

1. Use of the civilian population to serve the purposes of war

We have previously mentioned that Hamas uses the civilian population for military purposes. These past few weeks there were a vast number of examples of this. By launching their rockets and missiles from schools, residential buildings and mosques, Hamas unquestionably exposed the population to the fighting in total violation of international law and the laws of war. We see this from the testimony of Gazans reporting that Hamas militants prevented inhabitants from fleeing the bombardment of their homes, going right up to accompanying them under threat of arms. Others explain that members of Hamas moved about while pulling children by the ears and that they held civilians as hostages in the alleys in order to form a ‘living barricade’ to protect themselves from Israeli attack.

2. Summary executions of members of Fatah

The day after the Israeli ground invasion, rumours circulated regarding the wish of Fatah to take advantage of the operation to retake control of the Gaza Strip. Many dozens of Fatah members were placed under surveillance and – according to sources close to Hamas – more than 35 members of the official party of the PA suspected of collaboration with Israel were executed during the weekend of 4 - 5 January. From the very start of the operation, Hamas may otherwise have shot at least 75 members of Fatah in the legs besides breaking the hands of a great many others. The newspaper *al-Hayat al-Jadida* reports that during the last days of the operation Hamas executed still more dozens of Fatah militants in Gaza under the pretext that they had violated the terms of their house arrest.

3. Misappropriation of humanitarian aid

Though Hamas got elected because of its image as social benefactor, it did not hesitate to abandon the population. Not only did Hamas engage in a war at the population’s expense, but they also deprived the population of international humanitarian aid which was being transferred from Israel to the Gaza Strip. Numerous reports tell us that men from Hamas seized a percentage of the food aid and supplies that came in to Gaza. As for the supplies that were intended to be distributed without levies taken by Hamas first, part was simply sold to

³⁷ See the issue of ESISC dated 4 January 2009.

the residents. Some lorries with humanitarian aid and tanker lorries filled with fuel were machine-gunned and then embezzled by members of Hamas.

By way of conclusion

The withdrawal of Israel from Southern Lebanon in May 2000 has often been presented as a Hezbollah victory in the armed struggle against Israel and served as an example to the Hamas cause (strengthened by the feeling of victory after the war of the summer of 2006). The strategy was to convince the Palestinians that what Hezbollah accomplished in Southern Lebanon could be adapted by pursuing armed struggle in the Palestinian Territories and, more particularly, in Gaza. In Lebanon, Hezbollah appeared on the political scene several years ago, but is it an example proving the transformation of a terrorist group into a respectable political party? Has it undertaken the actions necessary to put an end to violence and promotion of violence? The war between Hezbollah and Israel during the summer of 2006, as well as the virulent propaganda regularly disseminated by Hezbollah, notably via its television station *al-Manar*, not to mention the impressive reinforcement of its military capabilities since October 2006, undoubtedly provide some elements of proof to respond in the negative to these questions.

The legitimacy of Hezbollah, of Hamas and of the Muslim Brotherhood comes principally from the fact that they provide assistance and support to major strata of the population that the authorities, often corrupt, are unable to accord to them. However, it has to be said that Hamas has been unable to improve the fate of the Gazans; Israeli reprisal operations, the blockade and now war have only aggravated the situation. And if Hamas represented for the Palestinians an alternative to an ossified and corrupt regime, it remains true nonetheless that Palestinian voters must assume a heavy responsibility. Indeed, they brought Hamas to power though they were perfectly aware that this organisation fiercely rejected the concept of recognising the right of Israel to exist and that it recommended total war against the Jewish state. Hence it seems to be a risky bet to integrate these movements into the political process before they renounce their destructive objectives.

Operation 'Cast Lead' has undoubtedly inflicted a hard blow on the Islamist movement and on its military capabilities but it is still too early to say if they will come back or not. An ideology that has powerful support – both inside and outside the Palestinian Territories – is not defeated by arms alone. Moreover, the director of Hamas in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, is already speaking of the 'popular victory' and marching in step with the unilateral truce of the Israelis, Hamas has given Israel a week to withdraw from the coastal enclave. Other leaders explained when the cease-fire was announced that: *'producing holy arms is our mission and we know how to get arms'*³⁸, letting it be understood that Hamas is not ready for compromise with the Jewish state. The Iranian President congratulated Khaled Mechaal on his 'victory' in the battles against Israeli soldiers in the Gaza Strip. Whatever the future holds for Hamas in Gaza, it is imperative that genuine international pressure be applied for it to renounce its charter and its military action if it is again to participate in governing.

Even after the Israeli operation, it seems risky, in not impossible, to want to exclude Hamas from any representation within the Palestinian political scene.

³⁸ Ynet, January 19, 2009

However, certain guarantees should be given before serious negotiations are envisaged with the terrorist movement. The task that awaits moderate Palestinians to 'reconnect' Gaza to the future peace process appears to be arduous. But Israel will also have a preponderant role to play to juggle the influence of Hamas. What can a solution be? To demonstrate to the Palestinian population of Gaza by concrete signs that it can dream of a brighter future: assist in the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, support with force and determination the moderate Palestinians so as to cut the ground out from beneath the Islamists in a long lasting way. The other condition for peace is of course to ensure, with the help of Egypt, the EU and the United States, that Hamas will definitely be unable to rearm itself.

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