

# Hamas, The Islamic Wing of Palestinian Resistance: Its Roots, Characteristics, and Way of Politics

Buğra Sari\*

## Abstract

Hamas is an organization that has blended the historical and ideological legacy of Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) that has spread all over the Arab world with the sui generis living characteristics of the Palestinian people. Having such legacy and characteristics, Hamas has been considering Palestinian resistance as a religious obligation and struggling against Israel in the front line stating that the occupied territories cannot be abandoned since the day it emerged in 1987. The group has become one of the principal actors regarding the Palestinian question. Hence, Hamas has been one of the most significant non-state actors in the region. From this point, this study first addresses the Ikhwan past of Hamas. Then, the sui generis living conditions of Palestine under occupation that produced Hamas are scrutinized. Meanwhile, the study clarifies the organizational structure and main features of Hamas by paying attention to its rivalry with Fatah.

**Keywords:** Intifadah, Fatah, Hamas, *Ikhwan*, Palestine.

## Filistin Direnişinin İslamî Kanadı Hamas: Kökenleri, Karakteri ve Siyaseti

### Öz

Hamas Arap coğrafyasının neredeyse her köşesine yayılmış İhvan'ın tarihsel ve ideolojik mirasını Filistin halkının kendine has geliştirdiği yaşam karakteristiğiyle harmanlamış bir örgüttür. Bu miras ve karakteristik üzerine Hamas, kurulduğu tarih olan 1987'den itibaren Filistin direnişinin bir sorumluluk olduğu ve işgal altındaki toprakların terk edilemeyeceği ülküsünden hareketle İsrail devletine karşı en ön saflarda mücadele etmektedir. Hatta zaman içerisinde Filistin meselesinde belirleyici başat aktörlerden birisi haline gelmiştir. Hal böyleyken, Filistin meselesinin Ortadoğu bölgesinin temel meselelerinden hatta belki de en temel meselesi olması hasebiyle Hamas Ortadoğu'da önem arz eden devlet dışı aktörlerden birisi olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Buradan hareketle, eldeki bu çalışma Hamas'ı anlamının öncül koşulu olan örgütün İhvan geçmişi irdelemektedir. Ardından İsrail işgalinin getirdiği tecrübeyle Hamas'ı ortaya çıkaran Filistin'e özgü yerel koşulların altını çizmekte ve Hamas-Fetih arasındaki rekabeti dikkate alarak Hamas örgütünün yapısı ve temel özellikleriyle ortaya koymaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** İntifada, Fetih, Filistin, Hamas, İhvan.

\*Dr. Öğr. Üyesi | Polis Akademisi, Güvenlik Bilimleri Enstitüsü | bugrasari1988@gmail.com  
ORCID: 0000-0001-6428-1292 | DOI: 10.36484/liberal.686585  
*Liberal Düşünce Dergisi*, Yıl: 25, Sayı: 97, Kış 2020, ss. 147-165.  
Gönderim Tarihi: 8 Şubat 2020 | Kabul Tarihi: 17 Mart 2020

## Introduction

The name “ Hamas ” is the acronym of *Harakat al-Muqwamma al-Islamiyyain* Arabic or the *Islamic Resistance Movement* in English, while the word “ Hamas ” in Arabic means “ zeal ” or “ courage ” for the sake of a particular religious or political goal (Abu-Amr, 1993: 11).<sup>1</sup> In a sense, Hamas is the symbol of Islamic resistance concerning the Palestinian question. From the day it emerged in 1987, Hamas has been considering Palestinian resistance as a religious obligation and struggling against Israel in the front line stating that the occupied territories cannot be abandoned. Over time, the group has become one of the determining, principal actors regarding the Palestinian question. Hence, since the Palestinian question is one of the most heated issues -maybe the most heated one- in the Middle East, Hamas has been one of the most significant non-state actors in the region.

In reality, the non-state status of Hamas is a controversial topic. The organization came to power in Palestinian territories in 2006 when it got the majority of the votes in the elections. Though having won the elections, the group has continued to be recognized as a terrorist organization by the international coalition led by Israel and the United States. Thus, it has not been seen as a state actor. As a result, Hamas and Palestinians in Hamas-rules territories have been subjected to political and economic sanctions. Regardless of that, Hamas has been acting as a state actor in Gaza, continuing its activities as the Islamic wing of Palestinian resistance and struggling against Israel.

Hamas was established in 1987 in the middle of *the First Intifada*. Nonetheless, just like every other organization which appeals to a particular social base, it was not a phenomenon emerging all of a sudden. Hamas matured with the historical experiences of the Palestinian people living under occupation, and its roots go back to the idea of resistance shaped by and identified with the Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun* in Arabic or *Ikhwan*) movement. In this regard, Hamas has blended the *Ikhwan*'s historical and ideological legacy, which spread almost all over the Arab world with the Palestinians unique characteristics of life. Hence, to understand Hamas, this study will first examine *Ikhwan*, and then it will highlight the unique local conditions of the Israeli occupation, which gave birth to Hamas. Meanwhile, the study will consider the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah while portraying the structure and characteristics of Hamas. Hence, the study answers the following questions: What are the ideological roots and characteristics of

---

<sup>1</sup> For Hamas leaders' opinions on the name of the group, see Chehab (2007: 23-27).

Hamas?; What are Hamas' strategies to appeal to Palestinian society?; What is Hamas' vision on the principles of Palestinian state and against the State of Israel?; What are the underlying factors of Hamas-*Fatah* rivalry?

## The Social and Ideological Movement behind Hamas: *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*

In Hamas Charter<sup>2</sup> published on August 18, 1988, it was indicated that the group's main principles were decided in line with Islam, and the organization's ideas on life and humanity and its relevant stances had to be based on Islamic understanding. Accordingly, Hamas practiced Islamic provisions and referred to Islam while determining an action (1988 Hamas Charter, Article I). While Hamas was explaining its ideology by referring to Islam, on the second article of its Charter, it clarified that the way the group interprets Islam is the way that *Ikhwan* followed. The relevant article is as follows:

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.

Since its roots go back to *Ikhwan*, the history of Hamas starts with the emergence of *Ikhwan* Movement in Egypt and *Ikhwan*'s concerns about the Palestinian question. The *Ikhwan* Movement was formed in Egypt in 1928 by a teacher named Hasan al-Banna, aiming to educate and reform Egyptian society with an idea of Islamic revival as opposed to European influence on Egyptian society at that time (Boulby, 2011). Thus *Ikhwan* highlights the relationship between being tied to the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of imperial powers and religious degeneration in Egypt. On that issue, al-Banna wrote a letter to then-king Farouk of Egypt and stated that Egypt is witnessing a fork in a road: One leading to the West and the other to Islam. Al-Banna added that Egypt has a unique religious role, and with the revival of Islam in Egypt, Islam can be revived in the international scene. Hence, he argued that Egypt should choose the path to Islam. According to al-Banna, there was a need for a Muslim state in Egypt (Mitchell, 1993: 232). That need shaped the goals of *Ikhwan* Movement around two pillars in which one is primary, and the other is special. The primary goal is identified as to save the

---

<sup>2</sup> For the full text of the Charter see Maqdsi (1993: 122-134).

Muslim world from the hegemony and sovereignty of foreigners and to set a new Islamic rule which will bring the Islamic provisions back. The special goals are related to the needs for efforts to reform and transform the society in which *Ikhwan* operates (Görgün, 2000: 585).

While *Ikhwan's* goals were formed in line with the ideas of al-Banna, varying strategies have been developed to achieve these goals: Giving lectures, participating in conferences, delivering *khutbahs*, organizing ceremonies, traveling, camping, publishing books and newspapers, etc. Hence, the movement aims to introduce and spread its ideology among the people. Moreover, with its economic, social, and political endeavors, the movement supports its main strategies (Gânim, 2000: 582-583).

### The Arrival of *Ikhwan* Ideology to Palestine and Its Spread

In line with its goal to revive Islamic order in all Muslim territories, *Ikhwan* contacted different parts of the Arab world in a short period, and Palestine became one of those. It was the first contact between *Ikhwan* and Palestine when al-Banna sent his brother Abdurrahman al-Banna to Palestine in 1935. After that, the movement became more interested in the Palestinian question and aimed to attract Islamic societies' attention to the Zionist ambitions over the Palestinian territories. Moreover, some of the *Ikhwan* members participated in Palestinian resistance and lost their lives in the 1936 Rebellion against the British forces and the 1948 Arab-Israel War against Israel (Hroub, 2006: 9; Roy, 2011: 20). Those activities increased *Ikhwan's* sphere of influence in Palestine.

The establishment of *Ikhwan's* first Palestine branch in Jerusalem in 1945 (for some sources it was in 1946 (Hroub, 2006: 7; Tamimi, 2007:5)) even more increased the group's sphere of influence (Abu-Amr, 1993: 6). After that, *Ikhwan* started to attract more people in Palestine, and in 1947, it had 25 branches with over 20 thousand members (Abu-Amr, 1993: 6). Nevertheless, after the 1948 Arab-Israel War, *Ikhwan's* operations in Palestine had to be divided into two headquarters: One in West Bank and one in Gaza. With the loss of the majority of Palestinian territories, Jordan's and Egypt's sovereignty came to surface, and while *Ikhwan's* West Bank branch had started to be controlled by Jordan, the Gaza branch was under Egyptian control. In time, that made *Ikhwan's* West Bank and Gaza branches in Palestine innately different from each other. While Jordan-controlled West Bank *Ikhwan* continued to operate in social and religious life as a legal organization, Egypt-controlled Gaza *Ikhwan* had been banned and closed down. Consequently, the contact between West Bank *Ikhwan* and Gaza *Ikhwan* got loosen, and Gaza *Ikhwan*

chose to organize its affairs secretly. Hence, *Ikhwan's* Gaza branch -what became Hamas later on- used to live underground, hiding from authorities in a dispersed manner (Abu-Amr, 1993: 7; Robinson, 2004: 120; Roy, 2011: 21-22).

Following the West Bank-Gaza division, *Ikhwan* focused on its activities in social and religious spheres. Its main aim was to liberate Palestinian territories by raising a well-mannered Islamic generation with operating schools of religion, foundations, and social clubs. According to Palestinian *Ikhwan*, the following generations will be pursuing independence along with an extensive Islamic socio-cultural revival movement. In that regard, *Ikhwan* believed that an Islamic transformation is a prerequisite for the liberation of Palestine. In *Ikhwan's* rhetoric, it was called the "preparation of the generations" (Hroub, 2000: 27-28; Hroub, 2006: 13-14).

After Israel's victory in 1967 Six Days Wars and its capture of Gaza and West Bank, *Ikhwan* started working on more for the preparations of the generations. At that point, instead of engaging in armed resistance against Israel in Palestine, it focused on organizing activities to raise Islamic consciousness. As part of it, mosques were not only places for daily prays. *Ikhwan* turned them into institutions aiming for providing social services (Robinson, 1997: 137). Additionally, it operated among various segments of the society through student clubs in high schools and universities, youth clubs in towns and suburbs, foundations, kindergartens, health centers, etc. When Palestinian *Ikhwan* became a significant body providing social services to Palestinian people in 1973, all of its activities were gathered under the roof of an organization called *Mujama al-Islamiya*, the Islamic Center (Roy, 2011: 24). With the Islamic Center, *Ikhwan* managed to spread its services and its ideology in Palestine.

## The Roots of Ikhwan-Fatah Struggle in Palestine: Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)<sup>3</sup> in Armed Resistance and Ikhwan in Social Sphere

While engaging in social and religious activities after the war in 1967, *Ikhwan* primarily considered *Fatah's* legitimacy in society instead of Israel. The defeat of Arab states against Israel was a major issue, and *Fatah* indeed became a prominent actor when it initiated guerilla warfare against Israel after the war. As part of it, *Fatah* organized staggering armed attacks in and outside

---

3 Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) is an umbrella organization recognized as the only legitimate representative of Palestine by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations. Under PLO, *Fatah* is the largest and most influential group. Until his death, the *Fatah* leader Arafat was the chairman of PLO. The current chairman of PLO is -again- another *Fatah* leader Mahmud Abbas.

Israel. The widely-known attacks were as follows: 35 hijack attempt by 1968, the murder of Israeli athletes during the 1972 Munich Olympics, and the killing of US Ambassador to Sudan in Khartoum in 1973 (Schanzer, 2008: 16).

Due to its role in Palestinian resistance, *Fatah* became a respected actor in Palestinian society. Even most of the people started to see *Fatah* and its ideology as the only way to liberate Palestine (Schanzer, 2008: 8). This was unacceptable for *Ikhwan*, and hence, it developed the strategies mentioned above addressing social and religious spaces to gain the hearts and trust of Palestinians. While *Ikhwan* aimed to liberate Palestine by raising Islamic generations and establishing a state following Islamic provisions, *Fatah*-as a secular nationalist left-wing organization- was on the opposite side of the political spectrum.

For that reason, *Ikhwan* adapted a 3-step strategy to struggle against *Fatah* and tried to implement that. The first step was to gain the support of people through social services. Following that, on the second step, the idea was to challenge *Fatah* and *Fatah*-controlled Palestinian authority in political and ideological spheres by relying on public support. The third and last step was to organize guerilla attacks against Israel and to shape the path of Palestinian resistance (Lewitt, 2006: 8). Although they are utilized to complement the third step today by Hamas, the first two steps had been the main area of operations for *Ikhwan* between 1967 and 1987. Khalil al-Kavka -who was among the leaders of *Ikhwan* and then Hamas during organization's early years- indicated that concerning the first two steps the years between 1967 and 1975 could be viewed as the mosque building period and the period between 1975 and the First Intifada could be seen as the period for constructing social institutions (Hroub, 2000: 31).

Indeed, from 1967 to 1975, the number of mosques that became the centers for *Ikhwan*'s social services in Palestine increased from 200 to 600 in Gaza and 400 to 750 in West Bank (Abu-Amr, 1994: 15). In social space, the Islamic Center played a key role for *Ikhwan* ideology to be spread in Palestine society. Through the Islamic Center, *Ikhwan* was able to reach numerous Palestinians with its libraries, foundation networks, sports and social clubs, nursery schools, and organizations distributing *zakats*. Meanwhile, by providing the essential needs of thousands of Palestinian refugees living in camps, *Ikhwan* managed to gain more sympathy within the society (Abu-Amr, 1993: 8).

Another factor that enhanced the capability of *Ikhwan*-controlled Islamic Center to reach various parts of the society was the "charity organization" license given by Israel to the center in 1978. After that, by acting as a legitimate

organization, the Islamic Center was able to manage a significant portion of the aid funds collected in Palestine and sent to Palestine from abroad. As a reflection of that, *Ikhwan's* influence in the occupied territories further increased.

Israel's recognition of the Islamic Center as a charity organization indeed heated the rivalry between *Ikhwan* and PLO. As mentioned before, following the war in 1967, the armed Palestinian resistance was led by the *Fatah*-controlled PLO, which identified itself as a secular nationalist left-wing organization. That carried *Fatah* to a prestigious position in the eyes of Palestinians. As a reaction to that, Israel is said to aim to encourage *Ikhwan* -which adapted an Islamic ideology- to create an opponent to highly influential secular nationalist left-wing ideology promoted by *Fatah* in the society. In this sense, Israel played its cards in favor of Islamist *Ikhwan* against secular nationalist *Fatah*, which was seen as the biggest threat towards Israel back then. That was part of Israel's divide-and-rule strategy (Robinson, 2004: 119). Israel's Military Governor of Gaza, General Yitzhak Segev explained that strategy by saying "We extend some financial aid to Islamic groups via mosques and religious schools in order to help create a force that would stand against the leftist forces which support the PLO" (Abu-Amr, 1994: 35; Usher, 1999: 19).

## First Intifada: The Birth of Hamas

A car accident involving an Israeli military vehicle killing four Palestinians on December 8, 1987 triggered a number of continuous protests and riots against the Israeli occupation, which is now known as the First Intifada.<sup>4</sup> It was a turning point for *Ikhwan*, which until then had been focusing on gaining the hearts of Palestinians through social and religious activities and challenging *Fatah's* ideological stance. At that point, *Ikhwan* leaders were either going to risk losing their popularity among Palestinians by keeping quiet or choosing to participate in the Intifada -in which many young *Ikhwan* members had already done- and start the jihadi movement (Hroub, 2006: 13).

That dilemma revealed the difference between the young and old members of *Ikhwan*. While the former generation emphasized notions like discipline and cause, the younger generation embraced the understanding of struggle in the way of jihad. In fact, by the early 1980s, that started to be a matter of discussion within the movement and divided the *Ikhwan* members. Back then, some of the *Ikhwan* members inspired by the Iranian Revolution and argued that an Israel-backed pacifist strategy would not be helpful for

---

<sup>4</sup> Intifada means "insurrection" in Arabic.

the liberation of Palestine, and thus, an armed resistance should be organized immediately. For that purpose, they formed the organization, called “Islamic Jihad.” Briefly, they initiated an active armed resistance against Israel without adapting the strategy to prepare the generations for building an Islamic society -which was the *Ikhwan*’s main idea (Abu-Amr, 1993: 9; Roy, 2011: 24; Hroub, 2006: 10-11).<sup>5</sup>

It was indeed the second time that *Ikhwan* had the “preparation of generations vs. initiating armed struggle” dilemma when the First Intifada began. That time it was more crucial since unless *Ikhwan* chose to participate in active resistance, it would leave the whole resistance area to *Fatah*-controlled PLO, and consequently, *Ikhwan* would lose all of its hard-won hearts among the Palestinian society. On December 9, 1987, *Ikhwan* leaders met at Sheikh Ahmed Yassin’s home to discuss those matters. As distinct from their decisions at the beginning of 1980s, they this time decided to initiate active resistance against Israel, and they established Hamas. After the establishment decision, on December 14, 1987, they started distributing pamphlets under the name of Hamas and declared that they were now participating in protests and Intifada against the Israeli occupation. The founder of the Islamic Center, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, became the first leader of Hamas. The remaining *Ikhwan* leaders who participated in the meeting at Yassin’s home were as follows: Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, Ibrahim Al-Yazouri, Sheik Salah Shehada, Issa Al-Nashar, Muhammad Sham, Abdul Fattah Dukhan (Abu-Amr, 1993: 10; Hroub, 2006: 13).

The establishment of Hamas did not push the “preparation of generation” strategy to the background. On the contrary, it continued to be pursued with social and religious activities along with the armed resistance (Roy, 2011: 24). In a sense, the armed resistance was regarded as complementary to the social and religious facilities under the Islamic Center roof (Mishal, 2003: 575). Hence, the name *Ikhwan* in the early days of Hamas was not visible in the pamphlets distributed to the people. The aim was to protect *Ikhwan*’s legal status and its achievements through the Islamic Center’s “charity organization” license. Nevertheless, as the Intifada took long and it enabled *Fatah*’s position in active resistance, a risky situation targeting *Ikhwan* ideology arose, and hence, *Ikhwan* leader decided to announce in January 1988 that they were the ones who distributed the pamphlets with Hamas signature against Israel (Abu-Amr, 1993: 10; Kepel, 2011: 185; Roy, 2011: 26).

Following that, on August 18, 1988, Hamas declared its Charter involving 36 articles emphasizing the struggle against Israel and the goal to destroy it.

---

<sup>5</sup> For a source solely on Islamic Jihad, see Hatina (2001).



The Hamas Charter stated that the Palestinian territories are Islamic *Waqf*, and not a single part of it can be abandoned to Israel (1988 Hamas Charter, Article XI). By highlighting that, Hamas clarified its position against Israel and its difference from *Fatah*. That was apparent when in 1988, the *Fatah* leader Yasser Arafat accepted Israel's right to be a state in line with the United Nations Security Council decisions number 242 and 338, suggesting an international peace conference and a two-state solution in the region (Tessler, 1994: 721; Cleveland, 2008: 524). Thus, *Fatah* abandoned the idea of removing Israeli presence from the occupied territories and agreed to coexist within the pre-1967 borders.

Arafat's move strengthened his position as the "Palestine's international leader," and *Fatah* got recognized in the international political arena, which was leverage for the group against Hamas, which gained influence during Intifada in Palestine. At that point, Hamas -which aimed to destroy Israel and form an Islamic state in Palestine- strongly objected to the *Fatah*'s strategy. The Palestinian society had also interpreted the *Fatah*'s recognition of Israel as a sign of the group's weakness (Schanzer, 2003).

Meanwhile, Hamas -which was against the two-state solution- intensified its attacks against Israel by 1989, and it started to become a prominent actor. In the same year, it was declared illegal after attacking Israeli soldiers. Afterward, the United States, European Union, Canada, and Australia added Hamas to their list of terrorist organizations. In fact, Israel's attempt to declare Hamas illegal resulted in increasing sympathy towards Hamas and increasing the group's influence among Palestinians (Schanzer, 2008: 33-34). The reason was that Hamas' antecedent *Ikhwan* had previously been partially supported by Israel when the Islamic Center was recognized as the charity organization by the Israeli state, and many people were suspicious of Hamas when it initiated its active resistance against Israel. Hamas' designation as an illegal organization by Israel strengthened the groups' position in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The increasing popularity and power of Hamas led Arafat to propose the group to join PLO in 1990. Nevertheless, it did not happen since Hamas asked to elect 40-50 % of the newly-formed Palestinian National Council, and also, refused a potential recognition of Israel on the horizon (Abu-Amr, 1993: 15-16). Also, Hamas was against the ongoing Madrid and Oslo peace talks between *Fatah* and Israel. Moreover, Hamas boycotted and did not join the presidential and the legislative council elections for Palestinian authority taken

place on June, 20, 1996, which Hamas interpreted as a by-product of the Oslo Process. The 13<sup>th</sup> article of the Hamas Charter clarified the group's view:

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...

From time to time the invitation is made for an international conference to look into solving the problem. Some accept and some reject the idea, for one reason or another, asking for some condition or conditions to be fulfilled in order to agree to attend and participate in the conference. Due to the Islamic Resistance Movement's knowledge of the participating parties of the conference, and the participants' past and present opinions and stands on Muslim interests, the Islamic Resistance Movement does not perceive that the conferences are able to deliver the demands, provide the rights, nor do justice to the oppressed. Those conferences are nothing but a form of enforcing the rule of the unbelievers in the land of Muslims. And when have the unbelievers justly treated the believers?

*Never will the Jews or the Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: "The Guidance of Allah-that is the (only) Guidance." Wert thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which hath reached thee, then wouldst thou find neither Protector nor Helper against Allah.*

-Sura 2: Baqara: 12 (1988 Hamas Charter, Article XIII)

## Organizational Structure of Hamas

When Hamas was formed in 1987, it already had a 50-year-old tradition of *Ikhwan* movement and had a sizeable organizational base. To manage and direct its base, Hamas created formal and informal entities organically in touch with each other. The formal bodies were *Majlis al-Shura*, the Shura Council, and *al-Maktab al-Siyasi*, the Political Bureau. The Shura Council involved elected representatives, and it shaped Hamas' aims and targets in general. It also decided on the members of the organization's highest political unit, the Political Bureau.

The Political Bureau had 10-20 members who lived in Palestine or exile. It was responsible for managing all activities of Hamas. The events were formed around various topics such as charity works, education, recruitment, military issues, media and public relations, finance, and religious affairs (Hroub, 2000: 116). Though the Political Bureau directed those activities, Hamas' informal entities had a significant function in operating them. The informal entities originated from the *Ikhwan* tradition were mosques, prayer rooms, schools, kindergartens, soup kitchens, hospitals, sports clubs, and

charity organizations.<sup>6</sup> Briefly, as described by Mishal, Hamas' decision-making processes were as follows:

1. Tasks are defined more through the interaction of local members than by the organization's top leaders.
2. Decisions are driven more by interaction among peers than strictly by hierarchical authority and control.
3. Activities are based more on information from local members than on formal leaders.
4. Lateral communications and consultation among members in different local positions have become more common than reliance on vertical communications between superiors and subordinates.
5. Local activists are committed to performing tasks and fulfilling responsibilities effectively rather than to blind loyalty and obedience to superiors (Mishal, 2003: 583).

The informal entities of Hamas brought a significant advantage. Those entities strengthened Hamas' bonds with the society and provided a unique opportunity for the development of the group's strategies by keeping the daily lives of Palestinian people in mind. Hence, the power of Hamas came from horizontal interactions between people, based on trust and friendship. It was crucial while mobilizing public support (Mishal, 2003: 581-582).

On the other hand, Hamas also had its own armed entity, which was entirely separate from the activities organized in social life. The main reason for that separation was to protect the group from Israel's surveillance mechanisms and *Fatah's* oppression. For that, Hamas' armed entities mainly divided into two: The security wing and the military wing. The security wing is known as *Majmouath Jihad u-Dawa (MAJD)* today, and it aimed to detect and punish Israeli informants, drug and alcoholic beverage sellers, etc. The military wing is called Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades and built primarily to engage in active armed struggle against the Israeli military (Chebab, 2007: 23).

## The Second Intifada: The Hamas-Fatah Conflict and the Rise of Hamas

When the Israeli extreme right-wing leader Ariel Sharon entered Al-Aqsa Mosque with nearly a thousand guards of him in 2000, a number of riots took place, and Arafat declared that it was the start of Second Intifada. The declaration was also the result of the negotiation strategy of the 1990s, which led nowhere and tarnished *Fatah's* image among Palestinians. At that point, Arafat's main target was to win the hearts of Palestinians rather than a full-fledged

---

<sup>6</sup> In Hamas terminology, all activities organized in social life were called *da'wa*.

struggle against Israel. Supporting that argument, to address the rising Islamic consciousness and rhetoric, Arafat formed al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which involved certain symbols and slogans from the Quran and Islamic tradition in general. He also appealed to Islamic rhetoric and said: "We are marching, millions of martyrs to Jerusalem" (Schanzer, 2008: 58).

Meanwhile, Hamas and *Fatah* -which did not engage in armed conflict with each other and emphasized the primacy of Palestinian cause until then-started developing hostile attitudes openly from 2001 onwards. In fact, the groups challenged each other in 1991, and in the murder of some high-ranked *Fatah* officials during peace negotiations in 1993, Hamas was considered the main suspect. Additionally, especially in 1994, when Hamas organized its first suicide car bombing attack against Israel, the United States and Israel pressured Arafat to stop Hamas, and then some *Fatah* forces arrested several Hamas members (Lewitt, 2006: 116-117).

With the impact of those incidents, clashes emerged between some Hamas and the supporters of *Fatah*-controlled Palestinian authority. Consequently, in 2001, Hamas initiated direct attacks targeting *Fatah*-controlled Palestinian authority. In the meantime, *Fatah* also became tougher in its rhetoric against Hamas and took some armed precautions. It also asked to challenge Hamas in social space, but it could not manage to do that. According to the reports published in that period, the Ministry of Education of the Palestinian authority was under the total control of Hamas, and Hamas was even able to infiltrate into security forces. Another intelligence report suggested that the Palestinian authority began to consider Hamas as a real threat to its political visions, interests, presence, and influence (Lewitt, 2006: 116-117).

Around the same time, Hamas intensified its armed attacks against Israel as part of its general strategy. In reaction to that, Israel initiated its plan to eliminate Hamas leaders one by one through assassination attempts. At first, on July 23, 2002, one of the members of Hamas' Political Bureau and the leaders of military wing Sheik Salah Shehada was murdered in an F-16 attack targeting his home, which killed not only him but also his wife and several civilian Palestinians. On August 21, 2003, another prominent member of the Political Bureau, Ismail Abu Shanab, was killed by five missiles targeting his car. Following Shanab's assassination, on March 22, 2004, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was murdered after prayer in front of a mosque in a missile attack. Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi became the leader of Hamas after Yassin, but his leadership took only a month. He was also killed in an Israeli missile attack while he was on the road after a family visit on April 17, 2004 (Roy, 2011: 24). In addition to

the assassination of high-ranked Hamas officials, over 320 Hamas members had been assassinated during the Second Intifada. It means from low-ranked members to high-ranked military and political cadres, Hamas lost two members each week in Israeli attacks during Intifada (Hroub, 2004: 28).

Although the assassinations immensely harmed Hamas' organizational and operational capability, the Palestinians' sympathy and support for the group reached a level that had never seen before. A field study conducted after the death of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin revealed that for the first time in history, Hamas became the most popular movement in Palestine (Hroub, 2004: 21). People viewed Hamas and its leaders as the figures who gave their lives while resisting Israel's attacks against Palestinian villages and towns during Intifada. Meanwhile, Hamas continued to engage in an *Ikhwan* tradition and provided social services to the Palestinians in need. Additionally, while *Fatah* leaders were adapting a luxurious lifestyle, Hamas leaders were living a modest life with the difficulties of the everyday struggles of Palestinians (Hroub, 2004: 22). Considering all, in the minds of Palestinians, Hamas became an organization that was thinking and caring about them regardless of everything that happened (Doyran, 2008: 108).

Indeed, compared to the other groups, Hamas turned into a more prominent actor not only concerning the resistance to Israel but also the assistance to the Palestinian people in need. Hamas believed as long as the occupation continued, the resistance should be maintained by protests in the streets, meetings, strikes, riots, attacks against Israeli soldiers and settlers, and even suicide bombing attacks in Israeli cities (Hroub, 2006: 44). It should be noted that until 1994, Hamas had just organized attacks against Israeli military units, which were regarded as the only legitimate target. On February 25, 1994, which was the day of *Eid al-Fitr* for Muslims and *Purim* for Jewish people, an Israeli settler<sup>7</sup> killed 29 Palestinians and injured 125 others in Ibrahimi Mosque located in the al-Khalil city with an automatic weapon. After the "al-Khalil Massacre," Hamas started targeting Israeli civilians as revenge for the Palestinian civilian deaths. It announced that it would only stop targeting Israeli civilians if Israel ends killing Palestinian civilians (Hroub, 2006: 51-52). Consequently, Palestinians had the impression that Hamas was a competent organization that could call Israel to account for each Palestinians that were killed by Israeli forces.

---

<sup>7</sup> The settler was a member of the radical Kach movement. His name was Baruch Goldstein.

## Hamas' Electoral Victory in 2006 and the Political Separation of Palestine

In parallel with the developments showing the increase in its popularity among Palestinian people, Hamas -which boycotted 1996 elections- decided to attend 2005 local and 2006 general elections. In 2005 local elections, Hamas had significant success in West Bank, including in the towns Ramallah and Nablus, which were known to be *Fatah* strongholds. It showed that Hamas could also be successful in 2006 general elections. On January 25, 2006, Hamas had the victory by gaining 74 seats in the parliament out of 132 seats. *Fatah* got 45, and other groups together won 13 seats.

Three main factors were leading Hamas to the electoral victory. First of all, *Fatah*-led PLO disappointed Palestinians after the peace negotiations with Israel did not meet the expected progress. Secondly, Hamas-led social services in times of scarcity during Intifada and Hamas' vanguard role in the armed struggle led to an increasing sympathy towards the organization. Lastly, the mismanagement of the Palestinian authority under *Fatah* rule and often corruption and bribery allegations towards *Fatah* leaders were on the surface (Usher, 2006a: 2-11).

In the international arena, especially Israel and the United States were skeptical about the victory of Hamas. For the recognition of Hamas rule in Palestine, two requirements were suggested: Recognizing Israel and staying away from violence. As a response to that, Hamas said in case a Palestinian state covering Gaza, West Bank, and Eastern al-Quds would be formed, it would recognize Israel. In the meantime, for the other requirement, it indicated that the people living under occupation had the legitimate right to riot (Usher, 2006b: 30-31). As a result, an international economic boycott led by Israel and the United States was implemented against the new Hamas-controlled Palestinian government. Since it did not receive any support from outside and it was economically surrounded, the Hamas government had severe problems and could not have a chance to fulfill its role as the representative of Palestinian people -which was received through democratic means. Consequently, the economic sanctions harmed Palestinian people as a whole rather than Hamas. According to Roy, it was maybe the first in the history that an unusual reality emerged: Instead of occupants, the people under occupation were punished (Roy, 2011: 41).

Another obstacle in front of Hamas' rule in Palestine was *Fatah's* attitude towards the Hamas government. The strategy of international powers to iso-

late Hamas rule was seen as an opportunity by Mahmoud Abbas-led *Fatah*, and *Fatah* tried not to leave the governance. To protect its presence, it harassed Hamas by all means, including using the state facilities. For instance, immediately after the Hamas' electoral victory, a set of decrees was enacted by Abbas, and the Palestinian security forces, along with the Ministries of Finance and Information were started to be controlled by the Palestinian presidency directly instead of the government. Following that, Abbas appointed some *Fatah*-linked people to the heads of units responsible for personnel recruitment and salary management (Doyran, 2008: 122-123). Those issues made it almost impossible for Hamas to rule Palestine.

At the same time, Hamas-controlled Palestinian government -which lost its international financial sources- had to find 116 million dollars each month to pay the salaries of approximately 135 thousand civil servants. Economic embargo and sanctions made it the Palestinian economy quite vulnerable, and the civil servants who did not get paid initiated protests. Those protests were mainly organized and managed by *Fatah*-linked security forces. Hamas' attempts to control the demonstrations intensified the clashes, and it created a civil war environment within Palestine. Also, while the United States, European Union, and Israel cut Hamas' sources, they kept militarily and financially supporting *Fatah*, which catalyzed the emergence of the two-headed rule in Palestine.<sup>8</sup>

A group of Arab states led by Saudi Arabia began looking for chances of mediation between Hamas and *Fatah* at the beginning of 2007 to restore the order in Palestine. As a result of negotiations, Mecca Agreement was signed, and in March 2007, the "National Unity Government" was formed. With that attempt, Hamas aimed to lower the international pressure put on itself but yet the unity in the governmental level between Hamas and *Fatah* was not a real unity in Palestine (Long, 2010: 131-143). After the dissolution of the unity government clashes re-emerged, and in June 2007, Hamas organized a coup in Gaza, eliminated *Fatah*-controlled forces and took over the control of the city entirely.

Following the purge against *Fatah* in Gaza, Mahmoud Abbas declared Hamas' armed wing and the connected armed forces illegal. Abbas also announced that he abolished the Hamas government and gave Salam Fayyad -who had close ties with the United States- the authority to form the new government. Furthermore, Hamas buildings in West Bank and the parliament were raided by *Fatah* forces. The prime minister of the Hamas government Ismail Haniyeh declared that they did not recognize the attempts to establish a new

---

8 To understand the role of the United States in Hamas-Fatah conflict, see Roy (2011: 42-44) and Sarı (2018: 35-37).

government, and he said the National Unity Government was still on duty. Hence, two governing bodies emerged in Palestine: Hamas in Gaza and Fatah in West Bank. Geographically separated Palestine was politically divided too (Roy, 2011: 46).

After that separation, Hamas-ruled Gaza was further isolated in the international scene, which made its economy worse. Adding to the Israeli blockade, the living conditions of 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza became unbearable. On the other side, Fatah received foreign aid and support from the United States and Israel, which tarnished *Fatah's* image in the eyes of Palestinians and *Hamasized* the Palestinian resistance.

Additionally, the Gaza War in 2009 affected the living conditions in Gaza in a negative manner immensely. A story rumored during the war was even further increased the tensions between Hamas and *Fatah*. According to the rumor, Israel's Gaza Operation aimed to end Hamas' control in Gaza and re-establish Fatah's rule in the city (Erkmen, 2009: 20). Even the existence of that rumor was enough for increasing tensions. As a reflection of that, Hamas suppressed Fatah supporters in Gaza, and from time to time, it engaged in extrajudicial activities. Similarly, Fatah did not always abide by the laws and developed a hostile attitude towards Hamas members in West Bank. Arbitrary detention, custody, torture, and similar practices were documented in both places, and particularly violence against women in Gaza was a vast human rights issue.

## Conclusion: The Impact of Arab Uprisings on Hamas and 2017 Hamas Charter

In December 2010, in Tunisia, a young street vendor immolated himself and committed suicide as his living standards became unbearable. The incident triggered massive uprising almost all over the Arab world. Dictators who had been ruling the countries for decades were toppled down, and new governments that were relying on people were formed. Meanwhile, the Islamic movements became popular: Moderate Islamist Ennahda Movement got the highest percentage of votes in Tunisia, and *Ikhwan* in Egypt came into power, and Muhammad Morsi became the first elected president of the country. There were some expectations that with the rise of Islamic movements in the region, the international isolation of Hamas would end.

Nevertheless, the reality turned out to be the opposite after the military coup in Egypt. The *Ikhwan* Movement was considered serious threat by Israel, Western states, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, and



Hamas found itself in the middle of new regional geopolitics. It led to a strategic maneuver with the declaration of a new Hamas Charter<sup>9</sup>, disregarding the group's *Ikhwan* background. While the 1988 Hamas Charter's second article identified Hamas as the Palestinian wing of *Ikhwan*, the 2017 Hamas Charter eliminated the group's originating point. The new Hamas Charter identified the group as follows:

The Islamic Resistance Movement 'Hamas' is a Palestinian Islamic national liberation and resistance movement. Its goal is to liberate Palestine and confront the Zionist project. Its frame of reference is Islam, which determines its principles, objectives and means (2017 Hamas Charter, Article I).

Moreover, the 2017 Hamas Charter accepted the foundation of a Palestinian state with the borders before the 1967 Six Days War. It was a revolutionary change considering Hamas' previous stance. In the 1988 Hamas Charter, the Palestinian territories were regarded as Islamic *Waqfs*, and abandoning a single part of the Palestinian land meant leaving Islam. Hamas was advocating that it would never recognize an Israeli state on Palestinian territories and the whole Palestinian lands belonged to Palestinian people. Nevertheless, the 20<sup>th</sup> article of the new Charter suggested an independent Palestine with pre-1967 borders (2017 Hamas Charter, Article XX). It indirectly meant that Hamas acknowledged the existence of an Israeli state.

Hence, the changing geopolitical conditions made Hamas revise its principles and political stance. Opposition to *Ikhwan* in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Egypt in the region at the governmental level tightened the Hamas' elbowroom. Meanwhile, the Hamas-Fatah conflict continued, and the developments weakened the Palestinian resistance from inside. The frailness of the main actors unavoidably reduced the power of Palestinian resistance in the international space.

To sum up, looking at state of politics in Palestine, a political consensus seems not to be possible in near future since the rivalry between Hamas and *Fatah* is more about ideological rather than pragmatic political gains. Moreover, rather than seeking a political consensus, both Hamas and *Fatah* endeavor to consolidate their own sphere of influences in Palestinian society. In this respect, while *Fatah* largely represents the secular wing of the Palestinian society, Hamas appeals to Islamic segments. Consistent with their ideological roots, the two parties have clashing visions on the principles of the State and society. In addition to their ideological differences, the foreign involvement into Palestinian politics further deepens the rivalry between

---

9 For the full text of 2017 Hamas Charter see "Charters of Hamas" (2017).

Hamas and *Fatah*. That said, foreign actors, specifically the United States and Israel, successfully implement a divide and rule policy in Palestine. As a result, Palestinian resistance, being both politically and geographically divided, continuously weakens and loses ground politically and military. Recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel by a group of states led by the United States is a clear example of such weakness.

## References

- Abu-Amr, Ziad (1993), " Hamas: A Historical and Political Background." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 4, pp. 5-19.
- Abu-Amr, Ziad (1994), *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Boulby, Marion (2011), "Muslim Brotherhood." *Oxford Bibliographies*, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195390155/obo-9780195390155-0137.xml>.
- "Charters of Hamas" (2017), *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 4, no. 4, pp. 393-418.
- Chehab, Zaki (2007), *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of Militants, Martyr and Spies*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Cleveland, William L. (2008), *Modern Ortadoğu Tarihi*, translated by Mehmet Harmancı, İstanbul: Agora Kitaplığı.
- Doyran, Ersin (2008), *Bir Direniş Hareketi Olarak Hamas*, Ankara: Elips Kitap.
- Erkmen, Serhat (2009), "Filistin'de İktidar Mücadelesi: Hamas-Fetih İlişkileri", *Ortadoğu Analiz* 1, no. 2, pp. 14-21.
- Gânim, İbrâhim Beyyûmi (2000), "İhvân-ı Müslimîn", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Volume 21, Ankara: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, pp. 580-582.
- Görgün, Hilal (2000), "Mısır Dışındaki İhvân-ı Müslimîn Hareketi", *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, Volume 21, Ankara: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, pp. 583-586.
- Hatina, Meir (2001), *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies.
- Hroub, Khaled (2000), *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies.
- Hroub, Khaled (2004), "Hamas after Shaykh Yasin and Rantisi", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 33, no. 4, pp. 21-38.
- Hroub, Khaled (2006), *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Kepel, Gilles (2001), *Cihat: İslamcılığın Yükselmesi ve Gerilemesi*, translated by Haldun Bayrı, İstanbul: Doğan Kitap.
- Lewitt, Matthew (2006), *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
- Long, Baudouin (2010), "The Hamas Agenda: How Has It Changed?", *Middle East Policy* 17, no. 4, pp. 131-143.
- Maqdsi, Muhammed (1993), "Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) of Pa-

lestine”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 4, pp. 122-134.

Mishal, Shaul (2003), “The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas: A Network Perspective”, *Armed Forces & Society* 29, pp. 569-589.

Mitchell, Richard P. (1993), *The Society of Muslim Brothers*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robinson, Glenn E. (1997), *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Robinson, Glenn E. (2004), “Hamas as Social Movement.” Quintan Wiktorowicz (ed.), *Islamic Activism: a Social Movement Theory Approach*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 112-139.

Roy, Sara (2011), *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Sarı, Buğra (2018), “Filistin Direnişinde Aşil Tendonu: Hamas-Fetih Çatışması”, *Yeni Fikir Dergisi* 21, pp. 23-39.

Schanzer, Jonathan (2003), “The Challenge of Hamas to Fatah.” *Middle East Quarterly* 10, no. 2, [https://www.meforum.org/articles/other/the-challenge-of-hamas-to-fatah#\\_ftn5](https://www.meforum.org/articles/other/the-challenge-of-hamas-to-fatah#_ftn5).

Schanzer, Jonathan (2008), *Hamas vs. Fatah: The Struggle for Palestine*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Tamimi, Azzam (2007), *Hamas: A History from Within*, Northampton, MA.: Olive Branch Press.

Tessler, Mark (1994), *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Usher, Graham (1999), *Dispatches from Palestine: The Rise and Fall of the Oslo Peace Process*, Londra: Pluto Press.

Usher, Graham (2006a), “Hamas Risen”, *Middle East Report* 23, pp. 2-11.

Usher, Graham (2006b) “The Democratic Resistance: Hamas, Fatah, and the Palestinian Elections”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35, no. 3, pp. 20-36.

1988 Hamas Charter.

2017 Hamas Charter.