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BETWEEN RELIGION, EXTREMISM AND GOVERNANCE

POLITICAL ISLAM IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

Jörg Knocha / Hans Maria Heÿn

According to Palestinian Basic Law, Islam is the official religion in the Palestinian Territories.¹ It is an integral part of political and social life of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, 98 per cent of whom are Muslim. It also exerts a decisive influence on the two major movements, Hamas and Fatah, as well as on numerous smaller political parties and movements, which often originate in the secular sphere or have Marxist roots.

During the period from 1920 to 1948, the territory of present-day Israel and the Palestinian Territories formed part of the British Mandate. Once the British had withdrawn and the founding of the Israeli state in 1948 triggered the first Israeli-Arab war, Gaza came under the control of Egypt, and the West Bank including East Jerusalem under the control of Jordan. In the course of the Six-Day War in 1967, Israel finally occupied both these territories. For this reason, there were only rudimentary Palestinian institutions in place up until the first Oslo Accord was concluded between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1993. No parliamentary party system existed that was comparable to those in the Western World. The various movements defined themselves more by performing social activities, engaging in the armed struggle against the occupation of their land or carrying out terrorist attacks.

1 | Cf. The Palestinian Basic Law, "2003 Amended Basic Law", <http://palestinianbasiclaw.org/basic-law/2003-amended-basic-law> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

The partial autonomy since 1993 resulted in the gradual development of institutional structures. For the first time, a government existed, ministries were established, and national elections were held in 1996. As a result of the Second Intifada, which started in 2000, considerable parts of the political infrastructure were destroyed. Having won the 2006 parliamentary elections, the Islamist Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007. The Palestinian Territories have been politically divided ever since.

Having won the 2006 parliamentary elections, the Islamist Hamas took over the Gaza Strip in 2007. The Palestinian Territories have been politically divided ever since.

Modern political Islam played a role in this development that should not be underestimated, drawing on a long tradition in historic Palestine going back to the 1920s. From the very start, nationalist motives have been another important factor. In order to understand the interaction between Islamic movements and political institutions and their way of dealing with democratic principles, some basic peculiarities of the interaction between Islam, politics and the nation in the Arab sphere have to be considered.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND THE STATE

In many parts of the Islamic and particularly the Arab world, there is no strict separation between religion and politics, the economy and culture. Instead, there are frequently strong links between the state and a particular religion or denomination. Followers of other faiths are very rarely regarded as equals. There is virtually no freedom to individually choose and practice a religion, to change one's religion or to be a non-believer.²

There is also no clear separation between religion and state in the Palestinian Territories. Legislation on matters of personal status, which covers inheritance rights, marriage, divorce and child custody, is based on Islamic law, the

2 | Cf. Charles Taylor, "The Polysemy of the Secular", *Social Research*, 76, 4, 2009, 1143-1166, <http://jstor.org/discover/10.2307/40972206?uid=3738872&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21102573045343> (accessed 13 Sep 2013); U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2012", 2012, http://state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religious_freedom (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

Sharia.³ The Palestinian National Authority (PA) pays the salaries of most imams in the West Bank and prescribes the topics that they may cover in their Friday prayer sermons.⁴ In Gaza, many mosques have been under the

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control of Hamas or its predecessor organisation, the Muslim Brotherhood, for decades. Religion also plays a more important role in political discourse than in the West.⁵ Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was known for including religious references in his speeches and using religious symbolism. Even if a speech was fundamentally nationalist in its message, he rarely failed to insert some Koranic verses. Not only the Hamas, but Arafat's Fatah too, regularly uses religious expert opinions, so-called *fatawa*,

- 3 | Of course, these provisions only apply for the Muslim population. There are separate Christian courts with similar power to the Islamic Sharia courts. Cf. The Palestinian Basic Law, n. 1; Birzeit University, "Ecclesiastical Courts in Palestine: Legal Norms and Problems of Application", *Institute of Law Roundtable Meeting*, 10 Mar 2012, http://lawcenter.birzeit.edu/iol/en/index.php?action_id=266&id_legal=546&id_type=2&PHPSESSID=19af57c6b28a34e95491c338924c6e8a559a1365 (accessed 13 Sep 2013); Felix Dane and Jörg Knocha, "The Role and Influence of Christians in the Palestinian Territories", *KAS International Reports*, 2010, 12, 56-75, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_21240-544-1-30.pdf (accessed 13 Sep 2013). Conversation between the authors and Theophilus III of Jerusalem, the current Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem, on 9 Sep 2013 in East Jerusalem.
- 4 | Cf. U.S. Department of State, "International Religious Freedom Report for 2012: Israel and The Occupied Territories – The Occupied Territories", 2012, http://state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?dynamic_load_id=208394&year=2012 (accessed 13 Sep 2013).
- 5 | One current example of this is an undated Arabic Fatah flyer in the West Bank, which the authors came across in Ramallah on 21 August 2013. The heading of the flyer is the Basmala ("In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful"), the Arabic invocation that most suras of the Koran start with. The text begins with the final words of the second verse of the fifth sura ("The Dinner Table"), which was translated into German as follows by the Islam expert Rudi Paret: "Helft einander zur Frömmigkeit und Gottesfurcht, aber nicht zur Sünde und Übertretung! Und fürchtet Gott! Er verhängt schwere Strafen." (Rudi Paret, *Der Koran. Übersetzung von Rudi Paret*, W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 2007, 78.) Roughly translated into English: "Help one another to be pious and to God-fearing, and not to sin and commit violations! And fear God! He imposes harsh punishments." But the subsequent text is not concerned so much with religious topics but with the current political situation, the Israeli settlements, social problems as well as the security situation in the West Bank.

and solicits approval from internationally recognised religious authorities to legitimise its own policies.⁶ Fatah's armed wing, the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, which was set up during the Second Intifada, not only chose an Islamic sounding name, but also put a Koranic verse on its logo and issued statements with strong religious connotations.⁷



Yitzhak Rabin, Bill Clinton, Yasser Arafat (from left): When the violence continued after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, Hamas initially remained on its military course. | Source: © Ron Edmonds, picture alliance / AP Photo.

However, the close link between religion and politics in no way prevented the emergence of nationalist movements. Towards the end of the 19th century, the concept of nationalism became the most significant ideology in the Middle East, although it ran counter to the idea of one single and unified Islamic state.⁸ The goal was to modernise the community in line with the European model. The proliferation of nationalism was spurred on by the establishment of modern states after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the

- 6 | Cf. Nathan J. Brown, "Debates about Islam and the Hamas-Fatah Schism", Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2010, <http://boell.de/worldwide/middleeast/middle-east-palestine-islam-hamas-fatah-schism-8686.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).
- 7 | The political science academic Hillel Frisch considers this less an indicator of increased religiosity on the part of Fatah and more a tool to mobilise the population and prevent the Islamists from gaining influence. Cf. Hillel Frisch, "Has the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Become Islamic? Fatah, Islam, and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades", in: *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 17, 3, 2005, 391-406.
- 8 | Cf. Fred Halliday, *The Middle East in International Relations. Power, Politics and Ideology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, 193-228.

fight for independence against the political and cultural dominance of Europe and the increasing ideological influence of some national-religious Muslim scholars, such as Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, Mohammad Abduh and Rashid Rida.⁹ The conflict between Arabs and Zionists in Palestine, which started in the 1920s, was above all a clash between two nationalist movements.

There is a wide spectrum of opinions among representatives of political Islam regarding the democratic process and whether to have a share in it. Some Islamic theorists consider democracy a foreign concept that negates God's sovereignty by its focus on the sovereignty of the people. Others, however, argue that Islam can only be represented by a democratic system on account of certain contents of the Koran, including references to the equality of all people, the need for mutual consultation (*shura*) and striving for consensus (*ijma'*).¹⁰ It seems that when considering compatibility with democracy, the Islamic world is frequently equated with the Arab World, which is predominantly governed by authoritarian rule,¹¹ whereas nearly half of all Muslims live in democracies or in countries where there has been a democratic system at least temporarily.¹²

THE BEGINNINGS OF ISLAMISM AND THE RISE OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Beginning with the period of the British Mandate (1920-1948) and up until the start of the 1980s, the history of political Islam in Palestine is the history of the Muslim

9 | Cf. John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, Syracuse University Press, New York, 1998, 48-61.

10 | Cf. John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, "Islam and Democracy", *Humanities*, 22, 6, 2001.

11 | Cf. Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson, "An 'Arab' More Than 'Muslim' Electoral Gap", *Journal of Democracy*, 14, 3, 2003, 30-44; Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson, "Arab, Not Muslim, Exceptionalism", *Journal of Democracy*, 15, 4, 2004, 140-146.

12 | Cf. Alfred C. Stepan, "Religion, Democracy, and the 'Twin Tolerations'", *Journal of Democracy*, 11, 4, 2000, 37-57. Political science academic Alfred C. Stepan classified Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Turkey as precisely such systems. (What these countries have in common besides a predominantly Muslim population is that they have all been governed by a female Prime Minister or President.) He also includes the Muslim inhabitants of India and of Western democracies.

Brotherhood.¹³ While Islam also played a part in other political movements, nowhere else did religion represent such an inherent and formative component.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) was founded by teacher Hassan al-Banna in Ismailia in 1928. The movement was intended to serve as a tool for reviving Islamic principles and as a force acting against the British occupation of Egypt. The concept of jihad was at the centre of the Muslim Brotherhood's doctrine. The "Great Jihad" was seen as a means of catharsis to lead Muslims, who had lost their way, back to true Islam. This new Islam was considered a renaissance that would free Muslims from the shackles of tradition.¹⁴ The "Small Jihad" consisted of the active battle against the enemies of Islam. This meant primarily the institutions of the British Protectorate.¹⁵ Right from the start, the Muslim Brotherhood focused on Palestine,¹⁶ a fact that illustrates the ambivalence of the movement very clearly. On the one hand, it regarded itself as a spiritual movement dedicated to Islamic upbringing and education. On the other hand, it demonstrated a strong political consciousness from its inception, which was defined by the fight against the ruling structures in the Middle East, which they described as imperialist. Contemporary journalistic sources already characterised the movement as not only religious but also pointed to the political and nationalist ideas it inherited.¹⁷

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13 | Cf. Ziad Abu-Amr, " Hamas: A Historical and Political Background", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 22, 4, 1993, 5-19.

14 | Cf. Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza. Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2011, 62-67.

15 | The Islamic studies academic Tariq Ramadan vehemently contests that his grandfather Hassan al-Banna advocated the use of violence in Egypt. According to his writings, it was only permitted in Palestine because it was a response to the brutality of the British and Zionists there. Cf. Tariq Ramadan, "Whither the Muslim Brotherhood?", *The New York Times*, 8 Feb 2011, <http://nytimes.com/2011/02/09/opinion/09iht-edramadan09.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

16 | Cf. Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Origins of Hamas: Militant Legacy or Israeli Tool?", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 41, 3, 2012, 54-70.

17 | Cf. Albion Ross, "Moslem Brotherhood Leader Slain As He Enters Taxi in Cairo Street", *The New York Times*, 13 Feb 1949, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=F60915FB345C177B93C1A81789D85F4D8485F9> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

Syrian scholar Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the first Palestinian leader in the British Mandate territory, regarded the concept of a modernised and politicised Islam as a means of resistance.

When the Muslim Brotherhood set up its first branch in Palestine in October 1945, they found fertile ground for the dual concept of jihad. Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, the long-time Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and President of the Supreme Muslim Council, used Islamic ideas from the 1920s onwards to mobilise Palestinians and the entire Islamic world beyond against Zionism.¹⁸ However, it was the Syrian scholar Izz ad-Din al-Qassam, the first Palestinian leader in the British Mandate territory, to regard the concept of a modernised and politicised Islam as a means of resistance. He probably encountered the teachings of al-Afghani, Abduh and Rida during his studies in Cairo. These three scholars advocated the renewal, modernisation and politicisation of Islam. According to their teachings, the intrusion of Western powers into the Islamic world could only be fought by adopting certain values of Western civilisation without, however, changing the fundamental framework of Islam. They wanted Muslims to look back to their centuries-old identity and the civilisation-building, scientific and economic achievements of Islam. Only then would they be in a position to drive the Western powers out of the region and govern themselves.

Al-Qassam came to Palestine for the first time in 1921. In Haifa, he encountered a class of impoverished Palestinians who had lost their jobs due to the sale of agricultural land to Jewish immigrants from Europe and were working as day labourers in the port. In his sermons first in the Gerini and later in the Istiqlal mosque, he called for an Islamic renewal and explained how the increasing prosperity of the ruling class was contributing to the working class' poverty. He gradually developed a political ideology that envisaged the founding of an Islamic state by means including physical struggle against the British and the Zionists. He set up several Koranic groups, which operated independently of each other. In addition to religious instruction, these also provided military training.¹⁹ After the murder of the Jewish police officer Moshe Rosenfeld, the British cracked down on al-Qassam's group, the Black Hand (al Kaff al-Aswad).

18 | Cf. Frisch, n. 7.

19 | Cf. Abdullah Schleifer, "Izz al-Din al-Qassam: Preacher and *Mujahid*", in: Edmund Burke, III (ed.), *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993, 164-178.

In November 1935, he and some of his followers (*Qassamiyyun*) were killed in an exchange of fire.²⁰ However, his appearance in Palestine had already presaged the loss of power by the old Muslim elites, whom he accused of having failed to take action against the British and Zionists or even of collaborating with them.²¹

For many Palestinians, who were drawn to urban areas because of a loss of land and industrialisation and thus became part of the growing urban proletariat, al-Qassam's national-religious teachings were a wake-up call. His sermons and his following, which survived beyond his death, were significant forces in the great Arab insurrection from 1936 to 1939. Even though the Muslim Brotherhood decided against participating actively in the revolt because it lacked a network in Palestine, al-Qassam's legacy is of great significance for the way the movement developed subsequently. The religious-nationalist focus of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood already became apparent in their 1946 Charter. Its contents are not limited to Islamic moral principles and the Koran, but include the fight against poverty and illiteracy, improving the living standards of the Palestinians and the modernisation of society.²² Initial activities included the staging of major public events, fundraising campaigns, the opening of its headquarters in Jerusalem and the setting up of local offices in Jaffa, Haifa, Nablus and other cities.²³

The religious-nationalist focus of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood already became apparent in their 1946 Charter. Its contents are not limited to Islamic moral principles.

The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood had close links to its parent organisation in Egypt. For al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Palestinian issue became the main mobilising tool. He visited the Gaza Strip himself in March 1948. In spite of attracting an increasing following, the Brothers were marginalised during the subsequent First Israeli-Arab War. Their refusal to follow military orders

20 | Cf. Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 1999, 10-20.

21 | Cf. Beverly Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas*, Polity Press, Cambridge and Malden, 2010, 18-30.

22 | Cf. Helga Baumgarten, *Hamas. Der politische Islam in Palästina*, Heinrich Hugendubel Verlag, Kreuzlingen and Munich, 2006, 25-26.

23 | Cf. Amnon Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949-1967*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1982, 144-208.

from the Egyptians and to adhere to ceasefires caused a rapid deterioration of the relationship with the Egyptian authorities.²⁴ This was followed in quick succession by the Muslim Brotherhood being banned, it taking revenge by assassinating the Egyptian Prime Minister Mahmud Noqrashi. Al-Banna himself was murdered in February 1949.

After the Egyptian military coup in 1952, the Muslim Brotherhood was responsible for distributing humanitarian aid. It was the first time that it had direct contact with day-to-day political life.

In the Gaza Strip, which was administered by Egypt, the local branch of the Muslim Brotherhood founded a new group, the Unification Association (Jam'iyat al-Tawhid). Its members organised cultural events and activities for young people in an effort to strengthen Muslim faith, while at the same time engaging in party-political activities. For the Muslim Brotherhood, the period after the Egyptian military coup in 1952 began full of promises. A leading representative of the group was made Governor of Gaza as a way of thanking the Brotherhood for supporting the coup. Among other things, the Muslim Brotherhood was responsible for distributing humanitarian aid. It was the first time that it had direct contact with day-to-day political life. At this point, it represented the largest political association in Gaza and had more members than the Communist Party.²⁵ However, its refusal to stop its attacks on Israel and an attempt on the life of the Egyptian Prime Minister Gamal Abdel Nasser by a Muslim Brother in 1954 caused a new wave of repression. The group could subsequently only operate in secret and was forced underground.²⁶

The oppression of the Muslim Brotherhood and the arrests of leading members severely weakened the group. A younger generation then took over the leadership of the organisation with many of them prioritising religious instruction and education (*da'wah*) over militant activities. A lesson learnt from the experiences with the Egyptian authorities, which did not tolerate independent political or

24 | Cf. Filiu, n. 16.

25 | Cf. Mohammed K. Shadid, "The Muslim Brotherhood Movement in the West Bank and Gaza", *Third World Quarterly*, 10, 2, 1988, 658-682.

26 | Cf. Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence*, Columbia University Press, New York and Chichester, 2006, 16-20.

militant activities. However, not all Muslim Brothers agreed with this new direction. The leaders of the organisation at that time included people like Fathi Balawi, Salah Khalaf, Khalil al-Wazir, Yussef al-Najjar, Kamal Adwan and Assad Saftawi. Khalaf was active in Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Student Union in Cairo and subsequently became a close confidant of the later Palestinian leader. He later took the *nom de guerre* Abu Iyad. Al-Wazir, who similarly called himself Abu Jihad, suggested to the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza that they should set up a non-religious organisation that would take up the armed struggle against Israel. However, his ideas were not given serious consideration.²⁷ Together with Arafat, these two men founded the Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini), the reversed acronym of which provided the name by which the organisation became known: Fatah. Adwan, al-Najjar and Balawi also joined Fatah later. There is no doubt that many people from Arafat's Cairo entourage were self-professed Muslim Brothers, but whether he himself has ever been a member is unclear.²⁸

In any case, the religious-nationalist environment in Gaza and Egypt had a large impact on the two Palestinian movements that dominate today.²⁹ The reaction by the Muslim

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Brothers to the new competition was unequivocal. In 1960, they opposed the founding of Fatah, as they considered its approach impracticable and doomed to failure. This opposition resulted in the historic break between the armed Palestinian resistance and Palestinian Islamism.³⁰ Subsequent years saw the rise of a young preacher who further developed the new line taken by the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza: Ahmad Yasin. Having founded an educational establishment where he gave Koran lessons and where sports activities were on offer, he quickly gained a good reputation and a considerable following in the Shati refugee camp.³¹

27 | Cf. Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice*, Institute for Palestine Studies, Washington, DC, 2000, 25-29.

28 | Cf. Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker, *Arafat. Hinter dem Mythos*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Munich, 1994, 12-24.

29 | Cf. Baumgarten, n. 22, 28-31.

30 | Cf. Hroub, n. 27.

31 | Cf. Joseph Croitoru, *Hamas. Der islamische Kampf um Palästina*, C. H. Beck, Munich, 2007, 37-42.

However, many Palestinians in Gaza, most of whom were refugees who wanted to return to their homeland as soon as possible, rejected this course. They were in favour of a more active approach including armed combat.

In the West Bank, the Muslim Brotherhood joined with its parent organisation in Jordan and did not establish an independent organisation like the one in Gaza. Its main objective was to attract new members and nurture a generation of religious Palestinians. Its reputation in the highly politicised West Bank suffered because it refused to join other organisations in attacking Israeli targets. Some of the most left-wing secular-nationalist guerrilla units (*Fedayeen*), which also included members of Fatah, openly displayed their atheism and called the Muslim Brothers reactionaries. It was only during the short period between 1968 and 1970, that units of the Muslim Brotherhood attacked Israeli targets from Jordanian soil. The Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza refused these terror operations. When in September 1970 a conflict erupted between the Fedayeen and the Jordanian army due to the increasing Palestinian attacks and the Israeli counterattacks, the Muslim Brotherhood declared itself neutral and stopped all militant activities.³²

Secular-nationalist groups had already accused the Jordanian Muslim Brothers of collaboration with Jordan's King Hussein back in the 1950s. They were indeed the only political movement that was permitted to operate legally in the kingdom while political parties were forbidden.³³ From 1951, they took part in the Jordanian parliamentary elections. When the King got into a dispute with followers of the nationalist Prime Minister Suleiman al-Nabulsi, they organised a number of mass demonstrations in support of the monarch.³⁴ Nevertheless, some Muslim Brothers did not agree with these developments, one of whom was Taquiddin an-Nabhani. He is said to have been one of al-Qassam's followers in his youth, but he left the Brotherhood and founded the Party of Liberation (*Hizb-ut Tahrir*) in 1953. One of the important factors that influenced his

From 1951, the Muslim Brothers in Jordan took part in the Jordanian parliamentary elections. Nevertheless, some Muslim Brothers did not agree with these developments.

32 | Cf. Hroub, n. 27, 29-36.

33 | Cf. Baumgarten, n. 22, 21-22.

34 | Cf. Shadid, n. 25.

decision is thought to have been criticism of the close link between the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jordanian royal house. He also accused the group of not being sufficiently committed to the unity of all Muslims and believed that this was due to the Brotherhood's nationalist mind-set. He thought that Muslims needed to overcome nationalism because it was a European invention intended to split the Muslims and subsequently conquer them.³⁵ An-Nabhani described his movement as a political party whose ideology was Islam. The Islamic world view would be the only option for Muslims, as capitalism was based upon the separation of religion from life, and communism denied the existence of a creator.³⁶ The party's aim was to unite all Muslims in a new caliphate. In doing so, the movement was relying exclusively on peaceful means to achieve this final state.³⁷ The group never participated in the political process as this was equated to legitimising the occupation. The movement has had a stable, albeit modest following in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ever since. However, apart from occasional demonstrations, it hardly attracts public attention.³⁸ After an-Nabhani's death in 1977, Hizb-ut Tahrir developed gradually into a pan-Islamic movement with its stronghold in Central Asia, where it took advantage of the spiritual, ideological and political vacuum created by the collapse of the USSR.

While the Muslim Brotherhood withdrew from armed battle and was involved in politics only indirectly, mainly through activities in the youth, social and welfare sectors, Fatah intensified its attacks on Israel. Over the next few years, this produced the paradoxical situation where the Islamists restricted their activities to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, while secular-nationalist groups pursued an expansionist agenda, taking the conflict across national borders by attacking Israeli targets from bases in Egypt, Syria,

35 | Cf. David Commins, "Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani and the Islamic Liberation Party", *The Muslim World*, 81, 3-4, 1991, 194-211.

36 | Cf. Taqiuddin an-Nabahani, *The System of Islam (Nidham ul Islam)*, Al-Khilafah Publications, London, 2002, 33-72.

37 | Cf. John Horton, "Hizb-ut Tahrir: Nihilism or Realism?", *Journal of Middle Eastern Geopolitics*, 2, 3, 2006, 71-83.

38 | Cf. Sergio Garcia-Arcos, "Hizb Al-Tahrir in Palestine: a new political actor?", *Expert Analysis*, Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, Jun 2013, http://peacebuilding.no/var/ezflow_site/storage/original/application/e9248be56edf96317bda8d7c18f31171.pdf (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

Jordan and the Lebanon. Some of these groups even did not shy away from carrying out attacks in Europe.

CONDITIONS FAVOURABLE TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HAMAS

Subsequent to the Six Day War in June 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the borders between these two territories and Israel opened up. The Muslim Brothers in Gaza and Jordan took advantage of the situation and united to form the Muslim Brotherhood Society in Jordan and Palestine. While Fatah and other groups pursued their War of Attrition against Israel, the Muslim Brothers continued to focus on education and on spreading the faith. However,

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from 1967 onwards, they also started to organise formally, supported by the disillusionment of many Palestinians following the devastating defeat of the Arab armies in the Six Day War. The old ideologies, such as pan-Arabism and socialism, were in crisis. Yasin was convinced that the time for Islam had arrived: "Islam is the refuge for the people in Palestine. After the defeat in 1967, people felt a great need for God."³⁹

Over the next two decades, hundreds of new mosques were built in Gaza and the West Bank. The headquarters of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic Centre (al-Mujamma al-Islami), was founded during this mosque-building period. Set up in Gaza City in the mid-1970s by Yasin, leader of the Brotherhood in Gaza since 1968 and the two young doctors Abd al-Aziz ar-Rantisi and Mahmoud az-Zahar, the Mujamma continued the trend of increasing institutionalisation and politicisation of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁰ A strict vertical hierarchy developed within the Brotherhood, with the executive council and local district committees at the top. There were three categories of members: full members, affiliated members and supporting members.⁴¹ The headquarters controlled a network

39 | "Islam is the refuge for the people in Palestine. After the defeat in 1967, people felt a great need for God." Sa'id al Ghazali, "Islamic Movement versus National Liberation", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17, 2, 1988, 179.

40 | Cf. Croitoru, n. 31, 43-48.

41 | Cf. Shadid, n. 25.

that extended across the entire Gaza Strip and comprised mosques, hospitals, sports clubs and educational establishments. The services and activities provided were heavily subsidised by the Brothers and their foreign donors. The headquarters also coordinated the collection of the Islamic charitable giving, the *zakat*.⁴² In a type of adoption programme, wealthy families took care of poorer households. The Mujamma also tried to mediate in and help resolve conflicts between the different clans in Gaza. An institutional infrastructure of Islamic character developed that would serve as the basis for future political activities.⁴³

The Israeli military occupation force gave the Islamists free reign. They were permitted to hold large demonstrations and continued to receive funds from abroad without any restrictions. The reason for this was hope on the Israeli side that the success of this movement may help weaken militant organisations – an expectation that was fulfilled. The Brotherhood also benefited from a type of Islamic awakening in the Palestinian Territories and a politicisation of Islam following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Surveys from the 1970s and 1980s confirm a rise in religiosity among Palestinians. In an opinion poll between August 1983 and February 1984, 49 per cent of respondents professed themselves to be strongly religious, a further 20.2 per cent to be moderately religious. The number of those professing themselves to be strongly religious was considerably greater in Gaza than in the West Bank. Of those aged between 25 and 30, 14.7 per cent stated that they prayed more frequently than just five years previously.⁴⁴

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42 | The use of the proceeds from this voluntary charitable giving is controlled by local committees in Gaza and in the West Bank to this day. To what extent Hamas benefits is not clear. But it is said that the Hamas government has been making efforts lately to coordinate the work of the zakat committees more strongly. Cf. Roy, n. 14, 113-118; Monika Bolliger, "Islamismus und Macht im Gazastreifen", *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 3 Jun 2013, <http://nzz.ch/aktuell/international/uebersicht/1.18091754> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

43 | Cf. Roy, n. 14, 70-95.

44 | Cf. Shadid, n. 25.

Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood was able to begin its fight for supremacy in Gaza from a position of relative strength at the end of the 1970s. The Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza began a systematic campaign of suppressing political and social organisations that they identified as secular. This conflict occasionally took the form of a cultural battle. At

Both in Gaza and in the West Bank, increasing numbers of demonstrators appeared brandishing a copy of the Koran and shouting: "Allah is great".

social events such as weddings they replaced nationalist phrases and symbols with religious ones. They started to bring Islamic literature into circulation and increased their presence during protests against the Israeli occupation. Both in Gaza and in the West Bank, increasing numbers of demonstrators appeared brandishing a copy of the Koran and shouting: "Allah is great".⁴⁵ Violence was employed regularly, for instance at universities in the West Bank, which were under the control of secular-nationalist groups.⁴⁶ At the same time, they remained open to political participation. However, unlike the situation in the West Bank, where local elections took place in 1972 and 1976, local councillors in Gaza were appointed by the Israeli military occupying force.⁴⁷ This resulted in traditional power structures being reinforced, denying the Muslim Brotherhood the opportunity of influencing local politics by way of political mobilisation. But when elections did take place, the Brothers did not show any reluctance in participating in the political process. During the student elections at the Islamic University of Gaza in January 1983, the Islamic block (al-Qutla al-Islamiyya), the list of the Muslim Brotherhood, gained 51 per cent of the votes.⁴⁸ The Brothers also performed well in the student elections in Nablus and Hebron.⁴⁹

45 | Cf. Paul Hofmann, "Autonomy Is A Dirty Word To the Arabs Of Nablus", *The New York Times*, 1 Jul 1979, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive/pdf?res=FB0B13F83D5C11728DDA80894DF405B898BF1D3> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

46 | Cf. Shadid, n. 25.

47 | Cf. Aude Signoles, "Local Government in Palestine", *Focales collection*, 2010, 16-17, <http://www.afd.fr/webdav/site/afd/shared/PUBLICATIONS/RECHERCHE/Scientifiques/Focales/02-VA-Focales.pdf> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

48 | Cf. Filiu, n. 16.

49 | Cf. Baumgarten, n. 22, 45.

Since the end of the 1970s, a serious competitor to the Muslim Brotherhood has emerged on the Islamist side as well. Fathi Shikaki from Rafah in Gaza encountered radical Muslim thinking while studying medicine in Cairo, and the Islamic Revolution in Iran inspired him to become active himself.⁵⁰ Contrary to the Muslim Brotherhood, he considered the battle for Palestine a matter that concerned the entire Islamic world and had to be primarily conducted by military means. He founded several relatively small cells, which were subsequently collectively referred to by the term Islamic Jihad (*al-Jihad al-Islami*). In collaboration with the group's spiritual leader, Abd al-Aziz Odeh, he initially concentrated on recruiting new followers. The recruitment drive was particularly effective among young Palestinians who were dissatisfied with the compromises made by the PLO factions and the stance of the Muslim Brotherhood, which they perceived as passive. The group considered itself a vanguard and described the path taken by the Muslim Brotherhood as "unrevolutionary" and misguided. The members thought of themselves as the true heirs of al-Qassam – with the Koran in one hand and a weapon in the other.⁵¹ They were not interested in engaging in social or political activities. Islamic Jihad has still not developed a political profile or taken part in any elections and it was never able to develop a following beyond its organisational core. The group receives most of its support from the Iranian regime.⁵²

Fathi Shikaki founded several relatively small cells, which were subsequently collectively referred to by the term Islamic Jihad (*al-Jihad al-Islami*).

50 | Cf. Christoph Reuter, *My Life is a Weapon. A Modern History of Suicide Bombing*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Woodstock, 2004, 94-96.

51 | Cf. Elie Rekhess, "The Iranian Impact on the Islamic Jihad Movement in the Gaza Strip", in: David Menashri (ed.), *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1990, 189-205, <http://jewish-studies.northwestern.edu/docs/rekhess-iran.pdf> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

52 | As the exiled leadership of Hamas began to withdraw from Syria from the end of 2011 and joined the side of the rebels fighting against the regime, Iran cut its funding to Hamas. Instead, increasing amounts of money are flowing from Teheran to Islamic Jihad, which is continuing to support Damascus as is Iran. Iran appears to consider the group to be a more reliable partner now than the independently acting Hamas. Cf. Fares Akram, "In Gaza, Iran Finds an Ally More Agreeable Than Hamas", *The New York Times*, 31 Jul 2013, <http://nytimes.com/2013/08/01/world/middleeast/in-gaza-iran-finds-a-closer-ally-than-hamas.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

Passive resistance against the occupation was followed by the founding of the first armed cells. This radical change of course was controlled mainly by Yasin.

For the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza and in the West Bank, the founding of Islamic Jihad became a catalyst that spurred the transformation from an organisation engaged mainly in social and partly in political activities into a group that also engaged in military activities. Passive resistance against the occupation was followed by the founding of the first armed cells. This radical change of course was controlled mainly by Yasin, who procured weapons and organised paramilitary training with the help of other leadership figures. The escalation in the mid-1980s made it necessary for the Muslim Brotherhood to reconcile its long-term goal of changing society with the armed struggle. Cells with names such as Group for Jihad and Call to Islam (*Madjmuat al-Jihad wa-l-Dawa*) were founded. These were independent of each other and pursued two objectives. The first was to fight against the occupying power (which developed slowly). The second was to identify Palestinian collaborators, criminals, drug dealers and alcohol sellers, with all the more vigour.⁵³

ARMED STRUGGLE AND TERRORISM

On 8 December 1987, a fateful traffic accident took place in Gaza, in which an Israeli truck collided with a Palestinian share taxi. Whether it was a military truck or whether one or two share taxis were involved in the accident is not clear to the present day. The undisputed fact is that four Palestinian labourers died. After the accident, spontaneous mass demonstrations took place across the Palestinian Territories, which became the trademark of the First Intifada (1987-1993). The accident was reinterpreted as a planned act of revenge for the killing of an Israeli in Gaza the previous day and would be remembered as the culmination of a creeping escalation that had begun years before. There had been repeated incidents of Palestinian attacks and Israeli reprisals during previous years, which were happening at ever shorter intervals. The root causes of this deterioration were the ongoing aggravation of social conditions in the Palestinian Territories, increasing dependence on the Israeli economy and its labour market,⁵⁴ the

53 | Cf. Shadid, n. 25.

54 | The political economist Sara Roy uses the term "de-development" for the economic situation in Gaza. She blamed Israeli policies in Gaza, which she said were characterised by low ▶

creeping land grab by Israel to build new settlements, and a highly political young generation.⁵⁵

The leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood convened immediately to discuss how to deal with the new situation. Pressure from the streets made it essential to confront the occupation head on. The organisational response was the founding of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya), whose acronym Hamas was subsequently used as its designation. The name also implies a meaning like "zeal". In an early pamphlet, the founding of Hamas was justified not only with the occupation of Palestine but also with the PLO's increasing willingness to compromise.⁵⁶ The newly founded organisation provided the Muslim Brotherhood with an additional organisational vehicle. If the violence had dissipated quickly, the Muslim Brothers would have been able to dissolve Hamas and dedicate themselves once more to their traditional goals as the Muslim Brotherhood. But when the demonstrations and strikes showed no sign of abating, the Brothers decided to designate Hamas irrevocably as a branch of the Palestinian Brotherhood. The subsequent period saw the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas gradually becoming equated.

When the demonstrations and strikes showed no sign of abating, the Brothers decided to designate Hamas irrevocably as a branch of the Palestinian Brotherhood.

Their flyers and writings, and the Hamas Charter published in August 1988, illustrated once again the two-faced nature of the organisation. On the one hand, they put forward openly religious, anti-Semitic and misogynous arguments. The authors used stereotypes from the tradition of Christian-European anti-Semitism where Jews were characterised as being all-powerful. They were attributed all the evil in the world, from the two world wars to the

levels of investment in social and economic infrastructure, discriminatory tax legislation, dissimilar treatment of Israeli and Palestinian producers, control of the traffic in goods and land grabbing, amongst other things. She explained the modest degree of prosperity after 1967 by the relatively high wages that Palestinians received in Israel as well as money transfers from Palestinians working abroad. But she believed that the positive impacts were limited as these incomes were neither generated nor invested in Gaza. Cf. Sara Roy, "The Gaza Strip: A Case of Economic De-Development", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 17, 1, 1987, 56-88.

55 | Cf. Croitoru, n. 31, 65-74; Baumgarten, n. 22, 37-48.

56 | Cf. Hroub, n. 27, 292-301.

Hamas was a Palestinian movement aimed at setting up an Islamic state in the entire territory of historic Palestine. As such it was following in the footsteps of al-Qassam.

present-day drug trade. The writings also mentioned the anti-Semitic fabrications of The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. As the threat posed by Zionism was supposedly global, the response also had to be global. On the other hand, strongly nationalist arguments were put forward at the same time. Hamas was a Palestinian movement aimed at setting up an Islamic state in the entire territory of historic Palestine. As such it was following in the footsteps of al-Qassam. Nationalism was described as an integral part of the religious ideology of Hamas.⁵⁷ Palestine forms the core of this world view, surrounded by three concentric circles: the Arab world, the Islamic world and the rest of the world.⁵⁸ Guided by these beliefs, Hamas was in direct competition with the PLO, which claimed the monopoly on the "national liberation battle". However, with the proclamation of an independent Palestinian state in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, which was made on 15 November 1988, it became clear that the PLO was way ahead of Hamas regarding the willingness to make concessions and pragmatic decisions. At that time, the two-state solution was still totally unthinkable to Hamas. Over the years and particularly during the parliamentary elections of January 2006, the Charter lost a great deal of its significance for Hamas, but in spite of several announcements, it was never changed or formally toned down.

During the years of the Intifada, the military influence exerted by Hamas steadily increased. Although Hamas continued to take part regularly in elections at universities, unions and chambers of commerce, the militant struggle played a dominant role. What started as demonstrations soon progressed to stone throwing and attacks with Molotov cocktails, and culminated in knife attacks, use of firearms and abductions. One event that took on central significance for the escalation involved clashes at the Temple Mount, the al-Haram ash-Sharif, a place in East Jerusalem that is sacrosanct to Muslims. Here Israeli police shot dead 17 Palestinians in October 1990. Several months later, the armed wing of Hamas was founded, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. As the situation in the Palestinian Territories

57 | Cf. Baumgarten, n. 22, 207-226.

58 | Cf. Khaled Hroub, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, Pluto Press, London and New York, 2010, 22-23.

escalated, secret talks between Israel and the PLO got underway in Norway on 20 January 1993, which would later result in the Oslo Accords. These gave the Palestinians a degree of autonomy for the first time and facilitated the establishment of the PA. They were also intended to lay the foundation for a peace agreement and the establishment of a Palestinian state. It appeared that the PLO's willingness to enter into compromise would finally bear fruit. With its maximum demands, Hamas risked becoming marginalised. Once Israel had declared Hamas a terrorist organisation in 1989, leading figures of the organisation were arrested or exiled, including Yasin, the group's spiritual leader. The head of the politburo, Musa Abu Marzuq, was arrested in the USA in 1995, where he had been living for several years.⁵⁹



Khaled Meshal: After the Oslo Accords, the new head of the politburo and other members of the leadership decided to separate the political and social wing from the military wing. | Source: Trango ©.

THE LONG ROAD TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

After the Oslo Accords, Hamas found itself in an existential crisis. The new head of the politburo Khaled Meshal and other members of the leadership decided to separate the

59 | Cf. Steven Greenhouse, "U.S. Detains Arab Tied to Militants", *The New York Times*, 28 Jul 1995, <http://nytimes.com/1995/07/28/world/us-detains-arab-tied-to-militants> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

political and social wing from the military wing.⁶⁰ In future, only a few of the top people from the political wing became involved in military activities. To them, popularity, legitimacy as well as visibility – in short: political survival – were crucial reasons for their course of action.⁶¹ This picked up on a trend towards greater political participation, which had begun back in the early 1990s.

In 1992, Hamas drafted an internal document, which started from the premise that an agreement between Israel and the PLO was possible. This could entail certain autonomous rights, such as the holding of national elections. Written in the style of a political memorandum, it described

Hamas wavered between taking part in elections and actively opposing them. The chances of being able to prevent elections by violent means were considered low.

several potential scenarios. Hamas wavered between taking part in elections and actively opposing them. The chances of being able to prevent elections by violent means were considered low. A mere boycott would result in political isolation, while participation could be construed as acceptance of the Israeli-Palestinian agreement. The chances of electoral success were also judged to be low.⁶² But when the violence continued after the conclusion of the Oslo Accords, Hamas initially remained on its military course. While Hamas had succeeded in preserving coherence among its disparate following – urban youth from an impoverished background, pious members of the middle class and an Islamic intelligentsia – during the first few years of the Intifada, it subsequently favoured open terror, which was considered controversial in the group itself.⁶³ In February 1994, the Israeli soldier Baruch Goldstein killed 29 Muslims who had come to pray at the Abraham Mosque in Hebron. During the next few weeks, Hamas responded with a wave of terror attacks, including a suicide attack that

60 | Cf. Roger Gaess, "Interviews from Gaza: What Hamas Wants", *Middle East Policy* 9, 4, 2002, 102-115.

61 | Cf. Jeroen Gunning, "Peace with Hamas? The transforming potential of political participation", *International Affairs* 80, 2, 2004, 233-255, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2004.00381.x/pdf> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

62 | Cf. Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, "Participation without Presence: Hamas, the Palestinian Authority and the Politics of Negotiated Coexistence", *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, 3, 2002, 1-26.

63 | Cf. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad. The Trail of Political Islam*, I. B. Tauris, London, 2006, 323-334.

led to the death of more than a dozen Israeli civilians.⁶⁴ However, the conflict with the newly founded PA, which was dominated by Fatah, also intensified. In response to pressure from Israel, but also in the knowledge of the Islamists' destructive influence, the Palestinian leadership adopted even tougher measures against Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In November 1994, at least 14 demonstrators were shot dead by Palestinian security forces during a protest in Gaza that had been organised by these two groups.

It was in this climate of violence and inadequate implementation of the Oslo Accords, that the first Palestinian presidential and parliamentary elections took place on 20 January 1996. Hamas had decided not to take part. It called for a boycott, but did not take any action to prevent people from casting their votes. In fact, it motivated individual Islamists to stand as independent candidates in the parliamentary elections. At least five of them were voted onto the Palestinian Legislative Council.⁶⁵ Palestinian leader Arafat had previously taken all possible steps to exclude opposition parties from the elections, or at least to minimise their chances. From the electoral system to the boundaries of the electoral constituencies and to the election campaign modalities, everything was skewed to guarantee Fatah's victory. It was ultimately not the religious nature of Hamas but rather political calculation that caused it not to become involved in the political process.

From the electoral system to the boundaries of the electoral constituencies and to the election campaign modalities, everything was skewed to guarantee Fatah's victory.

The period up to the year 2000 was characterised by peace negotiations that produced little result, while tensions between Hamas and the PA were rising. Following Hamas attacks on Israel, hundreds of Islamists were arrested by the PA on various occasions, even though influential Hamas members had voiced criticism of military activities. Those arrested included some members of the leadership. Torture was regularly being used in jails. The PA took over mosques that had close links to Hamas and closed

64 | Cf. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Fatal Terrorist Attacks in Israel Since the DOP (Sept 1993)", 2000, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Terrorism/Palestinian/Pages/Fatal%20Terrorist%20Attacks%20in%20Israel%20Since%20the%20DOP%20-S.aspx> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

65 | Cf. Mishal and Sela, n. 62.

their social institutions.⁶⁶ However, the frustration felt by the Palestinians played into the hands of Hamas, which insisted on its maximum demands, but was weakened by Israel and the PA. Nevertheless, even the Islamists were surprised when a new Intifada was triggered by the failed Camp David negotiations and the provocative visit by the Israeli opposition politician Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount in the Old City of East Jerusalem on 28 September 2000. Initially disorganised and then supported by Fatah, the insurrection ran on for several months without involvement of Hamas. The group was hesitant, as it had been in the case of the First Intifada. It did not wish to jeopardise its network of social and charitable institutions. However,

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when the violence reached a level exceeding anything that had gone before, and popular demand for revenge became ever greater, Hamas responded with a series of suicide attacks that killed hundreds of Israelis. Many leading Hamas figures, including the founding members Yasin, ar-Rantisi and Ismail Abu Shanab, were subsequently killed in targeted strikes by the Israeli Army. All the positive signs of the peace process disappeared and there was nobody in the PA who contemplated a second round of national elections. Large parts of the political infrastructure were destroyed during the course of the insurrection that lasted until 2005.

It was back in the era before Arafat's death in November 2004 that a decision was taken to hold local elections in the Palestinian Territories for the first time since 1976. Hamas immediately decided to participate. It had demanded local elections to be held since the mid-1990s. Arafat may well have postponed these elections for this very reason, as he feared that the Islamists would perform well in them. Hamas justified its decision to take part with the nature of the elections. It stated that there had been local council elections even before the Oslo Accords. Unlike the parliamentary and presidential elections, these had a direct impact on the scope and type of services provided to the people. Therefore, it would be not so much a political act but an executive one.⁶⁷ But Hamas' calculation was also

66 | Cf. Wendy Kristianasen, "Challenge and Counterchallenge: Hamas's Response to Oslo", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, 3, 1999, 19-36.

67 | Cf. Mishal and Sela, n. 62.

based on the assumption that its own chances of success had improved with the failure of the Oslo process, the bloodshed and the expansion of its own social infrastructure, which had considerably increased its importance due to the destruction of the official institutions of the PA. New local representatives were elected in over 260 communities in four phases from December 2004 to December 2005. While Fatah won in approximately 120 communities, Hamas was able to decide the election in its favour in some 80 communities. In the major cities of Nablus, Jenin and Qalqilya, it would provide the mayor from that time onwards. In the historically Christian cities of Bethlehem and Ramallah, left-wing candidates were elected with Hamas' support. There were no elections in its strongholds of Gaza City and Hebron.⁶⁸

This positive outcome was a surprise even for Hamas itself.⁶⁹ It prompted its decision to also take part in the parliamentary elections in 2006. Back in the presidential elections in 2005, Hamas had decided not to put forward

During the short period up to the elections, the Islamists had to prove that they had the capacity to govern. For the first time they formed part of the PA system.

a candidate of its own knowing that, in view of Arafat's recent death, whichever candidate Fatah put forward was bound to win. During the short period up to the elections, the Islamists now had to prove that they had the capacity to govern. For the first time they now formed part of the PA system. They were responsible for thousands of local employees and they had to provide services for over a million Palestinians. While the local authorities only have limited decision-making powers, they are one of the biggest employers in the Palestinian Territories and therefore subject to patronage. There were reports of Hamas giving preferential treatment to its own followers when filling posts, as Fatah had done for decades. There was also little change in other areas. Hardly any political or ideological debate about what was permitted in interactions with the PA and with Israel was led. Where it was necessary, contacts with Israel continued in order to guarantee the

68 | Cf. Arnon Regular, "1.1m Palestinians live in local councils controlled by Hamas", *Haaretz*, 18 Dec 2005, <http://haaretz.com/print-edition/news/1.176882> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

69 | Mahmoud az-Zahar may be an exception. In an interview in 2002, he expressed his conviction that Hamas would win free local and national elections. Cf. Gaess, "Interviews from Gaza: What Hamas Wants", n. 60.

provision of basic services. The smooth handover in many local councils was also facilitated by the fact that Hamas had already been involved in local politics through its widespread social network, albeit at an informal level. While international observers praised the pragmatism and effectiveness of the new local authorities, there was also some criticism. Occasional reports about the cancellation of cultural events raised fears that Hamas may be pursuing the Islamisation of society.⁷⁰

VICTORY FROM A STANDING START

The last survey before the parliamentary elections on 25 January 2006 already indicated that Hamas would perform well. In the opinion poll conducted between 17 and 19 January, 42 per cent of voters stated they would vote for the Fatah list and 35 per cent for the Hamas "List for Change and Reform". A further seven per cent were undecided.⁷¹ Due to the election system, the winning margin of only a few per cent on that day was sufficient to give Hamas an overwhelming victory. With a voter turnout of some 78 per cent, Hamas was able to win 74 of the 132 seats on the Palestinian Legislative Council, while Fatah

Fatah focused on the peace process in its national election campaign, but most voters did not consider this a priority in view of the lack of progress.

merely won 45. Apart from the election system, which favours the largest party, there were other reasons for the Islamists' landslide victory. Fatah focused on the peace process in its national election campaign, but most voters did not consider this a priority in view of the lack of progress. Many voters were also dissatisfied with decades of Fatah rule. Hamas exploited the dissatisfaction with government action in areas such as the fight against corruption, the rule of law and security, by presenting itself as a clean organisation. Added to this was the quarrelling within the secular-nationalist camp, which attracted 56 per cent of the votes. The different parties of the PLO did not manage to agree on joint candidates before the election,

70 | Cf. International Crisis Group (ICG), "Enter Hamas: The Challenges of Political Integration", *Middle East Report* 49, 18 Jan 2006, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/049-enter-hamas-the-challenges-of-political-integration.aspx> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

71 | Cf. Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR), "Special Public Opinion Poll on the Upcoming Palestinian Elections", 2006, <http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2006/pre-electionsjan06.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

while Hamas demonstrated a high degree of internal unity and discipline.⁷²

In February 2006, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who had been elected in January 2005, asked the top Hamas candidate, Ismail Haniyeh, to form a government. It soon transpired that, despite Haniyeh's appeal for all parties to work together to form a government, the old feuds persisted. Fatah quickly decided to go into opposition, while other parties negotiated with Hamas, but ultimately did not join the government either. It remains unclear whether international pressure played a role in all this.⁷³ At the end of March that year, the parliament gave the Hamas government, which only included a small number of technocrats, a vote of confidence. It was subsequently sworn in by President Abbas. However, the Islamists soon accused Fatah of never having accepted its defeat. There were more and more incidents of fighting between different

Palestinian factions and attacks in the Gaza Strip. Although Hamas and Fatah concluded a reconciliation agreement and agreed on the formation of a unity government, the mutual distrust resulted in heavy fighting in

The mutual distrust between Hamas and Fatah resulted in heavy fighting in June 2007. Within a few days Hamas brought the entire Gaza Strip under its control.

June 2007. Within a few days Hamas brought the entire Gaza Strip under its control. Many Fatah members were arrested or fled. This was the beginning of the political split of the Palestinian Territories into two political unities, with the Gaza Strip being controlled by Hamas and the West Bank dominated by Fatah. The PA dissolved the political, social and charitable network of associations, clubs and mosques that Hamas had built up in the West Bank. Many Hamas members, including some MPs and mayors, were arrested by Israel or by the PA, Hamas publications were banned and for a long time, Hamas followers were banned from appearing in public or from demonstrating. Hamas took similar action against Fatah in Gaza. Attempts at bringing about a reunification of the two territories have so far failed, but both parties are now permitted to demonstrate a limited presence in the territory of the respective other party. Hopes for a reconciliation between Hamas and

72 | Cf. PCPSR, "Results of PSR Exit Polls For Palestinian PLC Elections", 2006, <http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2006/exitplcfulljan06e.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

73 | Cf. Baumgarten, n. 22, 181-184.

Fatah appear to have diminished once again of late, with the deposing of the Islamist Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi, who had been a high-ranking member of the Muslim Brotherhood until his election, and the resumption of peace negotiations between Palestinians and Israelis in July 2013. Apparently there have been deliberations within Fatah as to whether Gaza should be classified as a “rebel province” to justify cutting PA payments to Gaza and opening up the possibility of reclaiming the territory by force, if necessary.⁷⁴

HANDLING GOVERNMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Interviews with members of the leadership, the election programme for the parliamentary elections in 2006 and the government programme of the short-lived unity government, show a picture of a slowly reforming Hamas, which is attempting to reconcile its religious and nationalist legacies.⁷⁵ In an interview back in 2002 Yasin, the spiritual leader of Hamas, offered recognition of Israel under the condition that the Israeli side would recognise the rights

74 | Cf. Jodi Rudoren, “Pressure Rises on Hamas as Patrons’ Support Fades”, *The New York Times*, 23 Aug 2013, <http://nytimes.com/2013/08/24/world/middleeast/pressure-mounts-on-hamas-as-economic-lifelines-are-severed.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013). The emergence of the group Tamarrud (Rebellion) in Gaza is also hampering the relationship between the two sides. A group by the same name had previously advocated the overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. This had subsequently encouraged the founding of a Tamarrud group in the Palestinian Territories as well, which criticised the Israeli occupation, Fatah and Hamas. One of several Gaza variants of the group, which calls itself “Rebellion against Injustice in Gaza” in full, put up a video on YouTube on 18 August in which it called for major demonstrations in Gaza on 11 November to overthrow the Hamas regime. Amongst other things, they accused the Islamists of murder, torture and corruption. 11 November is the day of Yasser Arafat’s death. Hamas is accusing Fatah and the Egyptian secret service of being behind the group. See also the group’s Facebook page: <http://fb.com/tamradgaza1> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

75 | A number of authors compare the change Hamas is undergoing with the transformation of Fatah or the PLO between the 1960s and 1980s. Strikingly, the strategy to achieve the liberation of Palestine has undergone similar changes in both cases. While the armed struggle was considered the only option for establishing a state of their own for a long time, other options were subsequently added. Cf. Michael Irving Jensen, *The Political Ideology of Hamas. A Grassroots Perspective*, I. B. Tauris, London and New York, 2009, 147-150.

of the Palestinian people. The establishment of an Islamic state should be left to the democratic process. Abu Shanab, founding member of Hamas, has made similar statements. If Israel were to fully withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967, they would give up the armed struggle. After the founding of a Palestinian state and the resolution of the refugee issue on the basis of UN General Assembly Resolution 194, the Palestinians would be engaged for an entire generation in building a functioning state. During this time, it would be possible to maintain good relations with Israel. It would be up to future generations to decide what should happen after that, while existing agreements would have to be honoured.⁷⁶

While the right to armed resistance and the demand for Sharia to be used as the main source of legislation are mentioned in the election programme, it is mostly free from anti-Semitic polemic. Instead, the points stressed include the need to protect minority rights, to uphold women's rights and to guarantee freedom of opinion. The government programme speaks of setting up democratic institutions, separation of the three powers and the upholding of civil rights. It further respects the agreements made by the PLO, recognises the prerogative of the PLO to conduct negotiations, and mentions the possibility of a final agreement with Israel.⁷⁷

The government programme speaks of setting up democratic institutions, separation of the three powers and the upholding of civil rights.

But the Islamists' wording and writings should not mislead anybody about their desire for power. The fact that the splitting of the Palestinian Territories resulted in the PA withdrawing from Gaza's institutional framework and that most employees were paid by Ramallah for doing no work enabled Hamas to take over power smoothly.⁷⁸ The security apparatus was the first to be taken over to guarantee Hamas the "monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force",⁷⁹ which Max Weber considered necessary

76 | Cf. Gaess, n. 60.

77 | Cf. Michael Bröning, *Political Parties in Palestine. Leadership and Thought*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2013, 15-56.

78 | Cf. Yezid Sayigh, "Hamas Rule in Gaza: Three Years On", *Middle East Brief* 41, Brandeis University, Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Mar 2010, <http://brandeis.edu/crown/publications/meb/MEB41.pdf> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

79 | Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, Duncker & Humblot, Berlin, 2010, 8.

for establishing a state. The armed wing of Hamas took on the responsibilities of a classic army, whose operations are directed outwards. Hamas repeatedly permitted more radical groups to carry out terror attacks on Israel or even provided support. Occasionally, it conducted direct attacks itself, which were justified with religious arguments and with the need to take revenge. This conduct, which is continuing to the present day, caused several devastating escalations of violence between the armed wing of Hamas and the Israeli Army, during which the Islamists' institutional infrastructure suffered severe damage while never being destroyed altogether. Many of these bouts of violence were ended by informal ceasefires, which Hamas remarkably also justified partly with Islamic principles.⁸⁰ Hamas reorganised its internal security structures. Fatah is not the only group who denies the factual existence of an official separation between the al-Qassam Brigades and the police force.⁸¹

In other areas, the transformation has proved much more complicated. The legislative body in Gaza was not operational as representatives from other parliamentary groups refused to take part in sessions, and many Hamas parliamentarians were arrested by Israel after the group had abducted the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. As a result, there is now a rump parliament that approves bills and annuls decrees by President Abbas, even when the quorum of 67 MPs has not been reached. Hamas argues that the quorum is in fact being achieved as deputies cast votes on behalf of jailed MPs and the Hamas representatives in the West Bank are integrated through various means of communication. Initially, approved bills were sent to President Abbas. However, as he never responded, Hamas went ahead and

80 | Hamas did not only prove to be pragmatic where the use of religious arguments to justify violence and ceasefires was concerned. It also uses other strings of arguments such as references to the purported achievements of their fighting strategy to advocate the resumption or ceasing of violence, depending on circumstances. Cf. Joas Wagemakers, "Legitimizing Pragmatism: Hamas' Framing Efforts From Militancy to Moderation and Back?", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, 3, 2010, 357-377.

81 | Cf. Jonathan Spyer, "Facts on the Ground: The Growing Power of Hamas's Gaza Leadership", *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 16, 2, 2012, 44-51, <http://gloria-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Spyer-YA-au-PDF.pdf> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

implemented the laws, publishing them in its own version of a law gazette. In doing so, it is relying on a legal clause stating that laws can come into force if the President does not respond to them. Hamas has thus published laws directly since 2009, as it considers the office of the President vacant in the absence of elections. However, the laws are limited to the ones absolutely necessary as extensive legislative work may cause unrest among a population that longs for political reconciliation. This is also why the work on a new penal code has been postponed indefinitely.⁸²

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After the split, the judicial system in the Gaza Strip was incapable of functioning and the Hamas executive therefore swiftly took control. This enabled the courts to resume work.⁸³ A newly established High Justice Council is responsible for the appointment of judges. With a law that came into force in February 2008, permanent military courts as well as a Supreme Military Court were established. These deal not only with cases that involve members of the security forces but also with cases involving civilians who are accused of collaborating with enemy forces, for instance, which carries the death penalty. This has created a functioning judicial system, but one that has serious shortcomings. The penal system is characterised by people being arrested without warrants, the absence of legal counsel and torture. Lawyers who are critical towards Hamas must reckon with repression that can occasionally turn violent.⁸⁴ Thus, a genuine division of power between executive, legislature and judiciary only exists on paper.

82 | Cf. Nathan J. Brown, "Gaza Five Years On: Hamas Settles In", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 11 Jun 2012, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2012/06/11/gaza-five-years-on-hamas-settles-in/birb> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

83 | Cf. ICG, "Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas", *Middle East Report* 73, 13 Mar 2008, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/072-ruling-palestine-i-gaza-under-hamas.aspx> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

84 | Cf. Bill Van Esveld, *Abusive System. Failures of Criminal Justice in Gaza*, Human Rights Watch, 2012, http://hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/iopt1012ForUpload_0.pdf (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

There are now approximately 50,000 employees working for Hamas. It is said that their salaries make up two thirds of the Hamas budget of some 900 million U.S. dollars.

The bureaucratic apparatus in Gaza was staffed by loyal officials.⁸⁵ There are now approximately 50,000 employees working for Hamas. It is said that their salaries make

up two thirds of the Hamas budget of some 900 million U.S. dollars. There does not seem to be a separate Islamic economic structure in which Hamas could accommodate followers and generate profits.⁸⁶ Hamas' main sources of income are private and state aid payments from abroad,⁸⁷ taxes on local businesses and revenues from operating the tunnels.⁸⁸ Before the Egyptian Army began to destroy many tunnels in the summer of 2013, the extensive system of tunnels between Gaza and the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula comprised several hundreds of subterranean shafts. Employing tens of thousands of workers, the tunnel industry had been the largest private employer in Gaza until that time. The tunnels were used to smuggle people and weapons; but their true significance lies in the importation of goods. Until the beginning of 2013, the tunnels were used to bring in hundreds of thousands of litres of fuel a day, as well as thousands of tonnes of gravel, cement and steel for the construction industry.⁸⁹ They are controlled by the

85 | Conversation between the authors and Khalil Shikaki, Director of the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, a long-time partner of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Ramallah, on 2 May 2013 in Ramallah.

86 | Cf. Roy, n. 14, 144-151.

87 | Because of the above-mentioned Hamas support of the Syrian rebels, the Iranian regime, which continues to support the Syrian government, cut its financial support for Hamas massively. While Iran is said to have supported Hamas with annual payments of some 250 million U.S. dollars in the past, now apparently only 15 to 20 per cent of that amount goes to the Islamists. Cf. Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Cornered Hamas looks back at Iran, Hezbollah", *The Daily Star*, 21 Aug 2013, <http://dailystar.com.lb/News/Analysis/2013/Aug-21/228065.ashx> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

88 | Cf. Fares Akram, "Gaza's Economy Suffers From Egyptian Military's Crackdown", *The New York Times*, 24 Jul 2013, <http://nytimes.com/2013/07/25/world/middleeast/gazas-economy-suffers-from-egyptian-crackdown.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

89 | From a conversation between the authors and Mohammed Saleem Skaik, Programme Manager of the Palestinian Trade Center in Gaza, on 26 Mar 2013 in Gaza City. In spite of the short-term rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the distrust persists between the Egyptian security forces and secret service forces on the one hand and the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas on the other side. After the Islamist President Mohamed Morsi was deposed in 2013, the security forces cracked down more strongly on the tunnel-based commerce, >

Tunnel Affairs Commission of the Hamas government. The Commission publishes health and safety guidelines, organises licences for the construction of tunnels and monitors the payment of fees, customs duties and taxes.⁹⁰



Yasin (right) in 2002 offered recognition of Israel under the condition that the Israeli side would recognise the rights of the Palestinian people. | Source: © Fayez Nureldine, picture alliance / AP Photo.

The fact that this comprehensive wealth of power has not resulted in the purposeful Islamisation of the political system and of society reflects the political and nationalist nature of Hamas and illustrates its pragmatism and its flexibility.⁹¹ Hamas had, in fact, hardly any choice other than to adapt, to learn from its mistakes and to respond

which meant severe financial losses for Hamas and resulted in a fuel shortage and price rises. In addition, a media campaign against Hamas was conducted in Egypt. Hamas was said to be an organisational and political part of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and complicit in the escalation of violence in Egypt. Similar allegations had already been made under former President Hosni Mubarak, but these had always been denied by Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood. Cf. Adam Morrow and Khaled Moussa al-Omrani, "Mideast: Brothers in Thought, Not in Arms", Inter Press Service, 11 Jan 2009, <http://ipsnews.net/2009/01/mideast-brothers-in-thought-not-in-arms> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

90 | Cf. Nicolas Pelham, "Gaza's Tunnel Phenomenon: The Unintended Dynamics of Israel's Siege", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, 4, 2012, 6-31.

91 | Cf. Roy, n. 14, 161-189.

adequately to the population's criticism as it was forced to produce results within a short period of time due to the abrupt transfer of power. It was therefore hardly ever in a position to give regard to its own fundamental principles.⁹² It thus did not modify the existing Basic Law, and women were recruited to join the police force and the judicial system. At many events put on by Hamas, a traditional dance called *dabke* is performed, nationalist music is played and Hamas officials stand up for the national anthem. All that would have been unthinkable several years ago as these symbols are associated with the secular-nationalist camp.⁹³

There is, however, a creeping proliferation of conservative-religious values and behaviours taking place. Religious scholars close to Hamas are exerting pressure on the population and the administration with their edicts. In schools, religious education is playing an ever more important role. Teachers are pressurising female pupils to submit to the rules of the Islamist dress code.⁹⁴ There are at least three identifiable causes for this:

First of all, Gaza has been clearly more Islamic-conservative than the West Bank, whose population is partly Christian. Some among the Hamas voters expect the new regime to take this into account. In some instances, the new laws and regulations are merely a matter of formalising existing realities. The Hamas parliament in Gaza thus approved new education legislation that introduced gender segregation from the age of ten. However, this regulation only affects a few of the 50 private schools, as the segregation of boys and girls has existed for a long time already in the 398 state schools and the 245 schools run by UNRWA.⁹⁵

92 | Cf. Menachem Klein, "Hamas in Power", *The Middle East Journal* 61, 3, 2007, 442-459.

93 | Cf. ICG, "Radical Islam in Gaza", *Middle East Report* 104, 29 Mar 2011, 26-27, <http://crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/104-radical-islam-in-gaza.aspx> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

94 | Cf. ICG, n. 83.

95 | Cf. Costanza Spocci and Eleanora Vio, "Under Hamas, No More Coed Classes in Gaza", *The Atlantic*, 23 May 2013, <http://theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/05/under-hamas-no-more-coed-classes-in-gaza/276163> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

Overzealous officials and members of the security forces, who act on their own initiative, are a second reason for the Islamisation trend. They want to demonstrate their allegiance to the assumed values of the new people in power. This includes things such as the banning of various books by employees of the Ministry of the Interior as well as penalties imposed on hairdressers where male employees cut women's hair.

A third way of facilitating creeping Islamisation is the purposeful probing of new areas of Islamic activity. Hamas introduces initiatives and pursues them if there is no resistance. If they meet with strong protest, controversial regulations (such as the banning of smoking hookahs in public or the demand that female lawyers must cover up in courts of law) are reversed or not implemented. What benefits the Islamists in these situations is that their initiatives rarely involve any formal decision-making processes and that Hamas can dismiss unpopular directives as mistakes by individuals.⁹⁶ Be that as it may, this strategy of Hamas is leading to a stealthy increase in religiously motivated regulation. The great majority of Palestinians in Gaza does not, however, consider the development of an Islamic society a priority.⁹⁷

What benefits the Islamists is that their initiatives rarely involve any formal decision-making processes and that Hamas can dismiss unpopular directives as mistakes by individuals.

Since taking power in Gaza, Hamas has established an authoritarian regime.⁹⁸ The scope of political activity is extremely limited. There is no monitoring of the opaque

96 | Cf. ICG, n. 93, 26-31.

97 | In a survey by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research of June 2013, only 14.0 per cent of Gaza's inhabitants stated that the education of a moral individual and the development of a religious society was a national priority to them. In the West Bank, the figure was 14.4 per cent. However, the number of Palestinians who consider the establishment of a democratic political system as the most important national endeavour is even lower at 9.5 per cent. For most Palestinians, the end of the occupation and the establishment of a sovereign state or the refugees' right to return home take priority. Cf. PCPSR, "Palestinian Public Opinion Poll No (48)", 2013, <http://pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2013/p48e.html> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

98 | With respect to the definition of authoritarian regimes used here, see Juan J. Linz, *Totalitäre und autoritäre Regime*, Berliner Debatte Wissenschaftsverlag, Berlin, 2003, 129-142.

workings of the government.⁹⁹ Opposition groups are suppressed and civil-society institutions harassed. NGOs, which were active before Hamas took power in Gaza, must reregister with the Ministry of the Interior and require official permits for their various activities. Restrictions are particularly severe in the media sector. The only daily newspaper that has been allowed to circulate regularly in Gaza since 2007 is the Hamas paper *Falasteen*.¹⁰⁰ This repression is not only directed against secular-nationalistic groups such as Fatah. The most serious confrontations involve Islamic Jihad and extremist Salafist groups, which accuse Hamas of ignoring Islamic principles. As tends to be the case in classic authoritarian systems, there is no monolithic power centre in Gaza; instead, there is a broad spectrum of opinions and views, which are predominantly advocated within Hamas. It is often unclear where the separating line lies between Hamas as an organisation and Hamas as a governmental party.¹⁰¹ Haniyeh is thus simultaneously Prime Minister and a member of the Hamas leadership. Both the politburo and the Hamas Shura Council in Gaza appear to operate as a kind of monitoring body, whose purpose it is to bring government activities in line with the fundamental principles of the Islamists.¹⁰² Attempts at reconciliation with Fatah have not borne fruit to date, but they have resulted in a limited pluralism within Gaza. This is, however, controlled by Hamas. Public statements by Hamas are characterised by catchphrases such as nationalism, justice and progress. The implementation of Islamic principles does not appear to be given priority even though there are occasional attempts to do so. When resistance within Gaza proves too great, rules can be rescinded. It seems that pragmatism of a nationalist

99 | This applies particularly to the budget and the work of the security forces. From a conversation between the authors and Waleed al-Mudallal, political science academic at the Islamic University of Gaza, on 12 Jun 2013 in Gaza City.

100 | Cf. Brown, n. 82.

101 | Cf. Sayigh, n. 78.

102 | The 15-man politburo, the 77 members of the Shura Council as well as the local Shura Councillors in Gaza were last elected in 2012. The election results suggest that the Hamas leadership has gained in terms of autonomy in Gaza, while the exiled leadership around politburo leader Meshal has lost influence. Cf. Ehud Yaari, "Secret Hamas Elections Point to Internal Struggle", *PolicyWatch* 1936, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 16 May 2012, <http://washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/secret-hamas-elections-point-to-internal-struggle> (accessed 13 Sep 2013).

nature with religious overtones has gained the upper hand over the use of Islam as an ideology within Hamas.¹⁰³

CONCLUSION

Political culture in the Palestinian Territories is determined to a large degree by the battle against Israel. The conflicts with the British and Israelis have produced a strong national identity. From the start, Islam has played an important part in this.

Today, Hamas is also a truly political organisation, which tries to reconcile religion and nationalism. Islam continues to play a highly significant role. Hamas' goal is the founding of a state of Islamic character with a strong role for Sharia. However, during the period following the Oslo Accords, the group gradually became integrated within the official PA structures, although it rejects the agreements to this day. Hamas has thus become part of the political system. Yet, despite of decades of social and charitable work, the Muslim Brotherhood never succeeded in raising an Islamic generation of the kind its founders originally envisaged. When Hamas takes some unpopular decisions these days, the population does not hesitate to make its displeasure known to the Islamists.

The emergence of a dictatorial regime in Gaza and assaults and terror attacks against Israel cannot be explained by religiously influenced factors alone. Fatah also carried out terror attacks against Israel over a long period and is maintaining an authoritarian political culture. To date, Hamas has not succeeded in entirely overcoming its mentality of an underground organisation, which is a legacy from the armed struggle of the past. It has never fully internalised the concept of compromise, power sharing and responsibility. Hamas politicians seem to think that whoever wins elections has the right to exercise absolute power. For as long as it does not change its political culture, Hamas cannot become part of a Palestinian democracy.

The article was completed on 13 September 2013.

103 | Cf. Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948-2005", *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, 4, 2005, 25-48.