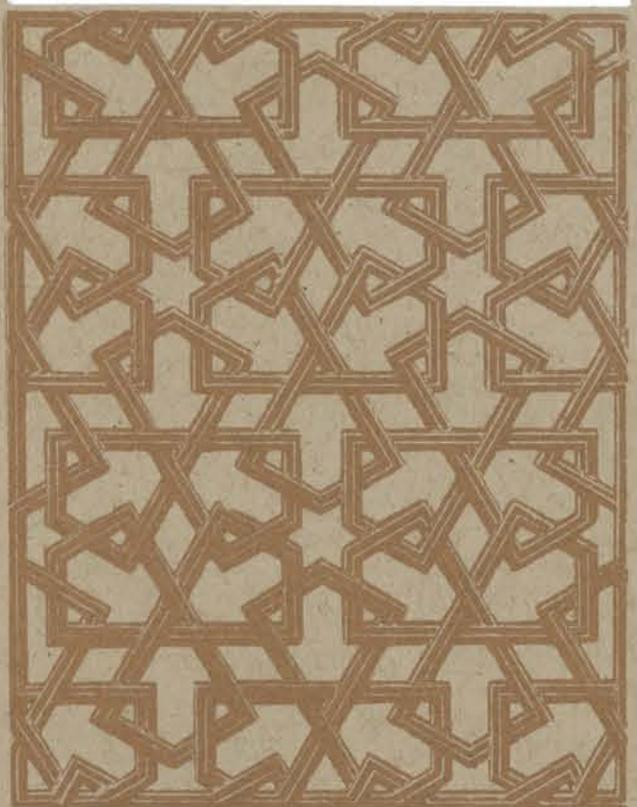


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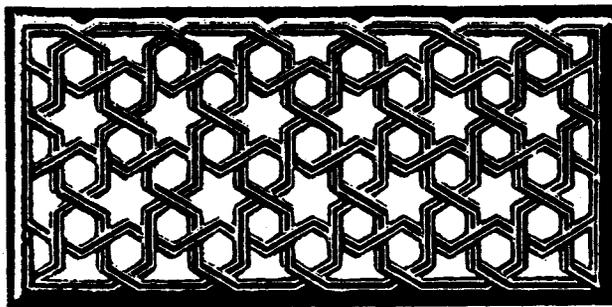
**ISLAMISM ACROSS THE GREEN LINE:  
Relations Among Islamist Movements  
in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza**

**ELIE REKHESS**



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**Relations Among Islamist Movements  
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**ELIE REKHESS**

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## The Author

Dr. Elie Rekhess is a senior research associate at Tel Aviv University's Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies and director of the Center's Research Program on Arab Politics in Israel. He also serves in a variety of academic and administrative posts, including senior consultant on Arab affairs to the Office of the Prime Minister, the Histadrut labor union, and the Abraham Fund, and academic supervisor of the Senior Police Officer Academy's Section on the Arab Minority.

Dr. Rekhess has written extensively on Palestinian politics in Israel and in the territories. Among other publications, he is the editor of *Arab Politics in Israel at a Crossroad* (Dayan Center, 1996) and *The Arab Minority in Israel: Dilemmas on Political Orientations and Social Change* (Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Haifa University, 1993) and author of *The Arab Minority in Israel: Between Communism and Arab Nationalism* (HaKibbutz HaMeuchad, 1993). Dr. Rekhess is also a regular lecturer and television commentator on Arab issues in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.

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## Executive Summary

The 1967 Six-Day War ended the social, cultural, and religious isolation that had separated Israeli Arabs from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and the rest of the Arab world for nearly two decades. A revival of Islamic orthodoxy in the 1970s also reflected a reaction to the rapid Westernization and modernization that the Arab minority had undergone in Israel.

There were few institutionalized political relations between Islamic activists in the West Bank and Gaza and their counterparts in Israel until the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran. From 1979–87, the newly established Israeli Islamist movement functioned within certain limitations—as a Muslim minority in a state with a Jewish majority, and under an obligation to operate within the confines of Israeli law. They therefore disassociated themselves from the idea of establishing an Islamic state in the entire area of Mandatory Palestine (which implies the elimination of the state of Israel)—as advocated by the Islamic movement in the territories. Instead, they called for mutual recognition: Israeli recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination (including a state of their own) and Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace.

The eruption of the *intifada* in December 1987, and the subsequent emergence of Hamas, led to direct contacts and closer relations between Israeli Islamists and their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza (mostly in the field of social and humanitarian aid), with the latter exerting more religious and ideological influence on the former. Although Israeli Islamists did not “import” the armed struggle into Israel, they did not condemn its use in the territories either, and continued to show solidarity, sympathy, and support for Hamas' and Islamic Jihad's ideological platforms.

After the 1991 Gulf War, religio-ideological differences emerged within the Israeli Islamist movement. These conflicts ultimately resulted in an internal split and the creation of two rival factions in the movement: a relatively moderate, pragmatic trend that supported Yasser Arafat's mainstream Fatah faction of the PLO and sought a political settlement between Israel and the Palestinians; and a radical activist trend with a rigid political line that supported the Palestinian opposition (particularly its Islamic component) and opposed the Oslo peace process.

The competing factions attempted to gain status and political legitimacy not only within Israel, but also by developing links with the Palestinian political system—and particularly political Islam—in the West Bank and Gaza. Their divergence of views was also evident on four other issues: armed struggle and terrorism, mediation attempts between Hamas and the PLO, aid to the population in the territories, and the debate over participating in the 1996 Knesset (parliament) elections.

The moderate Israeli Islamist faction has consistently rejected terror and acceded to requests from Israeli officials to attempt to influence terrorists not to harm kidnapped Israelis. The wave of terrorist acts perpetrated by Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during February and March 1996, which resulted in the death of dozens of Israeli civilians, evoked sharp condemnation from the moderate faction. By contrast, spokesmen for the radical faction were careful to avoid identifying with the perpetrators of terrorist acts or their dispatchers, but did not explicitly denounce them and sometimes even exhibited understanding for their motivation.

One area of cooperation between the Israeli Islamist factions was the effort to mediate between the PLO and Hamas leaderships in the territories. In addition to trying to calm a conflict that could spill over into Israel, the mediation efforts provided both Israeli Islamist factions with an opportunity to gain legitimacy and recognition in the West Bank and Gaza. The PLO and Islamist factions in the territories welcomed the Israeli Arab mediation role because it did not arouse Israeli concerns as much as outside Arab mediators would have, and the blend of Arab nationalists and Israeli Islamists ensured that the interests of all factions in the conflict would be taken into consideration.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the Israeli Islamist movement broadened the relief activity that had begun during the *intifada*. Israeli Islamist activists also maintained contact with Islamic educational bodies in the territories. The ties between Islamist movements on both sides of the "Green Line" were strengthened by increased economic and humanitarian aid to the inhabitants of the territories in general and Islamists in particular. Israeli Islamists continued to organize shipments of food and clothing collected for the territories. The Israeli police repeatedly closed these aid committees on suspicion that they served as a vehicle for financing Hamas objectives.

Next to the peace process, Israeli Islamists were perhaps most deeply divided over whether to seek representation in the Knesset—either independently or within the framework of a unified Arab bloc or list. Advocates of participation in Knesset elections argued that voting was a civil right and could provide Israeli Arabs with political power. These pragmatists accepted that participation in the Knesset implied recognition of Israel's existence and their minority status therein. For those very reasons, the radical Islamists refused to participate: ideologically, it was irreconcilable with Islamic concepts, and on a practical level, the Arab minority would always be subject to the interests of the Jewish majority.

The relationship between the Islamist movements in Israel and the territories is a function of various internal and external factors such as implementation of the Oslo agreements, progress in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and other tracks of the peace process, and political developments within the respective Israeli Arab and Islamist arenas. The link between the two movements has developed primarily in four channels: a doctrinal-spiritual connection in the religious sphere, identification and solidarity in the political sphere, cooperation in the humanitarian-social sphere, and an undefined involvement with regard to violence and terrorism.

The nature of the schism in the ranks of the Israeli Islamist movement may be discerned through each side's attitude toward the Islamist trend in the territories. The pragmatic faction has a Westward orientation and accepts its minority status in a non-Muslim majority. The more radical Israeli Islamist faction faces East, emphasizing its political-ideological identification with the Islamist movement in the territories (although by no means minimizing its local basis).

# I

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## Initial Contact (1979–87)

The resurgence of fundamentalist Islam among the Arab population in Israel resulted from a combination of local conditions peculiar to the Arab minority, as well as more general causes representative of Islamic revivalism evident in the Muslim world since the 1970s.<sup>1</sup>

Religion had played a prominent role in Palestine under the British Mandate. Islam and the Palestinian brand of Arab nationalism were closely fused under the leadership of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and head of the Supreme Muslim Council, Hajj Amin al-Husayni. After 1948, Islam virtually disappeared from the scene. Nearly the entire Muslim religious establishment of Mandatory Palestine fled, leaving the Muslim community in the newly established State of Israel without religious court judges, prayer leaders, or other functionaries necessary to sustain the community's traditional religious life.

The hiatus was further accentuated by a substantial decrease in the teaching of Islam, as the Israeli education system significantly reduced the scope of Qur'an, Sunna, and Hadith studies in the Arab curriculum. Resurgent Islam slowly began to fill the structural religious vacuum created by the 1948 War. It took years for the situation to return to normal, mainly because of an absence of qualified Israeli Arabs to take religious appointments.

### THE SIX-DAY WAR

The renewed contact between Israeli Arabs and Palestinians in the West Bank that resulted from the 1967 Six-Day War was the leading factor contributing to the spread of fundamentalist Islam within the Arab community in Israel. In fact, had it not been for the war, it is doubtful whether the Islamist movement in Israel would have been able to make such significant gains so quickly (i.e., in the late 1970s and early 1980s). The 1967 War put an end to the social and cultural isolation that had kept Israeli Arabs apart from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza—and the Arab world in general—for nearly two decades. The political effects that this almost overnight change had on the Arabs of Israel were dramatic, and its consequences for Islamic life in Israel were equally decisive.

Ideologically, the humiliating effects of the war for the Palestinians symbolized the bankruptcy of secular Arab nationalism. As time passed, the Arabs' inability to force Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories deepened Palestinian feelings of frustration and disillusionment with the nationalist trend represented by the PLO. Conversely, it considerably strengthened the religious component in the Israeli Arab community's collective identity.

Renewed access to Muslim holy places in Jerusalem and Hebron—namely, the Al-Aqsa and Al-Ibrahimi mosques, respectively—significantly enhanced the post-1967 reconstruction of their Islamic identity. Moreover, tensions and conflicts between Jews and Muslims regarding Jewish prayer on the Temple Mount and in the Cave of the Patriarchs spilled over into the Israeli Arab community.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based largely on Elie Rekhess, "Resurgent Islam in Israel," *Asian and African Studies* 27 (1993), pp. 189-206.

Thus, the rise of the Islamic revivalist movement in Israel was largely the result of influences radiating from the West Bank. Not accidentally, the first manifestations of this phenomenon became visible in the “Triangle”—the region in central Israel geographically closest to Qalqilyya, Tulkarm and Nablus, the traditional centers of West Bank conservatism.

Freedom of movement across the previously closed boundaries brought Israeli Muslims into contact with the vigorous, well-organized religious life of the West Bank and Gaza, which contrasted starkly with what they had known since 1948. Most prominent in this regard were the activities of the Muslim High Council in Jerusalem, which was reconstituted after 1967.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to the situation in Israel, where the *awqaf* (religious endowments) were controlled by the state and not devoted purely to the needs of the Muslim community, Israeli Muslims were able to observe an entire network of Muslim officials administering endowment property for the sole purpose of supporting the religious establishment.

Gaps in Islamic education in Israel were initially filled by the new availability of religious literature from the West Bank—including Qur’an commentaries, books on Muslim history, and guides to traditional law, Islamic precepts, and rules of conduct—which began to be sold in Arab villages inside the “Green Line” (i.e., Israel’s pre-1967 borders). The Muslim High Council soon began to intervene actively in Islamic affairs in Israel and gradually became the major spiritual authority in the Israeli Arab community. It overcame the long-standing lack of qualified religious officials to fill posts in Israeli mosques by recruiting them from the West Bank and Gaza. It also assisted young Israeli Arabs in studying at Islamic colleges in the West Bank and the Gaza.

A milestone occurred in 1978 when Israeli Arabs were permitted to perform the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina), which had previously been barred to Israeli passport holders. The Muslim High Council devised a method to circumvent this prohibition by supplying Israeli Muslims with a temporary Jordanian *laissez-passer*. Thus, each year after 1978, several thousand Israeli Muslims traveled to Mecca and Medina under the auspices of the High Council.

Israeli Muslims’ return to Islamic orthodoxy in the 1970s was not solely attributable to the renewed contact with the occupied territories, however. It also reflected a strong reaction to the rapid process of Westernization and modernization that the Arab minority in Israel experienced. As was the case elsewhere in the Muslim world, the Israeli Islamist movement provided practical solutions to fill both socioeconomic gaps and a growing vacuum in the Arab community’s political infrastructure created by the manifest impotence of nationalist ideology.

The cumulative result was a new Islamic assertiveness, particularly among the younger generation. From the 1970s onward, a “return to Islam” movement developed in Israeli Arab villages, in which young men and women began to wear traditional attire and classes on religious subjects in local mosques became increasingly popular.

## THE RISE OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN ISRAEL

These developments were initially restricted to the spiritual sphere and had little political content. Islamist activists in the West Bank and Gaza established few institutionalized relations with their counterparts in Israel during most of the 1970s, where the Islamist movement was generally in a nascent state of organization.

It was not until the 1979 Iranian Revolution that the movement became institutionalized. Within a year, Ayatollah Khomeini’s rise to power inspired the formation of the first clandestine Islamist militant organization in Israel. Its members intended to wage *jihād* (spiritual struggle) against Israel in order to undermine its Jewish-Zionist foundation and cause it to collapse from within. Calling itself Usrat al-Jihad (the Jihad Family), the group organized as a paramilitary unit

<sup>2</sup> They also became acquainted with fundamentalist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Liberation Party (Hizb al-Tahrir).

and carried out a number of acts of sabotage, some involving arson, against Jewish targets. It also took steps against secular or permissive trends within the Israeli Muslim community.

Soon after their initial sabotage operations in 1981, however, all seventy members of the organization were arrested and eventually sentenced to prison terms ranging from one to fifteen years. The full details of Usrat al-Jihad's creation have not yet been disclosed, making it difficult to determine whether its members had operational contact with Islamist militants in the territories. The arrest and trial of the group, however, clearly dampened the ardor of Muslim militancy in Israel.

By the mid-1980s, and particularly after the release of leading Usrat al-Jihad detainees from prison in 1983–84, the movement was pre-occupied mainly with setting up an organizational infrastructure in the Israeli Arab community and formulating its doctrinal and political views. Anxious to give their movement a new direction, the leaders of the Israeli Islamist movement no longer sought confrontation with the authorities nor tried to forcibly impose their views on “lax” Muslims. Instead, they aimed to convince Muslims to return to their Islamic roots by means of study, teaching, and persuasion.

The Islamic religious establishment in the territories (particularly the West Bank) played a central role in this effort by educating and training the leaders of the Israeli Islamist movement. Some of Israel's most prominent Islamists—including its founder, Sheikh ‘Abdallah Nimr Darwish—graduated from religious institutions in the West Bank. Darwish completed his studies at the Islamic Institute (al-M‘ahad al-Islami) in Nablus in 1972 and was apparently influenced by Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, leader of the Islamist movement in the Gaza Strip and founder of Hamas (the Arabic acronym for “Islamic Resistance Movement”) in the late 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

Sheikh Ra‘id Salah Mahajina, mayor of Umm al-Fahm since 1989, and Sheikh Kamal Khatib, a spokesman for the Israeli Islamist movement's militant wing, graduated from the Shari‘a College (Kulliyat al-Shari‘a) in Hebron. Other central figures, including Sheikh Khalid Ahmad Muhann‘a, who later became editor of the movement's weekly organ, *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Huriyya*; Sheikh Hashim Abd al-Rahman, deputy mayor of Umm al-Fahm; Sheikh Ibrahim Ighbariyya of Umm al-Fahm; and Mahmud ‘Umari of Sandala also received their religious education in the West Bank.

These leaders presumably established personal and professional relationships with some of the central figures of the Islamist movement in the territories during their studies. As far as is known, however, none of these relationships evolved into any form of coordinated activity such as fundraising, joint political programs, or armed operations during the period in question (1979–87). Rather, the influence of the Islamist trend in the West Bank and Gaza remained confined to the conceptual and doctrinal levels.

## IDEOLOGICAL INFLUENCES

In addition to the ideas of 19th and 20th century Islamic modernists and reformists, two major doctrines appear to have had particular influence on the religious worldview of the Israeli Islamist movement: the traditional Sunni orthodox approach taught in Arab schools and Islamic colleges in the West Bank and Gaza, and the doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The tenets of the Sunni orthodox curriculum were reviewed regularly in *al-Sirat*, the Israeli Islamist movement's monthly organ published in Umm al-Fahm.<sup>4</sup> It contained commentaries on

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<sup>3</sup> According to Yasin biographer Ahmad bin Yusif, the two men met in the early 1970s in Umm al-Fahm (where Darwish served as secretary of the local branch of the Communist party) and Yasin “converted” Darwish to orthodox Islam; see Ahmad bin Yusif, *Ahmad Yasin* (in Arabic) (Worth, Illinois: ICRS, n.d.), p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, *al-Sirat* 1, no. 8 (December 1986), pp. 5-15; 1, no. 11 (March 1987), pp. 3-8; 3, no. 6 (December 1988), pp. 3-6.

the Qur'an by Sheikh Darwish, who followed a traditional line, as well as a column on the Sunna (the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad) to which Ra'id Salah and Khalid Muhanna' contributed in a similar vein. These offerings reflected Sunni orthodox interpretations, relying largely on classical *tafsir* (Qur'an exegesis) and mainstream Hadith compilations.<sup>5</sup>

More importantly, the Israeli Islamist movement's social and political perceptions were underpinned and inspired by the doctrines of the Muslim Brotherhood—although movement leaders rarely conceded this. Little reference was made to Brotherhood texts originating in the West Bank or Gaza; instead, *al-Sirat* published materials mainly by Hasan al-Bana, founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, and other noted Egyptian Islamist leaders.<sup>6</sup> Adhering to the Brotherhood's basic ideological tenets, *al-Sirat* contributors emphasized Islam's importance as a religion with a primarily social and moral message. When properly construed and correctly interpreted, they said, Islamic prescriptions were relevant to the modern era and could serve as a foundation for the lives of both the individual and society. It was precisely through this prism that Darwish preached the need to help the poor, educate the young, care for the elderly, and contribute to the general welfare of the Israeli Muslim community. The Islamist movement absorbed a measure of the Brotherhood's political spirit as well, highlighting its commitment to the restoration of the Caliphate (rule by a supreme Sunni Muslim authority) and the establishment of a world Islamic state.

In contrast to their counterparts in the West Bank and Gaza, however—who were free to propagate an unabashed Islamist program—Israeli Islamists functioned within certain limitations. They were members of an Arab minority in a state with a Jewish-Zionist majority, and they had to operate within the confines of Israeli law. Movement spokesmen made a demonstrative effort to highlight these basic differences. "We have been fated to live in a Jewish-based state and we accept this reality without any intention of overstepping the red lines of the boundaries of the law," said Ibrahim Sarsuf. "We . . . accept the reality of constituting a minority in the State of Israel."<sup>7</sup> In an interview in *Ma'ariv*, Sheikh Darwish similarly declared, "We must act in the State of Israel according to the principles of Islam, without infringing upon the laws of the state."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Israeli Islamists adopted a decidedly cautious line that reflected the delicate balance between their Islamic fundamentalist approach, loyalty to the Palestinian national cause, and need to act within the boundaries of Israeli law. They disavowed the idea of an Islamic state in the entire area of Palestine—as advocated by their counterparts in the territories—because that implied Israel's elimination. Instead, Sheikh Darwish pragmatically called for mutual recognition: Israeli recognition of the Palestinians' right of self-determination, including a state of their own, and Palestinian recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace. (The border between the two states was left open for negotiations with the PLO.<sup>9</sup>) Darwish also declared his opposition to the principle of *jihād* and the use of violent means to inculcate Islamic fundamentalism. He became even more cautious after spending time under house arrest in 1981 and 1987 for alleged incitement against the State of Israel in his sermons—a charge Darwish denied.

<sup>5</sup> *Al-Sirat* 1, no. 11 (March 1987), pp. 9-11, 19-20; no. 2 (April 1987), pp. 8-11; *Al-Sirat* 3, no. 6 (December 1988), pp. 7-11.

<sup>6</sup> *Al-Sirat* 1, no. 11 (March 1987); *Al-Sirat* 2, no. 12 (April 1988); *al-Sirat* 3, no. 8 (April 1989).

<sup>7</sup> *Petach Tikva*, April 7, 1989, cited by Ibrahim Malik, "The Islamic Movement in Israel," *Surveys on the Arabs in Israel* (in Hebrew) (Givat Haviva).

<sup>8</sup> *Ma'ariv* (weekend magazine), April 6, 1990. In response to a question of whether the movement would replicate the *intifada* inside the Green Line, Sheikh Jum'a Qsasi (leader of the Islamic movement in the Negev) replied: "I am convinced this will not happen, because the Islamic movement has acquired strength by democratic means and we shall obey the law"; see *Kolbo Beersheba*, March 17, 1989, cited by Malik.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Sirat* 2, no. 9 (January 1988), pp. 2-3. See also remarks by Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur in *Nida al-Aswar* June 22, 1990, cited by Malik, p. 6; and Raphael Israeli, *Muslim Fundamentalism in Israel*, (London: Brassey's, 1993), pp. 89-90.

## II

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### The *Intifada* (1988–90)

The popular uprising known as the *intifada* (literally, “shrugging off”), which erupted in Gaza and the West Bank in December 1987, marked a new phase in the relationship between the Israeli Islamist movement and its counterpart in the territories.<sup>10</sup> Hamas’ emergence and central role in the uprising had a marked impact on political Islam in Israel.<sup>11</sup> It established direct contacts (mostly in the field of social and humanitarian aid) and strengthened relations between Islamists in the territories and those in Israel, increased the former’s religious and ideological influence on the latter, and increased the popularity of Islamism among the Arab population in the Galilee, the Triangle, and the Negev.

As a result, Israeli Islamists interpreted the *intifada* in a purely religious context. *Al-Sirat*, for example, continually highlighted what it perceived as the Islamic nature of the uprising, terming it an “Islamic revolution” (*thawra Islamiyya*) that was “supported by God” (*muayyada min Allah*).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Hamas’ leading and successful role in the uprising was seen as a sign of God’s renewed guidance of the *umma* (Muslim community), and as proof of a cohesive relationship between pious conduct and worldly political success, and an indication that historical evolution had returned to its rightful and appropriate course. In their view, Israel’s “iron fist” policy against the uprising was designed not only to deprive the Palestinians of their human rights but also to eradicate Islam and its holy sites.

The Islamist press in Israel gave extensive coverage to the confrontation in the territories, interviewing Sheikh Yasin and other leading Hamas figures frequently and reprinting Hamas’ serialized leaflets in their entirety. As the crisis in the territories deepened and the Islamist character of the *intifada* became more pronounced, Israeli Islamists began to adopt some of the more radical ideological tenets of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Muslim Brotherhood, which they had theretofore eschewed. One such principle was the Islamicized view of Palestine. Employing terminology identical to that of external Islamist organizations, Israeli Islamists stressed that Palestine was Islamic by nature and according to Muslim history. “Historic truth emphasizes,” Ra’id Salah claimed in *al-Sirat*, “that ‘Umar Ibn al-Khattab turned the land of Palestine into an Islamic *waqf* [endowment] that cannot be sold, purchased, or given away.”<sup>13</sup>

Israeli Islamists also began to express more militant views of Israel and Jews in general. *Al-Sirat* reprinted stridently Islamist *intifada* slogans, including a popular one that referred to the seventh

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<sup>10</sup> This chapter is based largely on Elie Rekhess, “Resurgent Islam in Israel” and “The Arabs in Israel and the *Intifada*” in *The Intifada*, ed. Robert O. Freedman (Miami, Florida: Florida University Press, 1991), pp. 354-56.

<sup>11</sup> Although Israel did not consciously foster the development of Islamism in Gaza in the late 1970s, it nevertheless turned a blind eye to the movement’s growing strength—the fundamentalists’ political and ideological struggle against PLO activists and leftist organizations such as the PFLP and DFLP served Israeli interests. As former Minister of Defense Moshe Arens confirmed, “during a certain period [Israel viewed the Islamist trend] as a healthy development that could block the PLO. . . [and] no effort was made to stop them”; see Roni Shaked and Aviva Shavi, *Hamas* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1994), p. 69.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-Sirat* 2, no. 10 (February 1988), pp. 19, 22.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, no.11 (March 1988).

century slaughter of Jews by an Islamic army on the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Sheikh Darwish asserted that Israel had entered the “satanic circle” by directing aggression toward the “houses of Allah.” Those who call for “racism” and “extend their hand to the burning of Islamic holy places,” Darwish continued, “are the disciples of Satan.” Similar references to Israel’s satanic nature characterized the Islamist literature distributed in the occupied territories.<sup>15</sup>

On a more practical level, *Al-Sirat* devoted special supplements to the biographies of Muslim *shuhada* (martyrs)—members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad killed by Israeli soldiers.<sup>16</sup> Israeli Islamists also paid condolence visits to the families of the *shuhada*, and raised money, collected food, and according to Umm al-Fahm mayor Sheikh Ra’id Salah, organized hundreds of aid shipments via trucks for the needy in the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>17</sup>

During a late 1989 visit to the United States, newly elected Islamist mayors and heads of local councils summarized the uprising’s cumulative effect:

The *intifada* has made [Israeli Arabs] aware again of the truth regarding the importance of the mosque and its historic mission. . . . [It] has nourished and strengthened the ties between Haifa and Gaza, between Hebron and Galilee. . . . It has revived the core of faith, narrowed the distance between Allah and the people, reinstated confidence and the feeling of potency and worth; it has revived hope; it has spread conviction among the 1948 Palestinians [i.e., those who remained after the establishment of the State of Israel].<sup>18</sup>

Israeli Islamists’ identification with the *intifada* reached unprecedented heights in mid-1990, prompting the Ministry of Interior to close the movement’s weekly, *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Huriyya*, for three months. The official justification was that the periodical had published inflammatory material that “harmed the public good” and that it served as a platform for Hamas.<sup>19</sup>

## THE LIMITS OF IDENTIFICATION

Despite these manifestations of solidarity with the Islamist movement in the territories, Israeli Islamists did not significantly alter the stance they had formulated in light of their unique status in Israel. The basic constraints on their political program remained in force throughout the *intifada* and served as a brake on potential excesses. In order to dispel any doubt, Israeli Islamist leaders carefully highlighted the differences between their program and the trend in the territories, particularly regarding sensitive issues such as Hamas’ primary goal—the establishment of an Islamic state in all of Mandatory Palestine. “There are many trends in Hamas,” stated Ibrahim Sarsur, one of the leaders of the Israeli Islamist movement (later elected head of the local council of Kufr Qasim), in April 1989. “One of them wants a greater [Islamic] Palestinian state from the [Mediterranean] sea to the [Jordan] river. . . . I am closer in my views to another, more rational trend, prepared for a solution within the framework of the existing [Israeli] borders.”<sup>20</sup>

Israeli Islamists’ attitude toward the armed conflict that Hamas and Islamic Jihad were waging against Israel in the territories during the *intifada* was similarly ambivalent. Sheikh Darwish

<sup>14</sup> The slogan was: “*Khaybar, Khaybar, ya yahud; jaysh Muhammad sawfa ya’ud*” (“[Remember] Khaybar, O Jews; the army of the Prophet Muhammad will inevitably return”). Khaybar is the oasis where the massacre occurred; see *ibid.*, vol. 3, no. 2 (July 1988).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* vol. 3, no. 3 (August 1988); vol. 3, no. 4 (September 1988); vol. 3, no. 6 (December 1988).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, special supplement (March 24, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> *Filastin al-Muslima* (a monthly publication from Manchester, UK, known to represent Hamas’ views), January 1990.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Davar*, July 9, 1990; *Filastin al-Muslima*, August 1990.

<sup>20</sup> *Petach Tikva*, April 7, 1989; *Kol Ha’ir*, January 19, 1990, cited by Malik.

succinctly described their position as “identification, yes; violence, no.”<sup>21</sup> The Israeli Islamist movement did not transfer the armed struggle into Israel, but also did not explicitly condemn its use in the territories—in contrast to later condemnations of *terrorism* by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad. Instead, written and spoken references to “*jihād*” by Islamist leaders in Israel were in most cases made in the context of *jihād al-naḥs* (the struggle to win over and purify the soul of individual believers)<sup>22</sup> or in the socio-political context. “I unequivocally reject military *jihād*, but *jihād* can also be waged through politics, education, and the media,” Sheikh Darwish stressed.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, he occasionally criticized the more aggressive brands of radical Islamism such as the Egyptian Jihad organization and—though generally supportive of the Iranian Revolution—denounced the killing of fellow Muslims in the Iran-Iraq War.

During the peak years of the *intifada* (1988-90), there were no known cases of overt involvement by members of the Israeli Islamist movement in violent incidents, whether independently or in cooperation with militant Islamist elements in the territories. However, Bir Zeit University scholar (and current member of the Palestinian legislature) Ziyad Abu ‘Amr’s research on the Islamist movement in the West Bank and Gaza alluded to possible secret relations with its Israeli counterparts.<sup>24</sup> Though Hamas leader Sheikh Yasin declined to elaborate about such links, Abu ‘Amr quoted him as saying that “Islam makes it obligatory to maintain relations of understanding and cooperation with the Islamists inside and outside Palestine.”<sup>25</sup>

In fact, Hamas contributed greatly to preserving the inexplicit nature of its relationship with Israeli Islamists. For one thing, *Filastin al-Muslima*, the movement’s main organ, barely took note of them. It occasionally described the views and activities of leading Israeli Islamist activists and even published interviews with them, but consistently refrained from mentioning Hamas’ position on or relationship with the Israeli movement, which was simply described as a natural extension of the Palestinian and international Islamist movements.<sup>26</sup> In a rare reference to its Israeli counterparts, the Hamas periodical stated that

Our brothers inside [Israel] are spiritually with us, with our *intifada*. Moreover, they miss no opportunity to support this *intifada*, which has raised the banner of Islam and the banner of Palestine on high. . . . Their continued existence [in Israel] perpetuates the Palestinian right to all of Palestine and ennobles the issue with a wholly Islamic character.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, a 1988 Hamas manifesto made no mention of the Israeli Islamist movement, apparently in order to spare the latter censure and unnecessary legal entanglements. Haifa University researcher Reuven Paz claims that activists from both movements exchanged views orally, but that Hamas carefully avoided publishing such material so as not to verify official Israeli suspicions of secret connections between the two. Paz also theorized that Hamas refrained from mentioning its Israeli counterparts because doing so implied the existence of two distinct Islamist movements in Palestine—and thus recognition of Israel’s existence.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> *Al-Hamishmar*, June 13, 1988. Although this rejection of violence could be interpreted as relating also to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Darwish was probably referring mainly to the Israeli movement.

<sup>22</sup> *Dvar Hashavu’a*, January 19, 1990; see also Ibrahim Malik, “Jihad in Islam: Extremism or Tolerance,” in *Islam and Peace*, ed. Ilan Pappé (Givat Haviva: The Institute for Peace Research, 1992), pp. 30-45.

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, September 16, 1992, cited in Alisa Rubin Peled, *The Islamic Movement in Israel*, in eds. Hussin, Mutalib, and Taj ul-Islam, *Islam, Muslims, and the Modern State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p. 286.

<sup>24</sup> Ziad Abu ‘Amr, *The Islamic Movement in the West Bank and the Gaza* (in Arabic) (Acre: 1989), p. 42. See also Abu ‘Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 22.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Filastin al-Muslima*, January 1990.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, October 1988.

<sup>28</sup> Cited by Michal Sela, “The PLO and the Arabs in Israel,” *Surveys on the Arabs in Israel* 18 (May 1996), Institute for Peace Research, Givat Haviva, pp. 31-32.

The Israeli Islamist movement's leaders, led by Sheikh Darwish, emphatically denied any connection with Hamas or Islamic Jihad, and its periodicals made little reference to possible ties to Islamists in the territories.<sup>29</sup> In March 1989, however, Israeli security officials determined that there was a secret connection between the two trends.<sup>30</sup> There were reports in May 1989 that the security services were examining the possibility that some Hamas posters were being printed in the Galilee and the Triangle with the assistance of Israeli Islamist activists. This contention was never proven.<sup>31</sup>

Observers also claimed that the Israeli Islamist movement was sending a dual message: an "internal" one (i.e., aimed at the Muslim and Arab public in Israel) denying Israel's existence, promoting the notion of Palestine as holy Muslim soil on which foreign rule was unconscionable, and calling for a *jihad* in order to liberate it; and a second, more moderate message (aimed at the Jewish public in Israel) recognizing Israel, calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside it, and acquiescing to minority status for the Arabs of Israel.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Salah Lutfi Salah, "The Islamic Movement inside the Green Line: Expectations and Challenges," *Shu'un Duwaliyya* 1, (1994) Center for Contemporary Studies, Umm al-Fahm, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> *Ha'aretz*, March 5, 1989.

<sup>31</sup> *Yediot Aharonot*, May 23, 1989.

<sup>32</sup> See Avital Inbar, *Davar*, January 19, 1990; see also As'ad Ghanem, "The Concept of Regional Peace of the Islamic Movement in Israel," in Pappé, pp. 84-85.

# III

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## The Peace Process (1991–96)

The period after the 1991 Gulf War was characterized by two major processes: the institutionalization of the Islamist movement as a political organization within Israel, and the development of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process outside of Israel. Within Israel, the Islamist movement consolidated its position and developed its organizational structure, the results of which were reflected in its showing in the 1993 municipal elections. The entrenched leadership in several Arab locales, however, rejected the next step—participation in the Knesset elections.

Nineteen-ninety-one was also an external turning point, in that it marked the end of both the *intifada* and the Gulf War, and—more significantly—the start of the peace process involving Israel, the Palestinians, and several Arab states. A sharp debate arose in the West Bank and Gaza (as well as among PLO and Hamas leaders outside the territories) over the issue of Palestinian participation in the Madrid peace conference and subsequent bilateral negotiations.

The political and ideological differences that erupted in the “external” Palestinian arena over the definition of Palestinian national goals filtered across the Green Line and were reflected in the Israeli Islamist movement. As these opposing trends began competing for political influence, the movement coalesced into two religio-ideological factions.

One was a relatively moderate and pragmatic trend that supported the Fatah-dominated PLO mainstream under the leadership of Yasser Arafat and efforts to achieve a political settlement between Israel and the Palestinians. The leader of the moderate wing was Sheikh Darwish, who was supported by the heads of the Islamic movement of the southern Triangle—Kufr Qasim council head Sheikh Ibrahim Sarsur, Kufr Bara council head Sheikh Kamal Rayan, Jaljuliya council head Tawfiq Khatib, and others.

The other was a more radical, activist trend that expressed a rigid political line, partial support for the Palestinian opposition (particularly its Islamist component), and opposition to the Oslo peace process. The leaders of the “rejectionist” wing included Sheikh Ra’id Salah, mayor of Umm al-Fahm, and Sheikh Kamal Khatib, a prominent Islamic activist from Kufr Kana. The conflict led to an internal split.

The rival Israeli Islamist factions attempted to gain status and political legitimacy within Israel and among Palestinians in general by developing links to the political system—and particularly Islamist elements—in the territories. Although the two groups sought legitimacy from both Hamas and the PLO, the pragmatic trend emphasized its ties with the latter while the radical trend emphasized its ties with the former.

Though the revelation of direct Israel-PLO negotiations in the summer of 1993 deepened the split, it was not a zero-sum game: the pragmatic trend did not cut itself off from Hamas, and the radical trend’s criticism of the Oslo agreements did not go so far as to shun or ban Arafat, at least not initially. In fact, there was a consensus between the two factions on certain political issues such as the question of Jerusalem, and even cooperation in certain areas.

Nevertheless, as the Oslo process progressed (albeit fitfully), the divergence of views was clearly reflected in five areas: the Oslo agreements and their implementation, armed struggle and terrorism, mediation attempts between Hamas and the PLO, aid to the population in the territories, and the debate over participating in the 1996 Knesset elections.

## THE OSLO AGREEMENTS AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout this period (1991–96), the moderate Israeli Islamist trend led by Sheikh Darwish displayed pronounced support for the peace process and Yasser Arafat's policies. Darwish welcomed the September 1993 Israel-PLO Declaration of Principles (DoP) and did not hesitate to share the rostrum with Israeli Minister of Tourism Uzi Baram at a festive demonstration of support in Nazareth shortly after the signing ceremony. Spokesmen for the moderate trend, however, stipulated that their support for the agreement was conditioned upon the fulfillment of the Palestinian national goal. Sheikh Darwish framed the issue this way:

If the Gaza-Jericho agreement leads to the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital [in] East Jerusalem, then this is a step in the right direction. But if this step leads toward the establishment of two large detention camps surrounded by an Israeli army, I don't think that any Palestinian will support it or will view such an agreement as fulfilling Palestinian aspirations.<sup>33</sup>

Ibrahim Sarsur articulated a similar message, stating that the Israeli Islamist movement would support the agreement on the condition that it lead to Palestinian self-determination.<sup>34</sup>

The implementation of the Oslo agreements, the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), and Arafat's entry into Gaza evoked sustained support for the peace process from the pragmatic faction. Despite their overall inclination to support the PA, moderate leaders were careful to avoid criticism of the Islamist opposition, and even made efforts to mediate between Hamas and the PLO. In the summer of 1995, for example, Sheikh Darwish defined the peace process as a reconciliation between the Arabs and their enemies, which he said was rooted in Islamic thought through the ages.<sup>35</sup> On another occasion, he reiterated his basic position:

Peace, in our understanding, is Israel's recognition of the Palestinians [beyond its] 1967 borders and the establishment of their independent state there, with its capital [in] Jerusalem. The Islamist movement neither rejects the peace agreement between [Israel and] the Palestinians nor enthusiastically supports it. Overall, it understands the position of the Palestinian opposition regarding these agreements, just as it forgives the Palestinian negotiator for signing them.<sup>36</sup>

Attorney Abd al-Malik Dahamisha, a leading Islamist activist and supporter of the moderate trend (who was later elected to the Knesset in 1996), expressed a less equivocal view: "The Oslo agreements could have been a good tool for a just and lasting peace had they been utilized correctly, [but] Israel castrated this peace." Defending the Islamist trend in the territories, Dahamisha explained that they also "want peace, but the Oslo agreements are not what they aspired to, because they believe that these agreements are not good enough to achieve a just peace—and this is their right."<sup>37</sup>

The 1996 Knesset election platform of the United Arab List—a coalition of the Arab Democratic Party (headed by Knesset member Abd al-Wahhab Darawsha) and the pragmatic faction of the Islamist movement—displayed a more balanced approach. The United Arab List's position on Palestinian objectives in the peace process reflected a broad consensus within the mainstream Palestinian trend: " 'Yes' to the realization of a just and all-encompassing peace that will ensure the end of the occupation and the disbanding of [Jewish] settlements; 'yes' to the establishment of the independent Palestinian state with its capital [in] Jerusalem."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Diyar* (Nazareth), October 1, 1993.

<sup>34</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, September 10, 1993.

<sup>35</sup> *Al-Hayat* (London), August 13, 1995.

<sup>36</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 15, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> *Kol Ha'ir*, April 12, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> For a summary of the platform of the United Arab List, see its advertisement in *Panorama*, May 17, 1996.

Radical Islamist leader and mayor of Umm al-Fahm Sheikh Ra'id Salah articulated a nearly opposite view grounded in firm opposition to the Oslo agreement and unofficial support for Hamas' position. In contrast to Sheikh Darwish's participation in the pro-Oslo rally in Nazareth, Sheikh Salah took part in a large-scale opposition demonstration that same month in Gaza, where he denounced the agreement as an "act of treason" and called for its abrogation by democratic means.<sup>39</sup> His colleague, Sheikh Kamal Khatib, also viewed the agreement—and particularly its postponement of negotiations on the final status of Jerusalem—as "an act of betrayal against the right of the Palestinian people."<sup>40</sup>

The radical Israeli Islamist faction also expressed its rejection of the Oslo agreement indirectly, for example by reprinting critical articles that had appeared in fundamentalist newspapers or were written by figures identified with Hamas in the territories, such as Khalid Ama'ira of Hebron, Fawaz Shahin of Jenin, and Isma'il al-Jamal of Jericho. By doing so, opposition leaders achieved a dual goal: publicizing Hamas' political line while conveying an indirect message of identification with it to their readers. The radical Israeli Islamist weekly *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya* became the main editorial platform for Islamists in the territories, to the extent that it occasionally gave the impression of being a Hamas organ. West Bank Hamas supporter Fadl Bushnaq's reaction to the DoP was a typical example: "We will not agree to a mock peace, a peace that will turn us into prey. We will not forgive the seekers of humiliation and we will not show mercy to those who have sold Jerusalem for a mess of pottage."<sup>41</sup>

Another technique was to interview Hamas officials. In an interview with Gaza Islamist leaders Sheikh Abu 'Ita and Khaled al-Hindi, for example, Abu 'Ita described the Oslo accord as "a fetus that is stillborn and as suspicious to me as a tasty dish laced with fatal poison."<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Nablus-based Hamas activist Sheikh Hamid al-Bitawi declared that the agreement "discriminates against [the Palestinians] in that it does not permit 1 billion Muslims to visit Al-Aqsa" mosque in Jerusalem.<sup>43</sup> When asked in the same interview what message he had for the Jews, al-Bitawi replied: "We call on them to convert to Islam. They are unfortunate and their lives are difficult, as is the case with us, and the solution for us and for them is Islam."<sup>44</sup>

Even after the establishment of the PA and the redeployment of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the territories, the Israeli Islamist opposition continued to reject the Oslo agreements, emphasizing its support for what it described as the overall Palestinian opposition.

The oppositionist position to Oslo is not unique to the [Israeli] Islamist movement, but is the position of a significant part of the Palestinian leadership, who understood that if [the] Oslo [process] succeeds, it will be the final nail in the coffin of the Palestinian problem. The changes and concessions always favor the Israeli side at the expense of the Palestinian side, which is in weak position. We believe without a doubt in the way of peace, but at the right time. The timing for Oslo was during a period of weakness and schism in [the] Arab and Islamic [world]. . . . Oslo is a peace between the strong and the weak, submission without peace.<sup>45</sup>

## ARMED STRUGGLE AND TERRORISM

The differences of opinion between the two Israeli Islamist factions were also apparent in their attitudes toward the issue of terrorism. In February 1992, four Israeli Arabs from the Umm

<sup>39</sup> *Al-Diyar*, October 1, 1993. See also Roni Shaked and Aviva Shabi, *Hamas* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1994), p. 235.

<sup>40</sup> *Kull al-'Arab* (Nazareth), October 3, 1993.

<sup>41</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, March 25, 1994.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, October 29, 1993.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, January 14, 1994.

<sup>44</sup> See also interviews with Ahmad Nimr Hamdan, a Hamas activist arrested by the PA in Gaza, in *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, September 15, 1995; Sayyid Abu Masamih, *ibid.*, June 14, 1995; Dr. Ghazi Hamad, *ibid.*, July 19, 1996.

<sup>45</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, August 11, 1995.

al-Fahm area attacked an IDF recruit tent camp near Kibbutz Galed, brutally killing three soldiers with axes and pitchforks and then escaping. When the ring was caught soon thereafter, its members were revealed to have links with the Israeli Islamist movement, although they had not acted on its behalf, having established a radical underground cell of the Islamic Jihad that functioned independently.

The Galed incident revived public debate in Israel about the extent of the Israeli Islamist movement's involvement in terrorism. Leaders of the movement promptly condemned the act, disassociated themselves from the perpetrators, and denied the existence of any institutionalized link between the two, and there have been no similar incidents since. "[T]he leadership of the [Israeli] Islamist movement opposes terrorist acts and demands that its adherents obey the law," observed military commentator Ze'ev Schiff in a July 1993 article, but nevertheless "the movement apparently fosters grave acts and serves as a reservoir for the recruitment of membership to Hamas."<sup>46</sup>

In a May 1995 interview, Ya'akov Peri, former director Israel's domestic General Security Service (Shabak), similarly asserted that the Israeli Islamist movement did not encourage terror "and officially even prohibits its members from participating in terror." According to Peri, "the murder incident at Galed was carried out as an isolated initiative of individuals and was a lone incident. Of the masses of people who go to the mosque for a [religious] lesson and a sermon, a few individuals believe that the time for *jihad* has arrived and that it is their task to perform [the goal of *jihad*] that very day."<sup>47</sup>

The moderate Israeli Islamist faction has also consistently rejected terrorism by others. When Hamas members kidnapped IDF Sgt. Nissim Toledano in 1993, Sheikh Darwish acceded to a request by "state sources" (via the Israeli prime minister's advisor on Arab affairs) to attempt to influence the kidnappers not to harm him. "I am entirely devoted to this effort," Darwish said, issuing an emotional appeal to Hamas through the media to spare the victim's life because the Qur'an forbids harming the innocent.<sup>48</sup> Darwish made a similar appeal to the kidnappers of another soldier, Nachshon Wachsmann, in October 1994, declaring in a broadcast: "In the name of religion, in the name of God, and in the name of the faith that you [the kidnappers] believe in, gentlemen, preserve the life of the young man. Return him to his mother." During the same broadcast, Darwish also called on Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to free Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmad Yasin immediately and condemned the Israeli government for kidnappings it had carried out in southern Lebanon, which in his view legitimized radical movements doing the same.<sup>49</sup>

The wave of Hamas and Islamic Jihad suicide bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during February and March 1996, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of Israeli civilians, evoked sharp condemnation from the moderate Israeli Islamist faction.<sup>50</sup> It repeatedly emphasized that the Israeli Arab who had transported the suicide bomber to downtown Tel Aviv was not a member of its ranks. Sheikh Darwish sharply attacked the bombings, calling on Muslim religious authorities to express a clear opinion as to whether such acts were permissible from a religious point of view.<sup>51</sup> Abd al-Malik Dahamisha took a similar position, stating that whereas those responsible considered suicide bombings as political acts and therefore legitimate, in his view they were unconscionable even in that context. "In politics, and even in war, there are limits to the means of combat. Atrocities and murder cannot be permissible political means."<sup>52</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *Ha'aretz*, July 23, 1993.

<sup>47</sup> *Yedion Merkaz Lemoreshet Hamodi'in (M.L.M.)*, no. 11 (May 1995). For a similar statement in 1993 by the head of the Shabak, see Shaked-Shabi, p. 235.

<sup>48</sup> See *Ha'aretz*, February 12, 1995.

<sup>49</sup> *Al-Hamishmar*, October 14, 1994.

<sup>50</sup> *Ha'aretz*, March 12, 1996; *Kull al-'Arab*, March 15, 1996.

<sup>51</sup> *Yediot Aharonot*, March 4, 1996.

<sup>52</sup> *Kol Ha'ir*, April 12, 1996.

Spokesmen for the radical Israeli Islamist faction were equally careful to avoid identifying with the perpetrators of terrorist acts or their dispatchers, echoing the moderate faction's assurances that they functioned within the confines of the law and forbid members from involvement in terrorism. There was a discernible difference, however, in their attitude toward terrorism by others. In contrast to the moderate faction, the radicals avoided explicitly condemning terrorist acts by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and sometimes expressed admiration of their technical prowess and understanding of their motivation.

This ambivalence was obvious in the indirectly sympathetic tone of *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya's* coverage of terrorist acts. After an April 1994 bus bombing in Hadera that killed six people, for example, an article with the unspectacular headline "Explosion Incident in Hadera" mentioned that "the incident demonstrated great capability and superb courage on the part of the Hamas activists in managing to meet this challenge and overcome all the security obstacles and military roadblocks."<sup>53</sup> In the wake of a July 1995 bus bombing in Ramat Gan, Sheikh Kamal Khatib opined that the incident stemmed from the Palestinians' growing despair at what they perceived as the negative results of the peace process—the prolonged closure of the territories, and Israel's rigid stance (in Khatib's view) in the negotiations.<sup>54</sup> In a similar vein, Khatib had previously expressed opposition to terrorist attacks by Islamists in Algeria, but said he understood the underlying reasons for them.<sup>55</sup>

Sheikh Khatib later condemned the Sharm al-Sheikh anti-terrorism conference, convened in response to a wave of suicide bombings in Israel in February and March 1996, as an anti-Islamic gathering. Notably, in *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya's* report on the conference, the word "terror" (*irhab* in Arabic) appeared in quotation marks, an indication of reservations about attributing the word to the events that had prompted the conference.<sup>56</sup> Sheikh Ra'id Salah offer a typical reaction to the bombings, asserting that "censure from every side for the murder of innocent people is necessary, but censure itself will not solve the problem. I propose summoning up the courage to study the suicide phenomenon in order to understand the reasons that lead to it."<sup>57</sup>

## ATTEMPTS AT MEDIATION BETWEEN HAMAS AND THE PLO

One area of agreement between the Israeli Islamist factions was their attempt to mediate between the Fatah and Hamas leaderships in the territories. This effort, which began in 1992, reached a peak during 1994-95 after the establishment of the PA in Gaza and Jericho and in response to repeated conflicts and violent confrontations with the Islamist opposition. Mediation activity included efforts by representatives of other, non-Islamist Israeli Arab political trends, namely Arab members of the Knesset and leaders of the Committee of Heads of Arab Councils. The two Israeli Islamist factions perceived the mediation efforts both as a means of calming the conflict between the mainstream PLO and the Islamist movement in the territories, and as an important opportunity to gain legitimacy and recognition from both groups.

The PA and Hamas welcomed the Israeli Arabs' mediation role because it did not arouse the same concerns among Israeli security authorities that outside Arab mediators might have, and the

<sup>53</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, April 15, 1994. The article also noted that "[t]he bombing incident is galling to the Israelis because it took place on a day of memorial ceremonies for their fallen soldiers in the wars since 1948, a day before their celebrations commemorating the establishment of their state." Another example of subliminal sympathy is the supplement published after the killing of Yahya 'Ayyash, the terrorist explosives expert known as "The Engineer" in early 1996, which contained emotional descriptions of his activities and his personality; see *ibid.*, January 12, 1996.

<sup>54</sup> *Ha'aretz*, July 25, 1995.

<sup>55</sup> See *Al-Ittihad* (Haifa), April 5, 1995.

<sup>56</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, March 15, 1996.

<sup>57</sup> *Emsa Hadera* (Hadera), March 15, 1996.

blend of Islamists and Arab nationalists ensured that the interests of all parties in the conflict would be taken into consideration. With representatives from every point along the political spectrum, they also exercised independent initiatives. After a bloody July 1992 clash between Fatah and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, for example, a "reconciliation committee" (*lajnat musalaha*) that included Chairman of the Committee of Heads of Arab Councils (and of the Supreme Follow-up Committee of the Arab Citizens of Israel) Ibrahim Nimr Husayn, Umm al-Fahm mayor Sheikh Ra'id Salah, and Tira mayor Tarik 'Abd al-Hayy managed to calm the crisis and then supervised implementation of the agreement that the two sides reached afterward.<sup>58</sup>

In August 1994, Yasser Arafat requested that Israeli Islamists mediate between the PA and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and met with a delegation led by Sheikh Darwish that included Sheikh Salah, Sheikh Khatib, Ibrahim Sarsur, Kamal Rian, Jum'a Qsasi, Abd al-Malik Dahamisha, Sheikh Mustafa Ghalyun and Sheikh Yusuf Ara'ida.<sup>59</sup> These efforts were only partially successful, however. Following a November 1994 shooting incident between PA policemen and Hamas demonstrators near the Filastin Mosque in Gaza which resulted in 13 deaths, Israeli Arabs were once again requested as mediators. Sheikh Darwish and Dr. Ahmad Tibi, an independent political activist who also served as an advisor to Arafat, became particularly involved, formulating a compromise document acceptable to the antagonists which dispelled the tension.<sup>60</sup> The ties between Darwish and Tibi developed further when they considered establishing a political bloc to participate in the Knesset elections. Perhaps more than any other factor, the alliance between the two men reflected moderate Israeli Islamists' affinity for the mainstream PLO camp.

Significantly, radical Israeli Islamist leader Sheikh Ra'id Salah was only briefly involved in the mediation efforts following the Filastin Mosque incident, and his faction's role in mediation between the PA and Hamas effectively ceased thereafter. Instead, its representatives began criticizing the PA's attitude toward Hamas. In a January 1995 interview in Jordan by the Hamas organ *Filastin al-Muslima*, Sheikh Salah voiced explicit support for Hamas' position in its conflict with the PLO. He blamed the PA for the November 1994 clash and asserted that the incident had involved all of the worshipers in the mosque, not only the Hamas activists as the PA claimed.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, he accorded a measure of respect to Arafat and called for strengthening Palestinian unity in the hope that the committee of inquiry appointed to examine the incident would reveal the truth. In a subsequent interview in the same publication, however, Salah adopted a much sharper tone toward the PA, accusing it of crossing "all the red lines" in its treatment of the opposition in general and Hamas in particular. He bluntly attacked the harsh steps it had taken against Hamas activists in Gaza, citing arrests, raids on mosques, unfair trials, and the spreading of false propaganda against Hamas.<sup>62</sup>

The radical faction's own media also intensified their criticism of the PA. *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya* and its supplement, *Minbar al-Haqq*, mounted harsh and at times unrestrained attacks on the PA's security and intelligence services, and on Arafat personally. It carried frequent accounts of arrests of Hamas activists that it said were motivated by past disputes with no relation to current political positions,<sup>63</sup> and accused Arafat of persecuting the opposition and running a corrupt administration.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>58</sup> *Ha'aretz*, July 12, 1992; *Jerusalem Post*, July 13 and 15, 1992; *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, July 17, 1992; "A Convenient Arbitration Position," *Ha'aretz*, July 19, 1992. For the text of the agreement, see *Panorama* (Tayyiba), August 1, 1992.

<sup>59</sup> For Darwish's views concerning the mediation efforts, see his article "The Palestinian House's Unity—First" (in Arabic), *Kull al-'Arab*, April 22, 1994; *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, August 12, 1994.

<sup>60</sup> MECS 1994, fn. 251; *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, December 2, 1994.

<sup>61</sup> *Filastin al-Muslima*, January 1995.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, July 1995.

<sup>63</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, August 4, 1995.

<sup>64</sup> See open letter to Arafat by Hamad Ighbariyya in *ibid.*, September 1, 1995; and two sharply worded open letters by Sheikh Kamal Khatib to Arafat advisor Dr. Ahmad Tibi, in *ibid.*, August 25 and September 29, 1995.

In the aftermath of the February and March 1996 suicide bombings and the stringent preventive measures Arafat subsequently applied to Hamas elements, the radical faction's criticism of the PA escalated and its alignment with Hamas became explicit. *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya* openly became a propaganda tool for Hamas' positions—quoting in its entirety, for example, a Hamas manifesto to international human rights organizations condemning Arafat's harsh policies against Hamas<sup>65</sup> and another demanding the release of all Hamas detainees held by both the PA and Israel—as one package.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, personal attacks on Arafat sharpened, accusing him of mediating between Syria and Israel, making concessions on Palestinian activity in Jerusalem in return for a meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy,<sup>67</sup> and giving the Israelis information—ostensibly obtained by torturing Hamas detainees—about the location of the body of kidnapped Israeli soldier Ilan Sa'adon.<sup>68</sup>

The PA's reaction was prompt. In early August 1996, it banned the distribution of *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya* in the autonomous areas. Responding angrily, the periodical protested “the muzzling and restriction of freedom of expression in the autonomous zone” and demanded that the PA rescind the order “or else the matter will be interpreted as hostility to everything Islamic, both under the jurisdiction of the Authority and inside the Green Line.”<sup>69</sup> In addition, editor Hasan al-Khatib wrote that “[d]espite our non-support of the Oslo agreement and the differences between us and our brothers in the [PA], we did not expect the Authority to be an exact replica of the Arab regimes that muzzle self-expression, spread fear, and ‘market’ a single view.”<sup>70</sup> In October 1996, the PA allowed *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya* to resume distribution in the autonomous areas, but only after the Jerusalem tunnel incident led to a marked improvement in relations between Arafat and Hamas and an end to the radical faction's attacks on the Authority.

By contrast, the moderate Israeli Islamist faction's policy toward the PLO-Hamas controversy was entirely different. Faction leaders attempted to adopt a neutral position and maintain ties with both sides with the aim of playing a mediating role. Sheikh Darwish summarized this approach in August 1995:

The Islamic movement mediates between the Authority headed by Yasir Arafat and the opposition elements headed by Hamas under the leadership of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin, with the aim of finding a basis for communicating instead of confrontation [and leading] toward the goal of building a Palestinian state whose capital is Jerusalem.<sup>71</sup>

Elsewhere, Darwish explained that the Israeli Islamist movement had ties of brotherhood with both the PA and the opposition and was attempting to forge a “covenant of honor” between all political positions in the territories in order to build a “unified homeland.”<sup>72</sup>

## AID FOR THE TERRITORIES

The growing ties between the Islamist movements on both sides of the Green Line were further strengthened in the early 1990s by intensified humanitarian and economic aid from

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., June 7, 1996.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., June 21, 1996. The implication of this demand was that the PA was coordinating with Israel against Hamas.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., July 26, 1996.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., August 2, 1996.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> *Al-Hayat* (London), August 13, 1995.

<sup>72</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 15, 1995. See also Darwish's remarks at a national conference in Nablus (where a “covenant of honor” was announced after a confrontation between rival factions) in *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, October 6, 1995.

Israeli Islamists to the inhabitants of the territories and particularly their fellow Islamists there. These efforts represented a broadening of the relief activity that was initiated at the outbreak of the *intifada*, in which the various factions of the Israeli Islamist movement organized shipments of food and clothing collected for the territories. In 1990, the national Islamic Aid Committee was established and began collecting funds, equipment, and food for *intifada* casualties in the territories. The committee was officially registered with the Israeli Registrar of Associations as a charitable body for humanitarian aid, setting up its headquarters in Nazareth with branches in Umm al-Fahm, Kufr Qasim, and the Negev.

The aid was distributed in two ways. Special campaigns were organized for Muslim holidays or during prolonged closures of the territories. During the 1994 'Id al-Adha holiday, for example, 260 sheep and 24 tons of beef collected in Israel were sent to the territories. Aid committee delegations traveled throughout the West Bank and Gaza distributing food, visiting the homes of those killed, injured, or imprisoned during the conflict and handing out holiday gifts and toys to the needy.<sup>73</sup> In addition, the committee set up a permanent aid network for children—particularly orphans of *intifada* casualties, but also physically impaired children of all types and needy families in general—using an “adoption” system that paired every orphan or family with a permanent Israel Arab donor. In 1995, 7,000 children and 1,000 families received a total of roughly 13 million shekels—a monthly average of 100 shekels (about \$33 in 1995) per orphan and 200 shekels per family.<sup>74</sup> In addition, the committee provided financial aid to the needy for hospitalization and to the disabled population in general.

In late July 1995, Israeli police raided the aid committee's offices in Nazareth, confiscated documents and equipment, and issued a closure order. The police said their actions were based on suspicions that the committee was a vehicle for financing Hamas objectives. Published reports alleged that senior Israeli Islamist figures were involved in transferring money from overseas to Hamas officials in the territories.<sup>75</sup> The aid committee was apparently transferring contributions primarily to the families of Hamas activists killed while perpetrating terrorist acts, including many who participated in the murder of Israeli citizens. The Israeli police also claimed that the committee received funds for social and religious institutions in the territories from Islamist organizations abroad, particularly the United States and Britain, and that a direct link existed between the committee and a branch of one of these organizations based in Beit Hanina, near Jerusalem. The police exhibited a so-called “martyr form,” containing details on a Hamas suicide terrorist, that had been attached to a request for aid submitted by his family to the committee.<sup>76</sup>

Aid committee spokesmen denied any ties with Hamas, insisting that their activities were purely humanitarian and that they offered aid to the needy regardless of political affiliation—including orphans whose fathers were killed for collaborating with Israel. The spokesmen added that the committee's funds came primarily from charitable contributions from Israeli Arabs (as well as Jews and Druze), and only a small portion came from abroad. Moreover, they said, the process was entirely transparent—every contribution was covered by a receipt and letter of

<sup>73</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, May 27, 1994.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, August 4, 1995. *The Jerusalem Post* (August 4, 1995) cited an annual sum of 15 million New Israeli Shekels (NIS); *Al-Sinara* (March 15, 1995) cited the figure of 1 million shekels monthly (i.e., 12 million shekels annually).

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, “Hamas Penetrates into Israel,” *Ha'aretz*, July 23, 1993. The interrogation of Muhammad Salah and Muhammad Jarad, two U.S. citizens of Palestinian origin arrested in Israel in 1993 on charges of conspiring with Hamas officials in the territories, revealed that they maintained connections with Sheikh Kamal Khatib of Kufr Kana and Dr. Sulayman Ighbariyya, deputy mayor of Umm al-Fahm and a noted figure in the Israeli Islamist movement who served as chairman of the Islamic Aid Committee. According to Muhammad Salah, the aid committee had received \$100,000 from several Hamas front organizations in the United States as relief funds for the families of Hamas officials who had been deported to southern Lebanon at the end of 1992. Some of the money was also designated to support *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*. Ighbariyya and Khatib claimed they never dealt with money in their meetings with Salah and Jarad; see Judith Miller, *God Has Ninety-Nine Names* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), p. 400.

<sup>76</sup> *Ha'aretz*, July 28 and 30 1995.

appreciation. The spokesmen criticized the closure as part of a political strategy to suppress the Islamist movement,<sup>77</sup> and warned that curtailing the aid (which was distributed in cooperation with the PA) would lead to criminal acts and even terrorist activity. In August 1996, Israel's High Court of Justice relied on classified security information to dismiss an Islamist movement petition to re-open the aid committee's offices, ruling that there was sufficient evidence that the committee was involved in the distribution of aid to the families of Hamas activists and that the primary source of its funding was contributions by foreign organizations.<sup>78</sup>

The closure of the committee's offices did not prevent the Israeli Islamist movement from continuing its aid activities in the territories. In June 1996, it resumed aid distribution through an organization called the Humanitarian Aid Committee, which had been established in 1994.<sup>79</sup> Its director, Munir Abu al-Hijah, explained that his organization functioned within the bounds of the law and concentrated on humanitarian work. Moreover, he claimed, in light of the closure of the Islamic Aid Committee, the Islamist movement no longer accepted donations from abroad or aided the families of security prisoners and instead limited its activities to supporting orphans only. These arguments did not convince Israeli authorities, however. In early December 1996, Minister of Defense Yitzhak Mordechai issued a closure order against the Humanitarian Aid Committee and another Islamist organization, the Association for the Orphan and Prisoner, on the grounds that these groups "provided financial and other aid to Hamas and Islamic Jihad through the care of families and children of activists . . . who had been killed in the territories or imprisoned."<sup>80</sup> As in the past, the heads of the closed organizations and the spokesmen for the radical Islamist faction rejected the authorities' accusations and vigorously denounced these measures.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to aid activities, Israeli Islamist activists maintained contact with Islamic educational bodies in the territories. The Da'wa and Islamic Studies College in Umm al-Fahm and the Islamic Shari'a Faculty of Al-Najah University in Nablus, for example, signed a "sister schools" agreement in June 1996. An Islamist movement delegation headed by radical faction leaders Sheikhs Ra'id Salah and Kamal Khatib participated in the signing ceremony.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, press reports in October 1996 revealed that Israeli Islamist activists were involved in renovating Solomon's Stables in Jerusalem's Temple Mount (known to Muslims as al-Musalla al-Marawani) and converting them into an Islamic prayer site. Some 160 Israeli Muslim volunteers worked for four months clearing debris, resurfacing the area with marble, and installing electricity, amplification, and an air-conditioning system. Sheikh Salah oversaw the renovation and played an active role in the project. Islamist movement supporters donated approximately 2 million shekels (roughly \$620,000) to cover the renovation costs.<sup>83</sup> According to radical Islamist spokesmen, the stables are an intrinsic part of the al-Aqsa Mosque, which sits atop the Temple Mount. "The al-Aqsa Mosque is an inseparable part of the faith of the Arabs of Israel," explained Sheikh Khatib. "If anyone should dare harm it, Muslim believers would take the necessary steps. They would try a peaceful solution, but if that failed, they would use a different method. Even *jihad*."<sup>84</sup>

<sup>77</sup> *Panorama*, August 4, 1995; *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, August 4, 1995.

<sup>78</sup> *Ma'ariv*, October 17, 1996.

<sup>79</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, June 28, 1996. In October, the committee distributed 700,000 shekels among West Bank and Gaza orphans; *ibid.*, November 13, 1996.

<sup>80</sup> *Ha'aretz*, December 3, 1996.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, December 6, 1996; see also a report on the arrest of six members of the Association for the Orphan and the Prisoner, suspected of having helped the families of Hamas activists, *ibid.*, December 10 and 11, 1996.

<sup>82</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, June 21, 1996.

<sup>83</sup> *Kol Ha'ir*, October 4, 1996; *Yediot Aharonot*, October 9 and 10, 1996; interview with Sheikh Ra'id Salah, *Kolbo*, 8 (November 1996).

<sup>84</sup> Khatib interview in *Ma'ariv*, October 18, 1996; see also "Sheikh Khatib and the Karate Kids," *The Jerusalem Report*, November 14, 1996.

The radical faction's role in the renovation of the stables attained special significance in light of the Palestinian reaction to Israel's opening of the "Western Wall tunnel." On October 11, 1996, 30,000–50,000 people attended a mass rally in Umm al-Fahm organized by the Islamist opposition "to save the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Islamic holy places of Jerusalem" from the supposed threat from the Israeli action. The main speaker was PA Wakf Director Sheikh Hasan Tahbub, who extolled the solidarity between Muslims in Israel and in the territories in their efforts to protect Islamic holy sites. The rally organizers announced a new fund for restoration of the al-Aqsa Mosque area and collected over 500,000 shekels.<sup>85</sup>

Leading figures of the moderate Islamist faction did not attend the Umm al-Fahm protest and, according to one report, were not even invited. In his speech, Sheikh Khatib accused "several persons" of forming a "conspiracy" aimed at granting Islamic legitimacy to the closing of Solomon's Stables in exchange for opening a mosque in the Knesset to serve new Islamist members of the Knesset—a charge against the moderate Islamist faction that caused friction between the two groups.<sup>86</sup> In the struggle within the Israeli Islamist movement to attain recognition and legitimacy from the West Bank and Gaza political (and particularly Islamists) leadership, the radical faction's role in the Solomon's Stables renovation project and Umm al-Fahm protest rally undoubtedly gave it a political advantage over its moderate rivals.<sup>87</sup>

#### THE DEBATE OVER PARTICIPATION IN KNESSET ELECTIONS

Since the late 1980s, the Israeli Islamist movement has been deeply divided over whether to seek representation in Israel's Knesset (parliament)—either independently or as part of a unified Arab bloc or list. Advocates of participation cited a series of practical reasons for doing so. Voting was a civil right, they argued, and as long as it did not harm Islamic belief, there was no reason not to use it constructively. Israeli Arabs, they pointed out, should not ignore an important mechanism for exercising their political power.<sup>88</sup> For these pragmatists, participation in the Knesset implied (at least on the declarative level) acceptance of Israel's existence and legitimacy as a Jewish state, and *ipso facto* the Muslim community's status in Israel as a minority.

The radical Israeli Islamist faction rejected political participation as a waste of effort. On a practical level, they said, the Arab cause would always be subordinate to the interests of the Jewish majority; ideologically, it was irreconcilable with Islamic concepts. In Sheikh Ra'id's words, "the Knesset represents a form of legislation that stands in contradiction to what Allah ordered and bequeathed to us."<sup>89</sup> To strengthen their case, two *fatwas* (religious opinions) were issued in May 1995 at the request of the radical faction—one by Jordanian Islamist Sheikh Muhammad Abu Faris, and the other by Egyptian Islamic scholar Sheikh Yusuf al-Qirdawi, who said:

Israel in Shar'i Islamic outlook is an alien entity in the region, an entity that imposed itself on the region by force of iron and fire, through bloodshed, and by emptying the land of its people by terrorist means. [As a result,] an alien state opposed to the goals of the *umma* [Islamic community] . . . was implanted in Dar al-Islam [the realm of Islam]. The Shar'i position toward the Zionist entity is total rejection, continuous resistance and constant *jihad*. The correct stance, from the Shar'i point of view, dictates disapproval of entry into the Zionist enemy's parliament because [doing so] would inspire a potential recognition of [Israel's] right to exist or remain on the usurped land, and this is what we should consistently and emphatically deny.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>85</sup> *Ha'aretz*, October 13, 1996.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, November 1, 1996.

<sup>87</sup> See "Between Umm al-Fahm and Al-Aqsa," *ibid.*, October 16, 1996.

<sup>88</sup> Elie Rekhess, "The Islamic Movement in Israel: The Internal Debate over Representation in the Knesset," *Data and Analysis*, no. 2 (April 1996), Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University.

<sup>89</sup> Cited by Rekhess, *Data and Analysis*.

<sup>90</sup> *Filastin al-Muslîma* (April 1995). Neither Abu Faris nor al-Qirdawi is affiliated with Hamas.

Nevertheless, on March 20 the Israeli Islamist movement's Shura (consultative) Council decided to re-examine a 1995 decision not to participate in parliamentary elections. A week later, the movement's General Congress held a new vote, which endorsed participation within the framework of a unified Arab list headed by an Islamist movement candidate. The endorsement caused a further widening in the split within the movement's ranks. Radical leaders Ra'id Salah and Kamal Khatib announced that they did not consider themselves bound by it. They did not, however, call on their followers to boycott the elections, remaining loyal to a previous movement decision that allowed individual members of the movement to decide whether to vote. A unified Arab list, representing a coalition of the Islamist movement and the Arab Democratic Party, ultimately won four seats in the May 1996 elections, two of which went to Islamist representatives.

The Israeli Islamist movement's debate regarding participation in the Knesset elections was similar to internal Hamas deliberations over whether to participate in the elections to the PA legislative council.<sup>91</sup> Both involved a conflict between an oppositionist trend (represented in Hamas by the leadership outside the territories) and a more pragmatic trend (in Hamas' case, a group of senior activists, mainly in Gaza). In both cases, opposition was based on political-ideological and religious considerations. In Hamas, opponents claimed that participation was tantamount to recognition of the Oslo agreements and support for the peace process; the Islamist opposition in Israel regarded swearing loyalty to and holding office in the Knesset as recognition of a Zionist Jewish state. Conversely, the more moderate elements in Hamas claimed that participation in the PA legislative council would help them protect the movement's infrastructure in the territories, provide them with an influential base, and demonstrate the real extent of their support in the territories. In Israel, the pragmatic trend aspired to actualize its civil rights and demonstrate its electoral strength.

Interestingly, Hamas spokesmen barely referred to the internal debate in Israel. In one of the few exceptions, Dr. Mahmud al-Zahar, a Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, explained that "the leaders of the [Israeli] Islamist movement took steps to consult with Islamist personalities outside the country in order to obtain a religious *fatwa*, as the problem is religious and not political."<sup>92</sup> An article in the May 1996 *Filastin al-Muslima* analyzing the political situation in Israel before the elections described the Islamist movement's decision to participate in them—and the split the decision caused—from the point of view of the radicals.

Later that month, religious authorities and Islamist leaders in several Arab countries issued a document appealing "to the Palestinian people on the occupied land of 1948" to boycott the elections. The signatories were Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Mustafa Mash'ur and spokesman M'amun al-Hudaybi; Rashid Ghanushi, leader of Tunisia's Al-Nahda al-Islamiyya; Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood leader Abd al-Majid al-Sanibat; *fatwa* author al-Qirdawi; and Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Ghawsha.<sup>93</sup> Interestingly, Ghawsha's name was eliminated in the report on the document published in *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*.<sup>94</sup>

Whereas the debate within Hamas was apparently tactical—the two sides reconciled their differences and reached a consensus against participation in the elections for the PA legislative council, the differences of opinion within the Israeli Islamist movement were more substantive, entrenched, and ultimately irreconcilable. Although Hamas' decision not to participate in the elections, the *fatwas* by al-Qirdawi and Abu Faris, and the appeal by external Islamic authorities clearly influenced the radical Israeli Islamist faction's rigid resistance to participation in the Knesset elections, whether they ultimately tipped the balance on this issue remains unclear.

<sup>91</sup> See Michal Sela, "The PLO and the Arabs in Israel," *Surveys on the Arabs in Israel* 18 (Givat Haviva: Institute for Peace Research, May 1996), pp. 34-35.

<sup>92</sup> *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, May 15, 1996.

<sup>93</sup> *An Appeal from the Scholars, Thinkers and Leaders of the Arab and Islamic Peoples* (n.p., May 22, 1996); *Ha'aretz*, May 28, 1996.

<sup>94</sup> *Sawt al-Haqq wal-Hurriyya*, June 7, 1996.



# IV

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## Conclusions

There is a strong connection between the Islamist movements on both sides of the Green Line. Conceptually, the Israeli fundamentalist movement is a sub-branch of intra-Palestinian political Islam. Its genesis and growth are in many respects integrally linked to the Islamist movement in the territories. Many of the ideological characteristics of the Israeli Islamist movement are similar or identical to its counterpart in the territories. In addition, there are obvious similarities in their *modus operandi*, particularly in establishing social, educational, cultural and religious networks under the rubric of the Islamist trend.

The Israeli Islamist movement uses its links with Islamists in the territories to seek legitimacy both within the overall Islamist trend beyond Israel and as part of the interfactional struggle going on within the Israeli Islamist movement itself. This link, however, is not static. It has an interesting entrenchment/withdrawal dynamic that is a function of various external and internal factors such as implementation of the Oslo accords, progress in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the other tracks of the Arab-Israeli peace process, and internal political developments in the Israeli, Arab, and Islamist arenas. Thus, any attempt to portray the connection between the Islamist trend in Israel and Hamas in the territories as unilateral or monolithic is misleading and erroneous; the link is multi-faceted, multi-directional, and multi-tiered.

The Israeli Islamist movement has developed in particular directions that reflect the unique environment in which it functions—within a Muslim minority in a non-Muslim state, under the perpetual threat of the Israeli-Palestinian national dispute. These particular conditions set the parameters of the movement's link with its counterpart in the territories, and clearly delineate what is permissible and prohibited in its range of activities in Israel. These basic constraints have dictated the direction in which the link has developed in four major channels: a doctrinal-spiritual connection in the religious sphere, identification and solidarity in the political sphere, cooperation in the humanitarian-social sphere, and an undefined involvement with regard to violence and terrorism.

Israeli Islamist spokesmen representing both the moderate and radical factions have consistently highlighted the legitimacy of maintaining close religious-spiritual contact with their counterparts in the territories. Such a relationship, they argue, involves the elementary right of individuals to embrace a doctrine shared by others. "Our Qur'an and that of the Islamist movement [in the territories] is the same Qur'an, and our Prophet is the same Prophet," Sheikh 'Abdallah has said on more than one occasion.<sup>95</sup> A similar approach is reflected in a February 1995 Islamist movement statement following the Israeli government's closure of the movement's offices for coordinating the distribution of aid in the territories: "What Hamas and we have in common is that we recite the same prayers, fast on Ramadan, and declare that there is no God except Allah and Muhammad is His Prophet. . . . How can this be denied? They are Muslims and we are Muslims."<sup>96</sup>

The links on the doctrinal-spiritual level between the two communities have been significantly strengthened in recent years by means of *da'wa* (religious outreach or missionary) activity,

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<sup>95</sup> *Yedion Merkaz Lemoreshet Hamodi'in*, no. 11 (May 1995).

<sup>96</sup> *Ha'aretz*, February 12, 1996.

preaching in mosques, religious education, and the Islamist media. The movement's more radical faction is particularly active and assertive in this area, while the moderate faction—with the exception of Sheikh 'Abdallah Darwish's unique status as a spiritual authority—is less evident, particularly as the schism between the two has grown wider. The purely religious connection becomes a powerful source of strength when it reaches beyond the narrow boundary of the individual to unify the public into a collective. The unifying potential of religious sentiment was evident in the Israeli Muslim community's spontaneous reaction to the Netanyahu government's decision to open the Hasmonean tunnel in Jerusalem.

The Israeli Islamist movement similarly perceives political solidarity with their counterparts in the territories as legitimate, although with certain reservations. The two Israeli Islamist factions relate to the question differently. In 1996, the radical faction became more vocal, assertive, and blunt in its favorable attitude toward Hamas, with the Knesset elections serving as a turning point. The emerging split between the factions facilitated the efforts of the more dogmatic Salah-Khatib camp by removing the internal barriers imposed by the moderate faction: as long as unity within the ranks was maintained, the dogmatic trend was forced to adopt a measure of restraint. When this factor disappeared, the radical leadership allowed itself freedom to express its views. Indeed, a late 1996 review of the Salah-Khatib group's positions on the Oslo agreements and the relations between the PA and Hamas shows a near-total adoption of the positions of the Islamist trend in the territories, with every fluctuation in the territories accurately reflected in the positions of the radical Islamist faction in Israel. By contrast, the moderate Israeli Islamist trend's positions are much more ambivalent and display a more independent and balanced approach to the PA, Hamas, and the Oslo process.

The two other aspects of the intra-Islamist connection—the humanitarian-social link and violence—are somewhat more problematic in that they involve practical implementation. Great strides have been made in the area of humanitarian-social aid since the *intifada*. The guiding principle is that this activity is legitimate, accepted, and permissible. Again, the dictates of reality and the message conveyed by Israeli security authorities determine its permissible bounds, although the prevailing murkiness regarding the definition of what is and is not legitimate in the area of humanitarian aid allows the Israeli Islamist movement a considerable measure of maneuverability. The radical faction has played the dominant role in this area, developing a varied and effective network of organizations and institutions (the Islamic Aid Committee, financial bodies, *da'wa* college, and a volunteer network) through which it has entrenched its physical link with the territories. Although the moderate faction also has institutions under its control, these are devoted to welfare activity on behalf of the Arab population within the Green Line only, while their rivals also focus outside.

Finally, there is a discernible difference between the moderate faction's vigorous and public rejection of terrorism, and the radical faction's less explicit condemnation of—and understanding of the motives for—terrorism. The situation is not static, however, and the tendency toward violence is sometimes difficult to single out among the total range of influences that the Islamist movement in the territories exerts, as demonstrated by the 1992 killing of several Israeli soldiers by renegade Israeli Islamists at Galed.

Ultimately, the nature of the split in the ranks of the Islamist movement in Israel may perhaps be most clearly discerned through the prism of each side's attitude toward Hamas and the type of links it maintains to the Islamist trend in the territories. The more radical faction faces East, emphasizing its political-ideological identification with the Islamist movement in the territories, although by no means minimizing its local basis. The pragmatic faction's Westward orientation is even more interesting. It has chosen to confine its activity within the bounds of the Green Line, accepting its minority status in a non-Muslim majority. It has decided to participate in the Knesset and accept the *modus operandi* of a Western democracy. This represents an explicit attempt to adjust religious dogma to a changing political reality. In light of the Israeli-Palestinian national conflict, this represents a unique development in contemporary Arab politics: a pragmatic

Islamist faction that acknowledges the legitimacy of Israel's existence. In this respect, the moderate faction appears to constitute a link in a broader Islamist trend whose beginnings are visible in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, and even Algeria.

The rift between the two Israeli Islamist factions has weakened the political and religious viability of the movement overall. The movement's leaders are aware of this, but view it as a temporary condition. The movement's collective sphere of influence is expanded and strengthened in the long run, they say, by the independent operations of all its factions, which are ultimately destined to unite. Indeed, ever since the split immediately prior to the May 1996 Knesset elections, there have been ongoing contacts between the two sides in an attempt to heal the rift. Moreover, although the conflict has an ideological aspect, it does not constitute an unbridgeable theological divide, but rather involves political, tactical, and personal differences of opinion.

Hamas clearly prefers that there be a single Islamist movement in Israel, both as a reflection of pan-Islamic unity and a tool for political influence within Israel. It is therefore likely that Islamists in the territories are playing a role in attempts to reunify the movement within Israel. In addition to this external effort, three other factors could induce the re-unification of the Israeli Islamist factions: internal pressure by activists in the field, fear that the continuation of the split will harm the Islamists' chances in Israeli municipal elections scheduled for 1998, and an aspiration to expand the movement's representation in the Knesset, either in early national elections or those scheduled for 2000.

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