

## CHAPTER SEVEN

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### HAMAS

### RESISTANCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF PALESTINIAN SOCIETY\*

HAIM MALKA

#### Introduction

For the Islamic movement Hamas, “resistance” is a way of life. It defines the movement, as its name-*Islamic Resistance Movement*-suggests, and drives its all-encompassing strategy to establish an Islamic Palestine through the transformation of society. Though the term resistance is most commonly associated with terrorism, for Hamas it is a comprehensive concept embracing military, social, and political activity. Resistance is a rejection of the status quo and an alternative paradigm to the secular-nationalist agenda of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in every sphere of Palestinian life.<sup>1</sup>

At the core of this strategy is a diverse network of social welfare institutions linked by personal relationships, shared values, and common interests. This network is most advanced in the Gaza Strip, where the Muslim Brotherhood built an independent infrastructure, as opposed to the movement in the West Bank which was closely linked to the Brotherhood’s Jordanian branch. The network of charitable organizations and services, not unique to Hamas, has not only been an important platform for spreading the movement’s version of Islam but has also provided a supportive infrastructure for military operatives to exploit and has been a major factor in the movement’s electoral victories.<sup>2</sup> While political action and military operations may be tactics in pursuit of their overall goals, Hamas’ social services are the key to its broader strategy of transforming society. The movement cannot exist without

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the founders of Fatah, including Yasser Arafat, which came to dominate the PLO, were originally supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

<sup>2</sup> The Palestinian territories are also served by host of domestic and international social service providers and aid organizations, the largest of which are the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Social Affairs.

its social services network which links the movement to the population and provides a source of legitimacy.

Charity and welfare, especially *zakat*, is a deeply rooted religious imperative for Muslims, and as a Muslim organization Hamas seeks to improve Palestinian society by aiding those in need. Hamas has been able to capitalize on the established tradition of charitable giving in Islam through mosques, *zakat*, and property endowments known as *waqf*.

At the center of Hamas' charitable activity and the foundation of its community activism is the mosque. Larger mosques often have a number of associated institutions built into or around the mosque complex, including schools, health clinics, and *zakat* committees. The mosque complex is intended to provide a wide range of both physical and spiritual needs of the local population and function as a community center. Whether Hamas' services are provided in exchange for political support or simply based on need is questionable. Regardless, by providing social services and caring for marginalized sectors of society, Hamas attempts to demonstrate that it cares about people's individual daily struggle as well as the national struggle. Its activities seek to make Islam relevant in every aspect of Palestinian life.

In addition to providing basic services for Palestinians, Hamas' welfare network also serves as a powerful tool for social, military, and political mobilization. The interplay between these three broad elements of activity is central to Hamas' strength and ability to draw on grassroots support. Its demonstrated capacity and effectiveness in the charitable and military arenas have strengthened the movement's reputation as a credible and effective organization among many Palestinians, including those who may not identify fully with its ideology.

Hamas seeks to be an all-encompassing movement whose activities in the social, military, and political spheres are channeled toward the larger goal of creating an empowered Islamic society capable of liberating Palestine. Hamas' ability to move between these three spheres reinforces its skill in adapting to conditions and circumstances while drawing on an array of tools and tactics. Thus pragmatic shifts, political participation, ambiguous statements, terror

or military attacks, and ceasefires are all components of Hamas' long-term strategy to transform Palestinian society and return to true Islam.

The movement's ongoing effort to mobilize Palestinians through an Islamic framework directly competes with the historically dominant nationalist forces of the PLO led by Fatah, which has attempted through the Palestinian Authority (PA)<sup>3</sup> to counter Hamas' growing appeal and regulate the Islamist welfare apparatus. Both groups have sought to use social services as a means of recruitment and patronage. Yet Hamas' ability to articulate a unified agenda based on Islam has allowed Hamas to frame the debate over the Palestinian struggle within an Islamic discourse. Its electoral message was clear and unambiguous on the right to protect the "resistance" as well Islam's role as a "reference" and source of legislation.<sup>4</sup> It is this ability to deliver a clear message to its constituents and effectively mobilize grassroots support that contributed to Hamas' electoral success in the parliamentary elections of January 2006.

The centrality of welfare to Hamas' broad social agenda of Islamizing society has been Hamas' most effective form of activism. Unlike politics which often requires compromises and military operations which can elicit lethal reprisals, charity work is relatively risk-free with significant payoff. Hamas' foray into national politics and governance, coupled with the declining socio-economic situation in the West Bank and Gaza, ensure that Hamas will continue emphasizing welfare services, and Palestinians will increasingly look to Hamas for sustenance.

Though several studies have explored Hamas' various components, precise figures and statistics for the movement's activities--including military and welfare budgets, membership, employees, and the numbers of affiliated institutions and beneficiaries--are nonexistent. Most estimates suggest that Hamas' total budget ranges between \$50-70 million annually.<sup>5</sup> Hamas remains in part a secretive organization which attempts to shield its fundraising

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<sup>3</sup> The official title is the Palestinian National Authority or *As-Sulta Al-Wataniyya Al-Filastiniyya*.

<sup>4</sup> See 2006 Electoral Campaign Platform for Hamas "List for Change and Reform," Palestinian National Information Center at <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/english/gover/Elections/Hamas-program.html>.

<sup>5</sup> The U.S. government estimates Hamas' annual budget at \$50 million. See John S. Pistole, testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Financial Services, Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, September 24, 2003, <http://www.fbi.gov/congress/congress03/pistole092403.htm>.

network and operations not only from international law enforcement measures but from Israeli and Palestinian efforts as well. As a result, even figures cited by government officials and scholars remain estimates at best, culled from a number of sources. This chapter does not attempt to provide a comprehensive audit of Hamas' charity network, but rather an examination of the role Hamas' charity institutions play in the movement's broader agenda of transforming Palestinian society.

### **The call to Islam and transformation of society**

Hamas seeks to empower Palestinians to improve their society and liberate Palestine through action and *jihad*.<sup>6</sup> For the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, the struggle to liberate Palestine and the Islamic transformation of society were originally two separate paths. It was not until the creation of Hamas at the outset of the first intifada in 1987-88, from within the militant ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, that the two parallel objectives were meshed into one multifaceted strategy. For Hamas, resistance became the new embodiment of Palestinian Islamic activism, and it sought to be an all-encompassing movement, active in every sphere of Palestinian daily life. Since Islam covers all aspects of daily life, it should influence all activities including charity, sports, entertainment, military operations, politics, and governance. By merging Palestinian identity with Islam, Hamas sought to “make Islam the principle component of Palestinian identity.”<sup>7</sup>

The starting point for transforming society is the individual, and much of Hamas' charitable work, education, and outreach efforts are intended to create sound Muslims through action and example. Making Islam relevant through everyday activity and as a way of life is essential to this mission. Charity and social work are used not only to improve people's lives but to change norms of behavior. Other mass movements have used similar methods. For example, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's efforts to segregate school classes and provide exclusive transportation for veiled women was, according to Gilles Kepel, a way of

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<sup>6</sup> See The Charter of Allah: The Platform of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), <http://jmcc.org/politics/hamas.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Meir Litvak, “The Islamization of Palestinian Identity: The Case of Hamas,” The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Data and Analysis, August 1996, 18.

responding “Islamically” to the social problems of overcrowding in classrooms and on public transportation.<sup>8</sup>

Part of Hamas’ authority and success in promoting “Islamic” norms of behavior stems from its influence over Islamic discourse in the Palestinian context. Hamas successfully “popularized the notion that its version of social morality is fundamental to Palestinian nationalism and national identity.”<sup>9</sup> Though not all devout Muslims in the Palestinian territories identify with Hamas or its goals, religious Muslims have tended to gravitate toward the movement. Thus Hamas’ dominance in the religious sphere has allowed it to frame the debate on a range of issues and set the criteria for the proper role of Islam in Palestinian life and the national struggle. Employing an Islamic frame of reference is a powerful tool which Hamas uses to its advantage over secular movements.

Combining the social message of Islam and morality with the military doctrine of armed resistance was an early achievement of Hamas when it sought to impose moral codes of behavior during the first intifada. The movement gained ground by espousing a clear social message of family values and morality at a time when such issues were neglected by the PLO. One of the most visible manifestations was the campaign to persuade women and girls to wear the *hijab*. It signaled a “noticeable trend away from activism focused solely on confronting the external enemy of the occupation to activism simultaneously focused on cleansing Palestinian society of elements deemed to make it vulnerable to that enemy.”<sup>10</sup> Nearly twenty years later, Hamas would boast that “eighty percent of women have a cover on their heads according to the principles of Islam.”<sup>11</sup> Hamas’ focus on morality and social norms was heightened with the influx of Palestinians from outside the West Bank and Gaza after the establishment of the PA in 1994, which Hamas perceived as importing secular and Western culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2002) 82.

<sup>9</sup> See Rema Hammami, “From Immodesty to Collaboration: Hamas, the Women’s Movement, and National Identity in the Intifada,” in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork, *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, (New York: IB Taurus, 1997) 203.

<sup>10</sup> Hammami notes that Fatah Hawks and later the PA’s Preventive Security apparatus also carried out operations against drug dealers and alcoholics, which she ascribes to the PA’s competition with Hamas on the ground through the discourse of social morality. See Hammami, “From Immodesty to Collaboration,” 203-207.

<sup>11</sup> See interview with Hamas member and Speaker of the PLC Abdul Aziz Duwaik in “Hamas Plans Ahead,” *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue No. 790, April 13-19, 2006, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/790/re72.htm>.

Strict social norms are promoted along with a steady stream of anti-Israel and often anti-Jewish teaching that permeates many facets of Palestinian daily life. Such anti-Israel sentiment is by no means limited to Hamas schools; it has been a regular accusation against the PA curriculum as well.<sup>12</sup> The rhetoric of hate and widespread glorification of violence and martyrdom--which Hamas does not deny--is not only a genuine sentiment, but is intended to harden and strengthen society for the fight against Israel.

If the individual is the foundation for transforming society, then youth are seen as the starting point. Close to half the Palestinian population is under the age of 15.<sup>13</sup> As a result, Hamas devotes significant resources and efforts to education and youth activities, with great emphasis on teaching Hamas' version of moral behavior. Hamas has benefited from the Muslim Brotherhood's charity network of kindergartens, schools, sports clubs, and libraries, which helped spread religious ideas and rally support for the Islamic movement.<sup>14</sup> Through institutions such as the *Mujamma al-Islami* in Gaza and its *nadi jam'iyya al-islamiyya*, it provides a range of youth activities and sports such as soccer, swimming, karate, and boxing, which Hamas uses to imbue Palestinian youth with discipline and morality. Beyond filling time, the focus on sports demonstrates that Islam is compatible with all aspects of daily life, even sports. This trend applies to other forms of entertainment and popular culture including music, art, poetry, and theater.<sup>15</sup>

Hamas has placed its most promising individuals at the head of youth organizations, including Ismail Haniyeh, who formerly headed the sports section of the Islamic Center. A

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<sup>12</sup> Numerous advocacy organizations, such as the Center for Monitoring the Impact of Peace (CMIP) and Palestinian Media Watch, have monitored and reported on the PA's educational curriculum, accusing it of incitement against Israel and Jews. For a summary of the issue see Aaron D. Pina, "Palestinian Education and the Debate Over Textbooks," CRS Report for Congress, Updated May 3, 2005, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RL32886.pdf>. For a Palestinian perspective see "The myth of incitement in Palestinian textbooks," Briefing, The Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education, June 13 2005, <http://electronicintifada.net/cgi-bin/artman/exec/view.cgi/11/3923>.

<sup>13</sup> According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 45.7 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are under the age of 15. In Gaza the number is 48.8 percent, while in the West Bank it is slightly lower with 43.9 percent. See "Palestinians at the End of Year 2006," Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, Ramallah, 2006, [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/\\_pcbs/PressRelease/end\\_year06e.pdf](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/_pcbs/PressRelease/end_year06e.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Ziad Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) 15.

<sup>15</sup> Litvak, "The Islamization of Palestinian Identity," 17-18.

case study on the sports section of the Center and its affiliate soccer club revealed that morality and discipline are stressed, and that members of the club must fulfill requirements such as prayer, fasting, and visiting the mosque.<sup>16</sup> A grim contrast to this account is found with the Hebron based Jihad Mosque soccer club, reportedly a Hamas military recruiting center. During the second intifada, six players on the club committed suicide attacks against Israelis during their membership on the team, which also required players to fast and pray regularly.<sup>17</sup>

With an overwhelmingly young population and high enrollment in basic education,<sup>18</sup> the educational field is one of the most important for spreading Hamas' worldview.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the network of kindergartens and primary schools organized by Hamas, the Islamic University of Gaza is a key center of support for the movement and important recruiting grounds for leadership, activists, and operatives.<sup>20</sup> Many of Hamas' top leaders including military and political officials have worked at the university, and many of Hamas' electoral candidates are drawn from the faculty. Hamas also provides scholarships and subsidies for students at the Islamic University and other educational institutions. Ismail Haniyeh, for example, rose through the ranks of the Islamic student movement before becoming active in Hamas. In the late 1990s, teachers sympathetic to Hamas were sent to day-long training sessions in basic light weapons use and other military skills.

According to Danish scholar Michael Jensen who observed classes at the Islamic University, "the intention is to create the sound Muslim, who is brought up with a specific frame of reference; an Islamist frame and an understanding of the world that is similar to the ideology

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<sup>16</sup> Danish scholar Michael Irving Jensen claims that players on an Islamic soccer club affiliated with Hamas in Gaza chose the team for various reasons beyond religious, including the opportunity for playing time and proximity of the club to home. For an in-depth look at the sports section of the Islamic Center in Gaza and its soccer team see Michael Irving Jensen, "Youth, Moral, and Islamism: Spending your leisure time with Hamas in Palestine," in Jorgen Baek Simonsen Ed., *Youth and Youth Culture in the Contemporary Middle East*, (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005) 120-122.

<sup>17</sup> Joshua Hammer and Samir Zeidan, "The Jihad Soccer Club," *Newsweek*, July 7, 2003, Vol.142, Issue 1.

<sup>18</sup>The Palestine Human Development Report 2004, <http://www.undp.ps/en/newsroom/publications/pdf/other/phdr2004.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> According to Sara Roy's estimate 65 percent of all educational institutions in Gaza below secondary school were Islamic. See Sara Roy, "The Transformation of Islamic NGOs in Palestine," *Middle East Report*, No. 214, Spring 2000.

<sup>20</sup> For a first-hand account of the Islamic University see Michael Irving Jensen, "Re-Islamizing Palestinian Society from Below: Hamas and Higher Education in Gaza," *Holy Land Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (2006).

and thinking of the leadership of Hamas.”<sup>21</sup> This seems to confirm earlier analysis of Islamic higher education, which has noted that one of the main issues preoccupying Islamic students was “immoral behavior.”<sup>22</sup>

Hamas is first and foremost a religious movement. The movement is guided by the secretive shura council (*majlis al-shura*), which includes well respected religious figures. Yet the public leadership of Hamas is overwhelmingly young and lay professionals, with little record of religious scholarship or formal religious authority. Even Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the former spiritual head and founder of the movement, was more of a moral and spiritual authority than a religious or scholarly one.

Some scholars have pointed out that though Hamas institutions such as mosques, schools, and clinics are religious, they are not components of “sacred authority.” Rather, “they are institutions with shared but identifiable functions related to religious and social services, the struggle against Israeli occupation, and Hamas’ desire to expand its political turf at the expense of Fatah.”<sup>23</sup> But the religious principles do not bar Hamas from tactical bargaining and a flexibility which has often been characterized as pragmatism. Indeed, Hamas has always retained the ability to shift its tactics based on the opportunities and constraints of its environment.

### **The welfare apparatus as a component of transforming society**

Even before the creation of Hamas as an official organization, the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamic organizations were active in welfare and charity work. For the most part, Hamas inherited a loose network of charitable institutions already in place, which gave it a natural advantage over other Palestinian groups in this arena, the most important of which is the Gaza based *al Mujamma al Islami*, established in 1973 by Ahmed Yassin and several other future Hamas founders.<sup>24</sup> As Hamas evolved into the dominant Islamic force in the

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<sup>21</sup> Jensen, “Re-Islamizing Palestinian Society from Below,” 73.

<sup>22</sup> See Reuven Paz, “Higher Education and the Development of Palestinian Islamic Groups,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs (MERIA)*, Vol.4, No.2, June 2000, <http://meria.biu.ac.il/journal/2000/issue2/jv4n2a6.html>.

<sup>23</sup> See Muhammad Muslih, *The Foreign Policy of Hamas*, New York, Council on Foreign Relations, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> *Al Mujamma al Islami* was founded as an umbrella institution for Muslim Brotherhood activity in Gaza. It was originally established as a mosque with several institutions attached including a *zakat* committee, health clinic,



Palestinian territories, many religious institutions became associated by varying degrees with the Hamas welfare umbrella. Hamas began overseeing mosques and *zakat* committees and its charities began to collect donations from local individuals and businessmen. It is also believed that Hamas has business operations and investments both inside and outside the Palestinian territories that generate income for the movement, including dairy farms and other cooperatives.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond local fundraising within the Palestinian territories and the Islamic community in Israel, funds for various *zakat* committees and other charities are also contributed by wealthy donors abroad and established international organizations. The most well known of these, the UK based Interpal (Palestinian Relief and Development Fund) and the Union of Good, founded by Sheikh Youssef al Qaradawi, have been accused of transferring money to Hamas affiliated charities.<sup>26</sup> There is also evidence that foreign donor support has been directed to Islamic oriented charitable organizations, including through World Bank sponsored projects.<sup>27</sup> This money is used to support a wide range of welfare activities: cash and food distribution, clothing, medical services, education and child care, youth clubs, rehabilitation centers, orphanages, and a long list of social services. There is no doubt that Hamas' ability to distribute aid and services won the movement friends and supporters.

However, the perception that all Islamic charitable organizations are formally part of Hamas or micromanaged by the movement's political leadership obscures the relationship and authority of Hamas. Many Islamic charity organizations and their employees, including *zakat*

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youth club, festival hall, and women's center. For a more detailed account see Ziad Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza*, 16.

<sup>25</sup> No publicly available estimate of the size of Hamas' business operations exists, but press reports have shed some light on the trend. See for example, Thanassis Cambanis, "Charity faces chasm of need on West Bank," Boston Globe, June 4, 2007, [http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2007/06/04/charity\\_faces\\_chasm\\_of\\_need\\_on\\_west\\_bank?mode=PF](http://www.boston.com/news/world/middleeast/articles/2007/06/04/charity_faces_chasm_of_need_on_west_bank?mode=PF).

<sup>26</sup> In 2003 the United States froze the assets of Interpal and a number of other charities accused of transferring funds to Hamas. Among a list of Interpal beneficiaries included in a 2002 Interpal publication include institutions with clear Hamas affiliation such as the Gaza based *al Mujamma al-Islami*. For a complete list see Interpal, "Helping Palestinians in Need," No. 5, October 2002 at <http://www.epolitix.com/NR/rdonlyres/7AEA7709-FEFC-4E8B-948E-73C78969EE36/0/Update2002.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> World Bank funding went to support various Islamic charities including *al Mujamma al-Islami* in Gaza, Islamic Zakat Society in Gaza, and Al Islah Charitable Society, among others. The aid was distributed as part of the Palestinian NGO Project of which the World Bank Group was the largest donor. See <http://www.pngo-project.org/programs/phase1.html>.

committees, sympathize with Hamas and may even be formal members. Some institutions like *al Mujamma al-Islami* or the Al Salah Islamic Association are clearly Hamas institutions, but many others may only have loose affiliations, such as directors or employees who sympathize with the movement's agenda. Many charitable organizations go to lengths to de-emphasize any link with Hamas for fear of retribution by Israel or the Fatah dominated branches of the PA security apparatus. The heads of *zakat* committees are also given relative autonomy in their operations and distribution of aid. Regardless of the degree of affiliation, it appears that "Hamas continues to play an indirect, yet significant role in the financing of affiliated organizations" most likely through foreign funds channeled to these organizations based on recommendations from Hamas sympathizers and activists.<sup>28</sup> Given Hamas' dominance, most Islamic oriented organizations including charitable organizations have tended to lean toward the movement.

Ideological affinity plays a more crucial role in mobilizing Hamas' network than formal political affiliation. Hamas' leadership knows that it can rely on the political support and activism of many of the charitable organizations and committees and draw on volunteers, employees, and even beneficiaries for political support. Hamas does not rely on a rigid system of control to obtain political support; instead, its ability to rely on a loosely organized network at crucial times is a major source of strength for the movement.

Islamic welfare organizations are typically divided into two broad categories: charitable organizations and service organizations.<sup>29</sup> Charitable organizations including *zakat* committees typically collect funds and distribute either cash or in-kind support such as food and clothing to needy families. Service organizations provide a range of social services including education, day care, youth clubs, health services, orphanages, counseling, and vocational training. Welfare organizations on the West Bank and Gaza remain distinct in their operations and subject to different institutional affiliations and constraints. As mentioned, it is difficult to obtain exact data on Hamas affiliated social institutions and their budgets. One broad estimate claims that Islamic institutions in the West Bank and Gaza

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<sup>28</sup> "Islamic Social Welfare Activism in the Occupied Territories: A Legitimate Target?," International Crisis Group, Middle East Report No. 13, April 2003, 12.

<sup>29</sup> "Islamic Social Welfare Activism in the Occupied Territories," 7.

comprise anywhere from 10-40 percent of all social service institutions.<sup>30</sup> The International Crisis Group estimates that at least one in six Palestinians receives some form of assistance from Islamic social welfare organizations.<sup>31</sup> One Palestinian source estimated that the Hamas-linked *al Mujamma's* annual budget in 2006 was \$730,000; this figure seems low, given its status as one of the largest Hamas institutions.<sup>32</sup> Other accounts have cited *zakat* budgets as high as \$2 million.<sup>33</sup>

*Zakat* committees are among the most trusted and respected Palestinian institutions and provide aid to thousands of people.<sup>34</sup> According to recent statistics, 81 *zakat* committees operate in the West Bank and Gaza, 67 of which are in the West Bank.<sup>35</sup> Most *zakat* committees operate on a common basic structure of collection and distribution of cash, food, and clothing with low overhead costs. The 2.5 percent tax, while obligatory in Islam, is voluntary in the Palestinian territories.

Whereas *zakat* committees in Gaza have historically enjoyed more autonomy, those in the West Bank originally fell under Jordanian jurisdiction, which continued even after 1967. For example, after its founding in Gaza in 1973, the *Mujamma*, later a Hamas stronghold, began asserting itself in the charity field by taking over mosques and *zakat* committees through the appointments of prayer leaders, imams, and management boards. With the establishment of the PA in 1994, the newly formed Ministry of Awqaf was officially charged with registering and overseeing all *zakat* committees. In practice, however, the PA was never able to fully establish governmental control over the committees, which gave them a certain degree of

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<sup>30</sup> Sara Roy, "The Transformation of Islamic NGOs in Palestine."

<sup>31</sup> International Crisis Group, 17.

<sup>32</sup> "Social Safety Nets and Social Support Programmes in the their Relation to Food Security in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," Food Insecurity and Vulnerability Mapping System in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, FIVIMS Working Paper II, September 26, 2006, 10,

[http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/FIVIMS\\_ph2\\_Wokingpaper2\\_060926.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/FIVIMS_ph2_Wokingpaper2_060926.pdf). This figure seems low however given claims that a *zakat* committee in Nablus had an alms budget of \$2 million in 2006. See Thanassis Cambanis, "Charity faces chasm of need on West Bank."

<sup>33</sup> The head of a *zakat* committee in Nablus which was partially funded by a dairy operation claimed an alms budget of \$2 million in 2006. See Thanassis Cambanis, "Charity faces chasm of need on West Bank."

<sup>34</sup> A Bir Zeit University poll conducted in 2003 found that 65 percent of Palestinians polled trusted *zakat* committees. Only schools and universities ranked higher among a list of 15 institutions. At the bottom of the list were the PA, PLC, and political parties. See Bir Zeit University Development Studies Program, Opinion Poll #11, March 2003 at [http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/DSPNEW/polls/poll\\_11/tables.htm](http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/DSPNEW/polls/poll_11/tables.htm).

<sup>35</sup> MAS Social Monitor Issue No. 8, 2005, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, 35, [http://www.mas.org.ps/publications/Full\\_text/2005/Texte.pdf](http://www.mas.org.ps/publications/Full_text/2005/Texte.pdf).

flexibility and autonomy and ensured that their legal status remained ambiguous.<sup>36</sup> The most important link between *zakat* committees and Hamas is found in the political and religious leanings of the leadership and boards of the committees. Some may identify openly with Hamas while others may not. In the municipal elections of 2005 and parliamentary elections of 2006, Hamas drew candidates and campaign workers from among *zakat* committees and other charitable organizations.

While these institutions may not be officially linked, Islamic charities work toward the same goal within a similar religious and political context. In contrast, a UN sponsored Human Development report lamented that Palestinian NGOs, including a myriad of social, charitable and developmental organizations, have failed to “harmonize and coordinate the work of individual civil society organizations under the umbrella of a strategic vision for sustainable development and the collective empowerment of society.”<sup>37</sup> Though Hamas does not have any visible centralized organizing body for charity organizations affiliated with the movement, these numerous educational institutions, *zakat* committees, and clinics share the same world view and identify with Hamas’ broad concept of creating a religiously observant and strong Muslim society.

According to one close observer, “Hamas’ social services have contributed not only to its wide popular support but also to its close ties with its political base.” A close connection with its base is reinforced by its reliance on *zakat* and other donations from within the Palestinian territories. This dependence on donations from its core of supporters is the opposite of the patronage system and accompanying corruption of Fatah and the PLO.<sup>38</sup> Beyond its traditional constituency which identifies with Hamas, the movement has been able to mobilize a broad sector of Palestinian voters who either sympathize with Hamas or were motivated by Hamas’ message as the alternative to the status quo.

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<sup>36</sup> While *zakat* committee employees are officially under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Awqaf they are not covered by the civil service law of the PA nor considered government employees. See Nathan Brown, *Palestinian Politics after the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 160.

<sup>37</sup> See Palestine Human Development Report 2004, (Ramalla: Bir Zeit University Development Studies Programme, 2005) 104, <http://www.undp.ps/en/newsroom/publications/pdf/other/phdr2004.pdf>.

<sup>38</sup> See Helga Baumgarten, “The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 4 (Summer 2005): 40.

Money collected through *zakat* committees may also fund various social services, often attached to a mosque, such as a health clinic or school. Many schools, kindergartens, and nurseries are actually housed within mosques. Arguably more important than the *zakat* committees and direct financial assistance is the impact of Hamas' vast network of social services including schools, health clinics, and a range of other welfare enterprises. Many of these services fall under the category of *dawa* or proselytization, most importantly education.<sup>39</sup>

Beyond the daily services, Hamas attempts to give marginalized sectors of society a sense of belonging. Occasionally mass weddings are held for young couples who cannot afford wedding parties. Hamas has also spearheaded efforts to rebuild homes that have been destroyed in fighting with Israel. Despite the international economic boycott of the Hamas government and broader efforts to target Hamas finances, the movement has been able to continue funding its various activities, including military, political, and social operations. Some of this money was collected abroad by Hamas officials such as former foreign minister Mahmoud Zahar who reportedly walked across the Rafah crossing with \$20 million in cash earmarked for the Hamas led PA.<sup>40</sup> Other reports suggest that Hamas affiliated health clinics and schools were still able to pay teachers and employees despite a dramatic increase in demand for these services.<sup>41</sup> Though this money was intended for the Hamas-led PA to pay salaries, it demonstrates the fundraising capabilities of the movement more generally.

Hamas claims to distribute aid based on legitimate Islamic principles of charity and a sincere desire to help those in need, yet aid is also an important tool of patronage and political mobilization. According to the International Crisis Group, "social welfare is a significant if not primary role in the growth and popularity of Hamas."<sup>42</sup> Like other organizations, Hamas' ability to distribute aid is limited to its financial capacity, and it claims to distribute aid based on strict socio-economic criteria. *Zakat* funds are usually reserved for families

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<sup>39</sup> *Dawa* literally means "call" and refers to Muslim efforts to reach out to other Muslims to encourage and teach greater religious observance. *Dawa* activities can include a range of education services and child care, youth programs, religious study groups, where a specific religious message is being transmitted.

<sup>40</sup> Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Abbas and Hamas try to ease deepening tensions," *Reuters*, June 14, 2006.

<sup>41</sup> The Al Razi Hospital in Jenin, funded by *zakat* money, claimed a 25 percent increase in outpatient and 40 percent increase for inpatient care. See Adam Entous, "Funds, Patients Make way to Hamas-linked Clinics," *Reuters*, May 24, 2006.

<sup>42</sup> "Islamic Social Welfare Activism in the Occupied Territories," 27.

without a father or where the male head of household is unable to work for health reasons. Due to such criteria, many needy families do not receive cash and in-kind support on a regular basis, nor do they receive support from the PA.

Some of the services provided by Hamas and other aid organizations require some form of symbolic payment, such as a 2 NIS (approximately \$0.50) fee for a doctor's appointment. The notion that these services are entirely directed at the poor is mistaken; some of the more advanced health clinics and hospitals such as the Al Razi hospital in Jenin (attached to the Al Razi mosque) often require payment beyond the means of many Palestinians.<sup>43</sup> Another example is the Dar al Akram School in northern Gaza, considered by some residents as a model school which requires most parents to pay tuition.<sup>44</sup>

Beyond regular services, emergency aid has become an increasingly important source of income for many Palestinians. Approximately one-quarter of Palestinian families received emergency and or regular aid in some form, although close to two-thirds said they were in need of aid.<sup>45</sup>

Hamas' charitable structure operates alongside efforts of the PA Ministry of Social Affairs, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), and numerous other organizations such as the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. In addition to these formal structures, the informal network of family and kin support entrenched in Palestinian society has become more important as the economic situation of the Palestinian territories continues to deteriorate. Support from these other organizations may be limited to specific sectors of society. UNRWA, for example, aids only those Palestinians registered with the UN as refugees.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> In a comprehensive study of Islamic health clinics in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen, Janine Clark found that the services were aimed primarily at the middle class, not necessarily the impoverished masses. See Janine Clark, *Islam, Charity, and Activism: Middle-Class Networks and Social Welfare in Egypt, Jordan, and Yemen* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> See Avi Issacharoff, "In Hamas schools, every child has a computer," *Haaretz.com*, September 7, 2006, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/759714.html>.

<sup>45</sup> FIVMS, 12.

<sup>46</sup> Most accounts put the refugee population of the West Bank and Gaza in the range of 1.5 million, but according to its own statistics UNRWA has registered 1.7 million refugees, nearly half of the population. See "UNRWA in Figures," United Nations Relief and Works Agency, Public Information Office, Gaza, March 2007, <http://www.un.org/unrwa/publications/pdf/uif-dec06.pdf>.

Given the gap between available assistance and the population in need, the distribution of aid becomes a contentious issue. Charges of favoritism against aid providers are widespread. Before Hamas' election victory the services provided by the PA were generally reserved for PA employees, the majority of whom were affiliated with Fatah or the PLO. Similar charges have been directed at Hamas, which has been accused of aiding only religiously observant Palestinians who identify with the movement. Some observers have argued that "Hamas social welfare support is largely determined by a cold cost benefit analysis that links the amount of aid awarded to the support it will buy."<sup>47</sup> Others, while acknowledging the appeal of Hamas' social services, argue that "Hamas represents something more formidable than a political machine handing out benefits to potential supporters--it is a broad based social movement connected to various institutions in the West Bank and Gaza."<sup>48</sup>

Whether Hamas extends aid as a quid pro quo for political support is debatable. *Zakat* committees in general claim to distribute aid on a nonpartisan fashion based on specific criteria. Beneficiaries are generally required to fill out forms and a questionnaire, and accept a home visit to determine eligibility. Yet it is difficult to imagine a totally fair method of distribution in a system where family and clan loyalties are so important and religious-political divisions so deep.

If Hamas does provide aid to a broader sector of society beyond religiously observant Muslims, it would fit with its overall efforts to change Palestinian society. By spreading services beyond its own constituency of loyal supporters, Hamas has the opportunity to generate more support and sympathy. Though parallel and competing systems of aid distribution and social services have emerged, the lines may not always be so sharp. People can take advantage of more than one charity organization, and Palestinians who receive aid as refugees from UNRWA may receive support from Hamas or other sources as well.

Aid distribution has been a significant factor in increased support for Hamas, yet economic aid alone cannot explain the movement's appeal. The Palestinian territories receive one of

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<sup>47</sup> Levitt, 120.

<sup>48</sup> Nathan Brown, "Aftermath of the Hamas Tsunami," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Web Commentary, February 2, 2006, <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/BrownHamasWebCommentary.pdf>

the highest rates of foreign aid per capita in the world. In 2005 alone, the international donor community and its various components spent \$1.3 billion in the West Bank and Gaza, \$500 million of which was humanitarian assistance.<sup>49</sup> This amount, which dwarfs the funds at Hamas' disposal, has not dampened support for Hamas, which suggests that allegiance and support for the Islamic movement transcends gratitude for charitable and social services. Hamas not only provides aid, but depends on local donations from its supporters, and according to a World Bank assessment, Islamic NGOs reported a high level of local community contributions.<sup>50</sup>

Hamas is also able to draw support and votes from traditionally non-Hamas Palestinians because of its reputation as honest and reliable, in part due to its social services. Its main base of support identifies with Hamas because they share the movement's Islamic worldview. Hamas is able to give context and meaning to the Palestinian national struggle through a religious prism which resonates with a socially conservative population, especially in Gaza and among refugees. Ordering society along religious and social codes is increasingly attractive to people who have suffered from the lack of authority and the erosion of traditional structures. In a situation where Palestinians feel they have no control over their own lives and future, Hamas' message of empowerment is a clear alternative to surrender and helplessness. It is the ability to empower Palestinians, either through the glorification of military operations or the provision of effective social services that gives Hamas supporters some illusion of control over their own fate. Hamas' call to action resonates with many Palestinians who have not seen their situation improve, despite nearly a decade of negotiations.

### **Hamas as the alternative**

Hamas sees itself as an alternative to the secular nationalist agenda of the PLO in every realm of the Palestinian national struggle. Its rigid stand on the sacred symbols of Palestinian

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<sup>49</sup> "West Bank and Gaza Economic Update and Potential Outlook," World Bank, March 15, 2006, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/WBGEconomicUpdateandPotentialOutlook.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> "The Role and Performance of Palestinian NGOs In Health, Education and Agriculture," The World Bank Group, December 2006, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWESTBANKGAZA/Resources/2942641166525851073/NGOreportDec06.pdf>.



nationalism and its unwillingness to compromise any of its core tenets contrast starkly with what are perceived by many Palestinians as the surrender and compromises of the PLO and Fatah during nearly a decade of failed negotiations.

Originally, the Islamist charitable network sought not only to provide an alternative to the Israeli military government or civil administration established in the West Bank and Gaza after 1967, but more importantly to the PLO and later the PA. Promoting financial independence and self-sufficiency is common among other Islamist movements such as the Egyptian and Jordanian branches of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Justice and Development Party in Morocco. By creating an independent network of social services, Hamas demonstrated that it could care for Palestinians and was more attuned to their suffering. Just as Hamas' military operations competed with the nationalist forces during the intifada and later rejected the PLO's path of negotiations during the Oslo process, the charitable network was its alternative paradigm of social welfare, and one that many Palestinians perceived as more efficient and less corrupt than that of the PLO.

Political competition turned violent at times as the competing agendas clashed, most notably on university campuses. Later, after the creation of the PA, the effort to isolate Hamas and take over its institutions intensified. The PA under Yasser Arafat was at odds with the majority of Palestinian NGOs, but its violent crackdown beginning in 1996 was directed at Hamas' infrastructure and was a concerted effort to impair the movement's growing power.<sup>51</sup> At the time, efforts were underway to curtail Hamas fundraising and the operation of its charitable organizations. The PA also attempted to take over mosques and *zakat* committees affiliated with Hamas, yet most of these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful. The violent crackdown of 1996 intensified the sense of persecution among Islamists at the hands of Fatah, and embittered the divisions between the two main movements that continue to plague Palestinian politics.

Competition in the ideological realm inevitably translated into competition in the political realm. Hamas has competed in elections for student councils and professional associations

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<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of the PA's efforts to control and regulate NGOs see Rema Hammami, "Palestinian NGOs Since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements?" *Middle East Report*, Spring 2000.

since its creation, so its foray into the national political scene was only a matter of time. The debate over political participation was well underway within Hamas during the first parliamentary elections in 1996, when Ismail Haniyeh, Jamil Hammami, Khalid Hindi and others originally nominated themselves as independent candidates before withdrawing their names to avoid splitting the movement.<sup>52</sup> By the time conditions were set for the first round of municipal elections in December 2004, Hamas was well prepared.<sup>53</sup> Through a coordinated and unified message based on issues of good governance and eliminating corruption Hamas was able to score impressive victories on the municipal level and the ensuing historic victory on the national level.

Throughout the municipal elections and the parliamentary elections of January 2006, Hamas mobilized its network of charitable organizations to assist in a diverse set of campaign activities. On the grassroots level Hamas drew on employees from its network of mosques, schools, *zakat* committees, and other charitable organizations for voter registration drives, door to door information campaigns, campaign rallies, and polling station workers. According to Hamas campaign officials, the movement had 10,000 volunteers in Gaza alone.<sup>54</sup> Hamas also alleges to have run its election campaign purely through volunteers.<sup>55</sup> The practice of paying campaign workers is common even in student elections, so a purely volunteer based campaign is significant, if accurate. While the numbers may be exaggerated it is probable that a majority of Hamas' local campaign workers were indeed volunteers. What is unclear however is whether Hamas paid the numerous media and election consultants who reportedly helped run the campaign of Hamas' Change and Reform party list.

Hamas likely used its long and comprehensive list of charity beneficiaries as part of its campaign strategy. As noted, *zakat* committees and other charitable institutions use these lists in the distribution of aid. They provided ready-made rosters of potential voters,

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<sup>52</sup> One Hamas member, Imad al-Faluji was elected to the PLC on the Fatah list and later became minister of communications. See Muhammad Muslih, *The Foreign Policy of Hamas*.

<sup>53</sup> Four rounds of municipal elections were held beginning in December 2004-January 2005, May 2005, September 2006, and December 2005.

<sup>54</sup> Erica Silverman, "Getting busy in Gaza," *Al Abram Weekly*, Issue No. 777, January 10-18, 2006, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/777/re5.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> See Matthew Kalman, "Secret democracy elevated Hamas Underground campaign unified voters," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 19, 2006, E-5 at <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2006/02/19/INGMQH9TVQ1.DTL>.

supporters, and campaign workers. Employees of Hamas-affiliated charitable and welfare organizations also played an important role in organizing door to door campaigning, question and answer sessions in *dimans* or local gatherings, and popular rallies. These grassroots activists were overseen by a professional and skilled group of campaign organizers, many of whom are experienced from operating charitable organizations. This group is Hamas' natural support base. According to one Israeli account, Hamas "considered every detail" in preparing for the election, which it conducted with "sincerity and thoroughness."<sup>56</sup> Hamas also allegedly used its mosque-based study groups for campaign purposes and told activists which candidates to vote for.<sup>57</sup> According to one observer, "Hamas had worked from the significant foundation of its social, education, and welfare base to nurture a new generation of leaders and activists who were seeking a balance of power in the Palestinian arena."<sup>58</sup>

In addition to having a well-oiled campaign staff at its disposal in both the municipal and parliamentary elections, Hamas chose candidates who were well-known and respected in their communities to participate in the district elections. Some of the candidates had no known formal ties with the movement, while others such as Mahmoud al Zahar were high profile members of the organization. But for the most part, Hamas parliamentary candidates were well-educated professionals, including a large number of university professors, physicians, engineers, and journalists. A prominent group of candidates and elected officials were also drawn from the charity and social services network. Among this group are Abdul Fattah Doukhan, former head of the Al Salah Islamic Society and Atef Adwan, acting chairman of the Islamic Society of Beit Hanoun, who were both elected to the PLC in 2006.

Women also played a significant role in the campaign. Setting aside the broader issue of women's rights in Islam, women are playing an increasingly active role in Hamas' political activities, organizing women's seminars, sit-ins, demonstrations, and rallies. Women have even participated in the military fight against Israel, including several suicide bombings. Much of the social and political activity is coordinated by Hamas' women's department,

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<sup>56</sup> Arnon Regular, "Hamas aims to win 60 percent of PLC seats," *Haaretz.com*, December 11, 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Regular.

<sup>58</sup> Beverley Milton-Edwards, "Prepared for Power: Hamas, Governance, and Conflict," *Civil Wars*, Vol.7, No.4 (Winter 2005) 323.

founded by activists such as Jamila Shanti, the number three candidate on Hamas' electoral list.

Though there are clearly differences of opinion within Hamas, the movement remained disciplined and projected a unified and coordinated list of candidates and a message focused on changing the status quo. According to the party's Change and Reform list political platform, Hamas would "spare no effort to ensure justice, fight corruption and create [the] proper atmosphere to attain independence, freedom, and self determination of the Palestinian people."<sup>59</sup> One of its campaign slogans "America and Israel say no to Hamas. What do you Say?," spoke directly to voters.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the program had a developed social component, calling for the reactivation of *zakat* committees and strengthening the network of social protection. The campaign message also made very clear that "resistance" remained a legitimate means to "attain freedom, independence, and sovereignty."<sup>61</sup>

Hamas determined what issues were important to all Palestinians, not just their own constituents, and campaigned accordingly. At the top of the list were issues of governance, fighting corruption, reforming government, and providing services. The ability of Hamas to persuade a significant number of "swing" voters suggests that political party identification is no longer an accurate measure of political support. There is also anecdotal evidence to suggest that Hamas' message of change resonated with traditional supporters of Fatah who were disappointed with Fatah's failures.<sup>62</sup>

Not only did Hamas have a clear and unified message among its candidates, it was able to convey that message to Palestinian voters. The movement used its own media outlets such as the newspaper *al-Risala*, *Voice of Al Aksa* Radio, and its *Al Aksa* Television station launched before the elections to broadcast its message. The television station broadcast twelve hours a day, and focused mainly on the election, including campaign messages and

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<sup>59</sup> Hamas Movement's Platform, Palestinian National Information Center, <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/english/gover/Elections/Hamas-program.html>.

<sup>60</sup> Brown, "Aftermath of the Hamas Tsunami."

<sup>61</sup> Hamas Movement's Platform.

<sup>62</sup> See for example Laila El Haddad, "Palestinian street voted for change," *Aljazeera.net*, January 29, 2006, <http://english.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/CF148743-EFB9-462D-BE67-CAB8366CEFD3.htm>.

video clips glorifying suicide bombers and Palestinian martyrs.<sup>63</sup> Hamas also reportedly used SMS messaging and e-mails as election tactics.<sup>64</sup>

A great deal of emphasis within the campaign focused not only on the message, but on the elections themselves. Here two main areas were covered. The first dealt with the logistics and mechanics of the voting system, where votes were cast for both party and district lists. The second stressed the compatibility of the elections with Islam and Islamic legal principles, which was a major concern for Hamas.<sup>65</sup>

### **Jihad and Resistance for the sake of liberating Palestine**

Hamas' use of charity institutions to support its military apparatus is a charge that has been well established. As early as 1994 in one of the first major works on Hamas, the movement was accused of diverting charity funds to what was at the time referred to as "secret activities" or the military apparatus.<sup>66</sup> Others have argued that "the Hamas *dawa* is the bedrock of Hamas' terrorist activities."<sup>67</sup> Since Hamas is an all-encompassing movement which stresses military resistance as one of its principle tenets, it is not entirely surprising that its military activities are aided by activists and funds from the social services field. This tactic has been pursued by similar movements including at one time the PLO.<sup>68</sup>

Hamas officials have also been identified as playing dual roles in the organization on both the political and military levels.<sup>69</sup> In specific cases, Hamas' charitable organizations have

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<sup>63</sup> Two weeks after the launch of the station, the PA public prosecutor issued an order to shut down the station for lack of proper operating licenses. See "Hamas TV channel faces axe," *Aljazeera.net*, January 23, 2006, <http://english.aljazeera.net/English/archive/archive?ArchiveId=18025>.

<sup>64</sup> Erica Silverman, "The non-secular solution," *Al Abram Weekly*, Issue No. 778, January 19-25, 2006, <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/778/re2.htm>.

<sup>65</sup> Silverman, "The non-secular solution."

<sup>66</sup> Roni Shaked and Aviva Shabi, *Hamas: Me-emuna b'Allah la derech l'terror* (Hamas: From Belief in Allah to the Path of Terror), (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House Ltd, 1994).

<sup>67</sup> See Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 159.

<sup>68</sup> The Palestine Welfare Association (PWA), established by the PLO in 1982 to provide health and humanitarian care assistance was also accused at the time of freeing up PLO funds for the support of "covert and military operations against Israel and the west." See J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins, *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) 214.

<sup>69</sup> One of the most senior examples was Dr. Ibrahim al Maqadmah, a former student activist and professor at the Islamic University, who also served as one of the central figures in Hamas' military apparatus, the Izzadin al-Kassam Brigades. Maqadmah played a key role as liaison between the military apparatus and political

been accused of organizing, funding, and participating in terror attacks. More generally the network has been described as a “logistical support network” that radicalizes Palestinian society and provides jobs and safe havens for military operatives.<sup>70</sup> A great deal of emphasis has also been placed on aid to the families of suicide bombers or “martyrs,” which is a cause Hamas openly supports.

Such aid is well established in Palestinian society, beginning in the early days of the military confrontation between Israel and the PLO. Neither Hamas nor other Palestinian official organizations hide their support for these families, who have a special place in Palestinian society. Hamas is not alone in its support for the families of suicide bombers and other activists who commit acts of terror against both civilian and military targets.<sup>71</sup> Like the families of prisoners, the PA has always recognized families of martyrs with a special legal status, entitling such families to specific benefits and monthly cash assistance. A governmental body, the Institution for the Affairs of Martyrs Families and Wounded, part of the Ministry of Social Affairs, has continued a long tradition of supporting the families of Palestinians killed either by Israeli military operations or in the course of carrying out acts of violence and terror.

Since its establishment, the PA has distributed monthly allocations to thousands of families of martyrs officially certified as such, including Palestinians injured during the second intifada. Figures from 2003 show that PA monthly assistance per family averaged from 410 NIS to 655 NIS (\$100 to \$160).<sup>72</sup> According to Israeli sources, Hamas awards initial payments of \$500 to \$5,000 followed by monthly payments of approximately \$100.<sup>73</sup> Support for such families has also come from donors in the Gulf. For example, in Iraq

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leadership of Hamas. In the late nineties he was imprisoned by the PA in Gaza, before being released and subsequently killed by an Israeli missile strike.

<sup>70</sup> Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, 6.

<sup>71</sup> Fatah's 2006 election platform called for assisting the families of martyrs in addition to wounded and prisoners. See Platforms of the Palestinian National Liberation Movement “FATAH,” Palestinian National Information Center, <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/english/gover/Elections/FATAH-program.html>.

<sup>72</sup> MAS Social Monitor Issue No. 8, 2005, 34.

<sup>73</sup> “Hamas's use of charitable societies to fund and support terror,” Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 22, 2003, [http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000\\_2009/2003/9/Hamas-s%20use%20of%20charitable%20societies%20to%20fund%20and%20su](http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2003/9/Hamas-s%20use%20of%20charitable%20societies%20to%20fund%20and%20su).

Saddam Hussein made one time cash payments of up to \$25,000 for families of suicide bombers.<sup>74</sup>

Whether such aid actually encourages suicide bombers is debatable. Punitive actions have also had limited impact on these attacks. In 2005 the Israeli military ended its policy of demolishing homes of suicide bombers, which it concluded had failed to deter terrorism.<sup>75</sup> The phenomenon of suicide attacks has spread to other regions and states, including Iraq, Morocco, Algeria, and even the United Kingdom. However, there is little evidence to suggest that the families of bombers in these countries have been awarded financial assistance or that the perpetrators of these crimes were reassured by the promise of financial compensation to their families.<sup>76</sup>

The pressing issue is less the fact that Hamas mixes funds for military and social operations but that people both within the Palestinian territories and in the Arab world view such operations as legitimate. A common theme of analysis is that most funds funneled to military operations are diverted without the knowledge of sincere donors whose intent is to help people in need.<sup>77</sup> This may be more accurate in Europe, where the EU was reluctant to accept that Hamas' social and military branches were part of the same entity before it designated Hamas in its entirety a terrorist organization. In many cases Europeans, including Europeans of Arab or Muslim origin, support charities such as Interpal and the *Comité de Bienfaisance et de Secours aux Palestiniens* out of a genuine belief that their contributions will go to alleviate Palestinian suffering.

Yet within the Arab and Muslim world where there is popular support for the fight against Israel, the reality is far more complex. Prominent religious figures such as Youssef al

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<sup>74</sup> "Erased in a Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks against Israeli Civilians," Human Rights Watch, October 2002, 100.

<sup>75</sup> "Decision of Defense Minister and Chief of Staff to Change Policy of demolition of terrorists' houses," Israel Defense Forces Official Website, February 17, 2005, <http://www1.idf.il/DOVER/site/mainpage.asp?clr=1&sl=EN&id=7&docid=37885>.

<sup>76</sup> According to Moroccan police reports, Saad al Houssaini, a Moroccan national who recruited Moroccans to fight in Iraq paid their families small sums of money. See Craig Whitlock, "In Morocco's 'Chemist' a glimpse of Al Qaeda," *The Washington Post*, July 7, 2007, A1.

<sup>77</sup> See for example testimony of Kenneth W. Dam Deputy Secretary, Department of the Treasury before the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Subcommittee on International Trade and Finance August 1, 2002, <http://www.ustreas.gov/press/releases/po3315.htm>.

Qaradawi have approved of violence against civilians including suicide attacks, giving them an official religious and popular legitimacy. Most donors who identify with Hamas are likely aware that their contributions may be diverted to military operations, which are viewed by many Palestinians and Arabs as legitimate. Indeed, for some sympathizers, donating money is their only opportunity to participate in the fight against Israel.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, those who support the Palestinian struggle either within the Palestinian territories or abroad would donate money to a movement that claims to be fighting for the rights of the Palestinian people, whether the West views those tactics as legitimate or illegitimate.

Hamas' glorification of violence and martyrdom does play an important role in the "radicalization" and militarization of Palestinian society. Yet Hamas is clearly not alone in promoting such sentiment. Fatah and its various components such as the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades and other militant factions have also contributed to both radicalization and militarization. Given the level of violence and ongoing state of war between Israel and the Palestinians neither phenomenon is surprising.

Hamas' activities differ from those of Fatah in the Islamization of society. Though Hamas has skillfully combined militarization with Islam, it is important to distinguish between these related yet distinct phenomena. Even before the outbreak of the first intifada, many young Palestinians exposed to violence have been radicalized, though not necessarily through an Islamic framework. With the breakdown of the peace process at the end of 2000 and the eruption of the second intifada, the acceptance of violence became more widespread, regardless of political affiliation. Many young Palestinians see a bleak future and are increasingly frustrated with the failures of politicians and politics in general to improve their lives.<sup>79</sup> Increased violence, extortion, kidnappings for ransom, clan feuds, and inter-factional fighting also contribute to the general militarization of society. One estimate put the number

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<sup>78</sup> A Palestinian public opinion poll released in September 2006 indicated that "57 percent [of Palestinians surveyed] support armed attacks against Israeli civilians inside Israel and 57 percent believe that armed confrontations have helped Palestinians achieve national rights in ways that negotiations could not." This support is despite the fact that 77 percent of respondents also supported a ceasefire. See PSR - Survey Research Unit: Public Opinion Poll # 21, Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, September 14-16, 2006, <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2006/p21e1.html>.

<sup>79</sup> See Steven Erlanger, "Years of Strife and Lost Hope Scar Young Palestinians," *The New York Times*, nytimes.com, March 12, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/12/world/middleeast/12intifada.html?ex=1331352000&en=7b52df337148d2fe&ei=5088&partner=rssnyt&cmc=rss>.



of armed men in Gaza at over 100,000.<sup>80</sup> Although counterterror efforts against the Hamas welfare network may temporarily disrupt Hamas' effort to Islamize Palestinian society, they will do little to stop its growing militarization.

### **Commitment to resistance**

Hamas has always adjusted to its environment based on the circumstances. This ability to pursue tactically flexible policies while maintaining ideological doctrine has been a key feature of Hamas since its creation. Skillfully maneuvering between the social, political, and military realms has reinforced Hamas' permanent role in every sphere of the Palestinian national struggle. Yet the one constant in Hamas' pursuit to create an independent and Islamic oriented state has been the emphasis on charitable services. Of all Hamas' activities the charity and welfare network has been the most successful and risk free.

Military operations carry the risk of Israeli reprisals against Hamas officials, as well as threatening the general Palestinian population. On the military front, Hamas has at times recognized the limits of its capabilities in challenging Israel and has sought periods of calm and informal ceasefires.

Political participation has also carried significant risks for Hamas as a movement. Heading a government it has had to cope with the burdens of governance while under pressure from the international community, Israel, and Fatah. Politics is about uncomfortable compromise and alliances, something Hamas is under growing pressure to accept. With the responsibility of governance comes Hamas' most significant risk: that its inability to govern will delegitimize the movement among its constituents and Palestinians.

Hamas has always prided itself on unity, and another significant risk for the movements and potential interlocutors is that political participation could lead to splits in the movement. Discontent within a more militant Gaza-based faction of Hamas and the senior political leadership's inability to fully control the military apparatus should be of major concern. A fragmented Hamas lacking unified principles and strategy will be even more dangerous than

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<sup>80</sup> Avi Issacharoff, "Ignoring the Chaos," *Haaretz.com*, May 4, 2007, <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/855677.html>.

a unified movement which is constrained by domestic burdens of governance and diplomatic relations.

Despite these risks, Hamas can always fall back on the charitable sector and return to its roots if need be, unlike its secular rivals. According to one expert, “the combination of growing population and shifting age structure places enormous pressures on public services, especially education and health.”<sup>81</sup> The enormous physical need for social services and the centrality of the charitable sphere in Hamas’ strategy to transform society ensures that providing services will remain a key component of the movement.

On the political level, whether Hamas is a coalition partner, heads the government, or is an opposition party, it will likely work to improve social service capacity in both the public and private spheres as part of its broader effort to empower Palestinians and create an independent Palestinian state.

Whether Hamas’ dependence on social welfare and politics will lead to a moderation of the movement’s militant policy remains unclear. Some observers have argued that Hamas’ justification for a “hardline” approach is shifting from one based on religious foundations to one of political and pragmatic arguments. Others have observed that since the assassination of Ahmed Yassin in 2004, Hamas’ political leadership is devoid of religious authorities, suggesting that the movement will be dominated by political rather than religious considerations.<sup>82</sup> Though it is not currently capable of renouncing violence, there is evidence to suggest that Hamas seeks to stabilize the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as well as internal Palestinian tensions. It has at times selectively adhered to informal ceasefires with Israel, and advocated a long term ceasefire arrangement or *hudna* in place of a final agreement.

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<sup>81</sup> Sara Roy, “The Economy of Gaza,” The Palestine Center Information Brief No. 143, October 5, 2006, <http://www.thejerusalemfund.org/images/informationbrief.php?ID=169>.

<sup>82</sup> See Khaled Hroub, “Hamas’s path to reinvention,” October 10, 2006 at [http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle\\_east\\_politics/hamas\\_3982.jsp](http://www.opendemocracy.net/conflict-middle_east_politics/hamas_3982.jsp) and Zvi Bar’el, “Where is the religious leadership?” *Haaretz.com*, March 25, 2004.

Without an internal Palestinian accommodation and a basic ceasefire with Israel, it will be increasingly difficult for Hamas to operate, govern, and promote its social agenda. Practical approaches, however, do not signal a retreat from Hamas' overall agenda nor abandonment of its multifaceted strategy of resistance. Such political shifts, whether tactical or strategic, will not alter Hamas' ultimate goal of creating a Palestinian state based on Islamic principles.