

The Gaza Strip

Humanitarian Crisis and Lost Statehood

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The Oslo Accords defined a moment of transition in which the Palestinian liberation project moved from a focus on armed struggle and revolution towards negotiation and state-building under occupation. While many were initially hopeful about the Oslo Accords, one of the unexpected effects of these agreements was the split of the Palestinian movement into two projects: one that broadly remained committed to the principles of liberation as first articulated by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and one that adopted a diplomatic path towards the partition of Mandatory Palestine. These two projects have manifested themselves in divisions between and within factions, the most explicit of which is the divide between Hamas, the Islamic resistance movement currently governing the Gaza Strip, and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in Ramallah. The Gaza Strip, as home to the Palestinian school of thought that remains committed to the PLO's purist vision of armed struggle for liberation, albeit in an Islamist guise, is in many ways today a microcosm of the Palestinian national movement. It demonstrates in contemporary fashion the costs and limitations of remaining committed to central tenets of the Palestinian struggle. In that sense, the Gaza Strip is also the lynchpin of the debate for determining the future of the Palestinian national movement.

The Palestinian people are currently undergoing a period of transition into a post-Oslo reality, the nature of which is yet to be determined. Many possible trajectories present themselves: a reorientation and strengthening of efforts to achieve self-determination within the context of a two-state model through internationalization efforts or multilateral diplomacy; a shift towards a rights-based movement and the launching of an anti-apartheid grassroots struggle; an armed uprising; or, most likely, a future that combines elements of all of the above. It is also probable that debates and introspection regarding the optimal path forward will be preempted by a tipping point that is at this moment unforeseen. The

policies of an increasingly right-wing and messianic Israeli political establishment, backed by American support, are actively creating facts on the ground that could force Palestinians to react in one way or another, heightening their sense of uncertainty and instability.

Regardless of the future trajectory of the Palestinian national movement, policies that have now been imposed and institutionalized within the Gaza Strip must be contended with. The political reality that informs and justifies present attempts to separate and isolate the Gaza Strip is itself a symptom of a broader unwillingness to contend with the ongoing suffering of the Palestinian people, and their quest for a justice rooted in the catastrophic events of 1948. Past and contemporary political discourse, led primarily by Israel and the United States, seeks to avoid such a reckoning by adopting humanitarian, military, and/or economic means to assuage the need for a political resolution. Such efforts are clearest today in Gaza, where members of the international community deal with the strip variously as a humanitarian challenge or a terroristic security threat. Within such a framing, the political drivers that have given rise to the current situation in Gaza are effectively marginalized.

This has resulted in the emergence of a *de facto* reality where dealings with the question of Palestine are necessarily restricted to the West Bank, particularly the effort to address Israel's colonization of the territories there. Yet such a focus will not in any way settle the principle drivers of Palestinian nationalism. Rather, it is imperative to know the underlying factors that animate the status quo in the Gaza Strip, and Israel's disposition towards it, as these are representative of the core issues. To do so, one must also contend with the reality of Hamas. The fates of Hamas and the Gaza Strip over the past three decades have inadvertently come to be intertwined, and it is impossible to deal with one without understanding the other. During the present period of transition, as Palestinians rethink their visions of statehood and contemplate the future of their struggle, an understanding of this interplay between Hamas and Gaza, and the historical backdrop that has led us to the present moment in time, where two million Palestinians are sealed off by an unforgiving blockade, is essential.

HAMAS AND THE OSLO PROCESS

In late 1988, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat convened the exiled leadership of the PLO in Algiers. The eruption of the First Intifada in the Occupied Territories had finally compelled Arafat to officially adopt policies the PLO had been contemplating for years. Since Arafat had taken over the chairmanship of the PLO, and his movement, Fatah, had come to dominate its leadership, the PLO's policies had been clear. PLO factions were conducting a revolutionary "global offensive" against Israel.¹ According to a 1967 statement by Fatah, armed struggle was central to this revolution. "Our correct understanding of the reality of the Zionist

occupation confirms to us that regaining the occupied homeland cannot happen except through armed violence as the sole, inevitable, unavoidable, and indispensable means in the battle of liberation.”² Fatah’s statement goes on to describe the necessity of dismantling the “colonial base . . . of the Zionist occupation state” and asserts that its intellectual, social, political, military, and financial elements have to be destroyed before the Palestinian homeland can be liberated.³

Addressing the convened attendees in 1988, Arafat gave a speech that conclusively broke with this trajectory. Rejecting the use of armed struggle for liberation, Arafat declared the independence of the State of Palestine and invoked international resolutions that demonstrated the PLO’s willingness to accept a state on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as the capital. Arafat’s declaration signaled the PLO’s readiness to concede the 78 percent of Palestinian land that had been lost in 1948 and to officially renounce terrorism.⁴ With this long-anticipated about-face, the PLO transitioned to a diplomatic track that was focused on achieving statehood on the remaining 22 percent of “historic Palestine.”⁵

The PLO’s concessions were anathema for Hamas, the Islamic resistance movement that had been created in December 1987, only a few months prior to Arafat’s speech. In its charter, Hamas stressed the indivisibility of the land of historic Palestine, referring to the land that had constituted the British Mandate, located between the Eastern Mediterranean and the River Jordan, over which Israel had been established. Hamas defined this territory as “an Islamic land entrusted to the Muslim generations until Judgement Day.”⁶ The charter proclaimed that “jihad for the liberation of Palestine is obligatory.” No other path for liberation was viable. The movement dismissed diplomatic efforts as contrary to its ideology, primarily because they were premised on conceding parts of Palestine, but also because Hamas believed they were unlikely to serve Palestinian interests. Instead, jihad was defined not as a tactic but rather a holistic and effective strategy around which the Palestinian community could rally.⁷

With Hamas’s charter and the PLO’s strategic shift, 1988 became a turning point that heralded a new phase of Palestinian nationalism.⁸ In that year, the PLO’s resolve to sustain the use of armed force to liberate historic Palestine appeared to wane. Almost seamlessly, Islamic nationalism rose to carry the mantle forward. While the PLO had risen at a time of global revolutionary anticolonialism, Hamas emerged against a regional backdrop of resurgent Islamism. The lessons that Fatah and the PLO had learned regarding the limitations of armed struggle and their path towards pacification were not seen as relevant to Hamas, which believed that its success was predestined.⁹ The movement’s leaders contended that Hamas’s Islamic character would offer a robust ideological framework through which to offset the worldly pressures that had hamstrung the PLO.

With Arafat’s concession, the Palestinian national movement conclusively moved away from the notion of liberation through arms towards state-building in the pursuit of independence. This transition culminated with the signing of

the Oslo Accords in 1993, which Hamas came out in full opposition against.¹⁰ The Oslo Accords enshrined the mutual recognition of Israel and the PLO, without officially making any commitments to Palestinian statehood. A central product of the Oslo Accords was the creation of the PNA. It was established in 1994 as a temporary administrative body that could govern portions of the Palestinian territories for a transitional period of five years, when the conclusive settlement was to be reached.¹¹ Among other governing tasks, the PNA was held accountable for security issues, as coordination mechanisms were put in place between the nascent entity and the Israeli army. Security was framed as a litmus test for Palestinian readiness to self-govern and a prerequisite for further Israeli withdrawal.¹² While the PNA was restricted to administering the affairs of daily governance under occupation, responsibility for negotiations in the pursuit of liberation ostensibly continued to rest with the PLO.

The Oslo Accords precipitated what has become a chronic disagreement between the PLO and Hamas on the nature of the Palestinian national movement, one that continues to this day. Palestinians under occupation hoped the Oslo Accords would bring statehood.¹³ Yet Hamas opposed the recognition of Israel on which the Oslo Accords were premised. It joined forces with Marxist and other nationalist groups to form a rejectionist front that called for the continuation of resistance.¹⁴ As peace talks were launched, Hamas played the role of a typical spoiler movement, embracing armed operations to derail the talks, even though this put it at odds with public sentiment.¹⁵ In response, thousands of Hamas members were arrested by the PNA and Israel, as security coordination mechanisms were initiated throughout the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁶ Alongside its military operations, Hamas also contemplated participating in the PNA's presidential and legislative elections, which were set for 1996.¹⁷ After extensive debate, however, the movement's consultative council decided to boycott the ballot box to avoid conferring legitimacy to the Oslo Accords.¹⁸ Expectedly, Yasser Arafat and his party, Fatah, emerged victorious and consolidated their grip on the presidency and the legislature.¹⁹

The PLO and successive Israeli governments sustained peace talks even as it became evident that the five-year deadline for reaching a final settlement in 1999 would be missed. During this period, Israeli settlements continued to expand against a backdrop of growing Palestinian frustration, aggravated by Israeli closures and checkpoint policies that severely undermined the Palestinian economy, weakened its labor markets and physically separated the Gaza Strip from the West Bank.²⁰ During this time, the number of settlers reached more than 350,000, controlling almost 7 percent of the land on which three million Palestinians were living. Israeli settlers competed with Palestinians for access to land and resources, fragmented the Palestinian territories into increasingly isolated silos, and restricted freedom of movement, with severe implications on the overall economy. During the period of negotiations, unemployment rose from under 7 percent

before the Oslo Accords to 25 percent in the West Bank and 38 percent in the Gaza Strip by 1996. In the five-year period of negotiations, Israel imposed 443 days of closure, preventing the movement of persons, goods, or capital between Israel and the Palestinian territories.²¹ As the Palestinian economy sagged under the weight of the occupation, Palestinian quality of life suffered and discontent grew.²²

AL-AQSA INTIFADA: PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE, ISRAELI UNILATERALISM, AND "WAR ON TERROR"

In September 2000, in the absence of prospects for a Palestinian state, the Occupied Territories erupted in the Second Intifada, what Hamas hailed as "the divine intervention" that had derailed the diplomatic process.²³ Unlike the first uprising, the Second Intifada rapidly militarized, as Palestinian mobilization was met with the full power of Israel's army. The military wings of both Hamas and Fatah reverted to armed resistance in order to pressure Israel to end its occupation. Arafat's role was widely interpreted as focused on leveraging arms to change the balance of power in the negotiations, and thereby as complementing, rather than supplanting, the diplomatic track that the PLO had committed to with Oslo. For Hamas, the reading was different. Hamas's leaders celebrated the Intifada, and early on articulated their vision for it. As Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, a prominent Hamas leader, explained succinctly, "I am not saying that the Intifada will lead to the complete liberation of Palestinian land from the river to the sea. Still, this Intifada [can] . . . achieve the complete withdrawal from the West Bank, the [Gaza] Strip and Jerusalem without giving up on 80 percent of Palestine."²⁴ Hamas's statements indicated that its goal for the Intifada was focused on ending Israel's occupation, a disposition that carried with it an implicit recognition of the 1967 lines.²⁵

While both Hamas and the PLO limited their immediate goals to the liberation of the Occupied Territories, Hamas was clear that this must come through force as the only way liberation could be unconditional. The movement's publications explained that diplomacy meant the "return of these lands with truncated sovereignty, subservience to the occupier, deformation of Jerusalem and without the rights of refugees."²⁶ Hamas rapidly became the central instigator of armed operations against Israel. Al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, adopted what they referred to as a "Balance of Terror" approach: in return for their brutal and indiscriminate killing of the elderly, women, and children, "now, the Zionists also suffer from being killed . . . Now Israeli buses have no one riding in them and Israeli shopping centers are not what they used to be."²⁷ Balancing terror was a tool for Hamas to deter Israeli attacks on the Palestinians by forcing Israel to anticipate inevitable retaliation.²⁸

Yet Hamas's military strategy reflected a fundamental misunderstanding on its part regarding how Israel would react, particularly under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who was elected into power six months after the Intifada began, on

February 6, 2001. Sharon won with a landslide vote, a resounding mandate from the Israeli electorate to deal with the Palestinian question militarily. A deeply controversial figure within Israel itself, Sharon was also despised by Palestinians, as he had built a military and political career rooted in destroying Palestinian nationalism.²⁹ His ideal outcome for Israel entailed the pacification of the Palestinian territories and their inhabitants, subjugating them to Israeli rule without conferring any collective political rights. Sharon's election had far-reaching consequences. Hamas, as well as Palestinians more broadly, interpreted his victory to mean that the Israeli public was not looking for peace.³⁰

Early on, Sharon sought American approval for Israel's heavy-handedness. Reaching out to the United States, Sharon noted that Israel was facing its own Al-Qaeda in the form of Palestinian armed resistance. Initially, Sharon's rhetoric failed to gather sympathy from the administration of George W. Bush.³¹ However, after September 11, the war of attrition between Israel and the Palestinians that had marked the first year of the Second Intifada almost immediately shifted in Israel's favor. Overnight, the Second Intifada was presented as Israel's War on Terror. Arafat condemned Al-Qaeda's actions, as did Hamas, which deescalated its military front.³² Nonetheless, in a post-9/11 Bush administration, Sharon's analogy carried a great deal of weight. Conflating what constituted "Islamic extremism," Hamas's bombs in Jerusalem were described as being another symptom of global "Islamic terrorism." Within the regional and international climate, any argument that Hamas was using armed struggle strategically to end Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian land was circumvented, as Israel positioned its response to the Second Intifada as an existential battle. Even though Sharon held Arafat, and the PNA, directly responsible for the violence, Israel also dealt Hamas a powerful blow. Israel sustained a policy of targeted assassinations that removed all of Hamas's senior leadership, including those seen as pragmatic leaders who had been instrumental in negotiating ceasefires.

The War on Terror rhetoric justified, to the American administration, not only Israel's iron grip, but also its unilateral initiatives to reconfigure the structure of occupation. This was carried out through the construction of a wall, which Israelis refer to as the security fence and Palestinians as the apartheid wall, that physically separates the West Bank from Israel.³³ Simultaneously, Sharon announced Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip. This entailed withdrawing nine thousand Jewish settlers as a precursor to strengthening Israel's grip over areas that "constitute an inseparable part of the State of Israel," namely the West Bank. Such a disengagement promised to reduce Israel's exposure to Palestinian resistance from the coastal enclave, and save significant security expenditure, given that these few thousand settlers controlled up to 30 percent of the Strip.³⁴ The remaining 70 percent of the Gaza Strip housed 1.8 million Palestinians. More important than security was Sharon's plan to remove these Palestinian inhabitants from Israel's direct jurisdiction. This allowed the state to maintain its control over the territories

of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with their 2.7 million non-Jewish inhabitants, without the threat of altering Israel's character as a Jewish-majority nation.³⁵

Sharon's initiative reflected a continuation of his use of the pretext of security to unilaterally consolidate Israel's grip on the territories while avoiding any form of political engagement with the Palestinians.³⁶ This goal was explicitly articulated by Sharon's top aide, Dov Weisglass, in an interview several months after the announcement of the disengagement plan. "The disengagement is actually formaldehyde," Weisglass told the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. "It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that is necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians."³⁷ Hamas understood these calculations and voiced early reservations regarding Israel's disengagement even while celebrating what it viewed as the ability of the resistance front to prompt an Israeli retreat.³⁸

As Israel decimated the Palestinian uprising and political establishment, the Bush administration pushed for "democratization" in the Palestinian territories, another element of its War on Terror doctrine. After Arafat's death in 2004, the United States and Israel sought a new Palestinian leadership that might revert to the project of state-building and diplomacy that had been initiated under the Oslo Accords. The failure of Hamas's military strategy meant that the movement needed to consider other means to safeguard its ideology. The elections that the United States pushed for in 2006 inadvertently provided an entry point for Hamas into the Palestinian political establishment, which had to be rebuilt. This major reform and resuscitation of the Palestinian political system offered Hamas the impetus to seek an alternative to its military strategy, one that could safeguard the fixed principles that it viewed as central to the Palestinian struggle.³⁹ Like the PLO before it, Hamas defined these principles as the refusal to concede the land of historic Palestine, a commitment to the right of return of refugees, and the safeguarding of the right to resist in the face of an unyielding and lethal occupation.⁴⁰

MARRYING RESISTANCE WITH POLITICS

The opportunity for Hamas to transition its ideology into the political sphere came in the form of planned presidential and legislative elections in 2006. Hamas's prospective engagement with the elections had to contend with a central tension: it disapproved of the premise of the PNA and the underlying Oslo Accords that had created it. As the movement considered engagement in the political process, it sustained its armed operations, in keeping with its perception that it could "marry" resistance with politics.⁴¹ Musa Abu Marzouq, a Hamas leader, explained that Hamas's political aspirations entailed "preserving the program of resistance. Despite [armed struggle] being in an ebb and flow, the political framework should be the continuation of resistance, the refusal to undermine it, to remove its arms, or to shackle it with unfair security arrangements."⁴² While the PLO's past entry into politics had been premised on concessions, Hamas tethered its possible

engagement in politics to the failure of negotiations and underscored the need to reject any further concessions from the Palestinian side.⁴³

After extensive deliberations throughout 2005, Hamas's consultative council gave the go-ahead for the movement to take part in the elections.⁴⁴ Hamas's leadership declared that the perceived demise of the peace process meant that its political participation could not be seen as conferring legitimacy onto the Oslo Accords, which it believed had been annulled by the developments of the Second Intifada.⁴⁵ Rather, Hamas held the goal of circumventing the PNA and what it felt was the focus on governance that had institutionalized Palestinian capitulation to the Israeli occupation. Hamas's leaders advocated instead for the resuscitation of the overarching institutions overseeing Palestinian liberation, namely the PLO.⁴⁶ It was on this basis that Hamas ran on a platform of "Change and Reform," a far-reaching agenda that presented its strategic trajectory for the liberation struggle alongside promises to tackle daily administrative challenges within the territories.

In a historic watershed that marked the culmination of its politicization, Hamas won 76 of the 132 seats of the legislative council, relative to Fatah's 43. As a senior leader in Beirut stated, "This is a peaceful coup on the present decrepit political reality, which was born out of defeat, corruption and acquiescence to rotten political solutions These results are an excellent political renewal, as if the Palestinian people are reborn, and it's a new birth for the project of resistance, for the development of a society of resistance, for a shaking-off of all the institutions."⁴⁷ Hamas's political emergence heightened Israeli worries by rupturing the prolonged subservience of Palestinian institutions to the occupation. This compliance had become concretized in the body of the PNA following the Oslo Accords. By resuscitating key demands that the PLO had conceded, including the goal of liberating historic Palestine, Hamas was attempting to take Palestinian nationalism back to a pre-Oslo period. The Oslo Accords had failed to achieve the goals that Palestinians aspired to, and had instead facilitated the continuation of Israel's occupation at significant cost to Palestinians. Hamas's efforts to undo the political structures created by Oslo challenged a status quo that had been made sustainable, if not beneficial, for Israel and its colonization of Palestinian territories.

Hamas's victory caused utter confusion within the Bush administration, given its focus on democracy promotion in Palestine and in Iraq, as test cases for the region. The most immediate reaction was trepidation regarding the place of a designated terrorist organization in public office. As Elliot Abrams, a senior member of the Bush administration, noted, "legally, we had to treat Hamas as we treated al Qaeda."⁴⁸ In high-level meetings within the White House shortly after Hamas's victory, it was quickly decided that the optimal response was to adopt a strategy that could both isolate Hamas and reassert Fatah's dominance.⁴⁹ The dual-pronged plan was to be implemented on several levels: military, financial, and diplomatic.⁵⁰ Concurrently, the Quartet, the international body composed of the United States, the United Nations, the European Union, and Russia, issued a statement noting "that

it was inevitable that future assistance to any new government would be reviewed by donors against that government's commitment to the principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations."⁵¹

The Quartet's conditions mirrored the prerequisites the PLO had been required to fulfill for diplomatic engagement almost two decades prior. Even though the PLO's acceptance of these conditions and the subsequent extensive peace talks had still not compelled Israel to relinquish its hold over the territories, the same demands were now put to Hamas. Until these demands were met, the United States and Israel launched what Hamas's publications referred to as an "iron-wall" strategy aimed at suffocating its government.⁵² Such intervention precluded any engagement with Hamas despite the movement's efforts to show pragmatism, including offering a political agenda that called for "the formation of an independent and fully sovereign Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital," on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and limiting resistance to the removal of the occupation beyond the 1967 borders.⁵³ In a pragmatic nod, Hamas's agenda stated that "the government will deal with [past] signed agreements with a high level of responsibility, in a manner that protects the interests of our people, preserves their rights and does not harm their fixed principles."⁵⁴ Addressing calls for more flexibility in dealing with the Quartet's conditions, Hamas's leader Khaled Meshal stated, "we have shown enough flexibility. We cannot say more than the official Arab and Palestinian position, which is to call for a Palestinian state on the land occupied in 1967. The problem is not with us. It is not with Hamas, as in the past it was also not with the official Palestinian and Arab positions. The problem has always been with Israel."⁵⁵

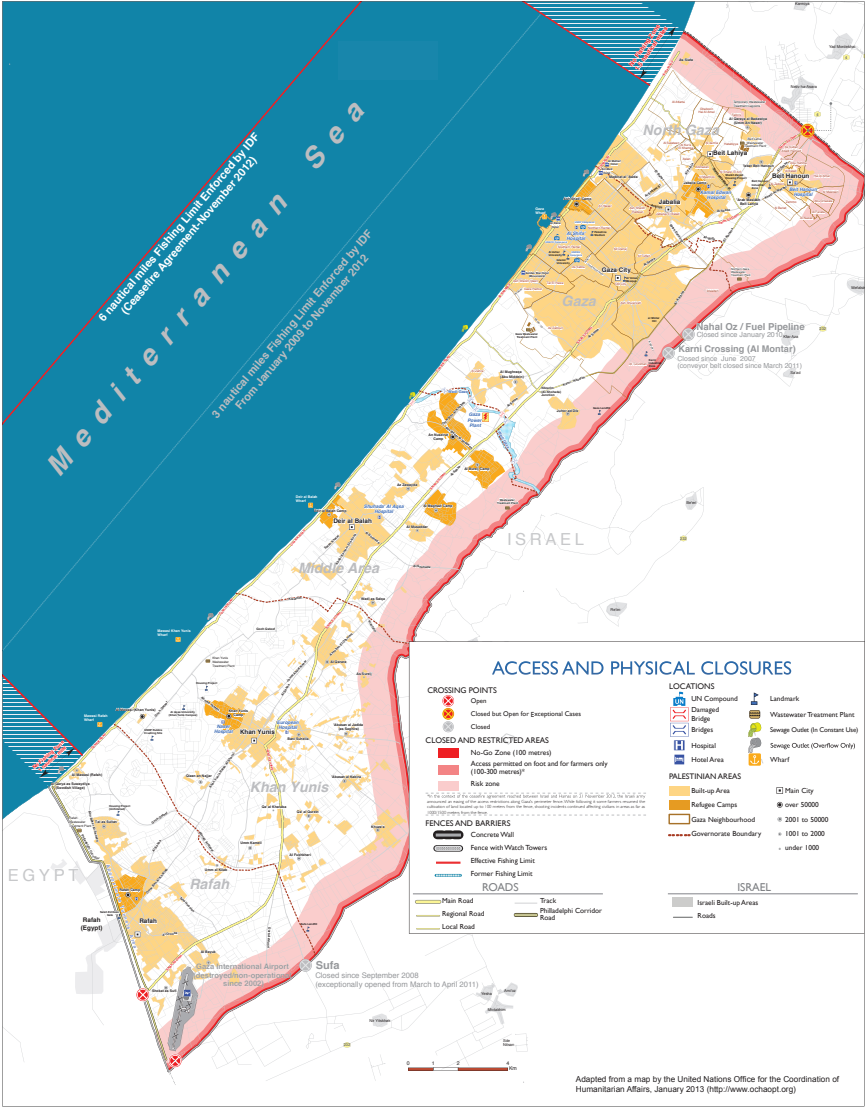
Alongside such offerings, Hamas stressed the need to sustain resistance. Abu Marzouq explained, "We are in government, yes, but the government is not whole. We are a government under occupation. We cannot assume that we have a government similar to others in the world. Or as the Americans demand, that we act only as a government. Hamas's program in government is one which is aligned, which is compatible, with its program of resistance."⁵⁶ Through its political intervention, Hamas sought to reassess how Palestinians dealt with their occupation, namely by breaking from the trappings of self-governance, repoliticizing the PNA away from its administrative focus and dedication to endless peace talks, and rupturing the continuity that the incumbent leadership hoped to secure.⁵⁷ In essence, Hamas sought to reverse the institutional inertia that had pacified the Palestinian leadership, and to resuscitate the calls for liberation that had marked the PLO's early history—and to do so within the framework of its Islamist ideology.⁵⁸

Hamas's politics of resistance created much discomfort to those invested in the peace process launched through the Oslo Accords, which called for governance and gradual state-building under occupation. Opposition to Hamas's vision of the Palestinian national movement, now endowed with a popular mandate by the democratic election, was seen as an existential threat to Fatah and the PNA,

which remained wedded to the Oslo principles. Supported by the United States and Israel, and by the cover of the Quartet principles, domestic measures were taken within the Palestinian political establishment to stymie power-sharing and prevent Hamas's actual entry into a leadership position. Signaling an initial impetus to act pluralistically within the PNA, Hamas extended a formal request to Fatah to form a coalition government.⁵⁹ Yet, reflecting wider sentiment, Fatah leaders suggested it would be "shameful" for Fatah to even consider entering a coalition government with Hamas.⁶⁰

Fatah's monopolization of the political establishment meant that Hamas faced enormous institutional inertia. This was exacerbated by the international community's overt and clandestine support of the incumbent. As discussions among factions progressed to forming a unity government, the PNA's leadership initiated measures to mitigate Hamas's entry into politics. In an extraordinary session, the outgoing legislature proposed and passed bills to expand the remit of the president's office, held by Mahmoud Abbas, who won the presidential elections in 2006, at the expense of the incoming cabinet in areas such as security and the judiciary. These measures reversed past American-led reforms and recentralized political power within the hands of the president.⁶¹ Hamas's publications viewed these activities as part of an "international conspiracy" and called the extraordinary session "unconstitutional."⁶² Articles condemned Abbas's authoritarian hold on power.⁶³ Leaders remarked that "when [the United States and Israel] pushed reforms on President Arafat, the goal was to pass the authority to the prime minister, particularly over the security forces. Now the time is to return the authority to the president once Hamas has come into government. That is illogical and unacceptable."⁶⁴

For close to eighteen months, the parties pursued a plethora of initiatives aimed at sharing power. Yet Fatah insisted that, prior to sharing power, it was incumbent on Hamas to transition, as the PLO had done in the past, from "liberation through armed struggle" to "state-building towards independence." As a senior Fatah leader said, "If new parties come into power in Spain or Italy, they would still recognize their membership in NATO. Recognition does not have to come from the party—but the government would have to respect past agreements."⁶⁵ Fatah's leadership was working from the premise of continuity, on the basis that the PLO was an authoritative body, akin to a sovereign state, recognized through its adherence to past agreements. The PLO remained committed to the 1988 concessions and the Oslo Accords, despite their failure to lead to a Palestinian state, and they believed Hamas's politicking in the PNA was premised on an implicit embrace of the Oslo Accords. Hamas dismissed these "delusions." Citing the absence of sovereignty, repeated American and Israeli intervention, and the vacuous nature of past agreements given Israeli reservations, Hamas questioned the basis of international recognition.⁶⁶ Before past agreements could be upheld, Hamas insisted that the PLO must be reformed so that all political parties could have a say in



MAP 7. Gaza Strip, 2014. Source: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs.

reconstituting its manifesto. Widely understood but unspoken was Hamas's desire to reverse the trajectory that the PLO had taken under Fatah's tenure, including its recognition of Israel.⁶⁷

Hamas's attempts to offer pragmatic concessions were consistently ignored in favor of military, financial, and diplomatic intervention. During the brief window

between 2006 and 2007 when Hamas sought to claim its position as democratically elected government, more than six hundred Palestinians were killed. A brief episode in Palestinian democracy had ended in fratricide.⁶⁸ Foreign intervention and domestic authoritarianism ultimately facilitated military clashes between Hamas and Fatah, and paved the way for Hamas's violent capture of the Gaza Strip. Underlying such turmoil was an absence of any effort to deal with the political motivations underpinning Hamas's agenda. Like the PLO before it, Hamas's political vision, and with it the internationally sanctioned right of self-determination, right of return, and right to resist—demands that form the core of Palestinian nationalism—had effectively been neutralized.

THE FIG LEAF: GAZA AS TERRORIST HAVEN

On the eve of Hamas's takeover of Gaza in June 2007, a leaked report noted that a senior member of Israel's security establishment was quoted as being "happy" at the prospect of Hamas taking over the Gaza Strip, as that would then allow Israel to declare the coastal enclave a "hostile territory."⁶⁹ Although not an official position, this well encapsulates Israel's disposition towards the Gaza Strip after Hamas's takeover, a development which ruptured the Palestinian territories institutionally and politically. With that division, the international blockade that had been imposed on the Palestinian Authority (PA) following Hamas's entry into the political establishment morphed to focus primarily on the Gaza Strip, where Hamas's jurisdiction could be geographically delineated. All five crossings leading into the territory from Israel were shut, as was the Rafah border with Egypt, hermetically sealing the strip and preventing the movement of goods or people into or out of it.⁷⁰

Israel cut fuel shipments by half and reduced imports into Gaza to the minimum amounts of food and medical supplies required for survival without sinking Gaza into a humanitarian catastrophe.⁷¹ Food shortage and healthcare crises were felt almost instantly as poverty rates and unemployment soared. Palestinians in Gaza began experiencing electricity cuts of up to sixteen hours per day; half of Gaza's 1.8 million Palestinians were receiving water for only a few hours a week; unemployment rose to more than 50 percent; only 23 out of more than 3,900 industrial operations continued to function; and 70 percent of Gaza's agricultural land was no longer being irrigated.⁷² Rapid economic deterioration was compounded by the fact that Gaza had suffered decades of de-development, whereby its economy had contracted and its infrastructure regressed as a result of Israel's isolationist policies towards the strip, which officially began following the Oslo Accords.⁷³

Under international law, the blockade amounted to collective punishment and came at a horrific cost to Gaza's population.⁷⁴ Initially, as articulated by Israeli, US, and PNA politicians, the blockade was aimed at forcing the collapse of Hamas's government, and reunifying the Palestinian territories under a single leadership

committed to negotiations with Israel. Yet rather than collapsing Hamas, the blockade allowed it to consolidate its grip and institutionalize a government that today oversees the affairs of the Gaza Strip in much the same way as the PNA does in the West Bank. In response to Hamas's entrenchment in the Gaza Strip, Israel gradually adopted a military doctrine referred to by its security establishment as "mowing the lawn."⁷⁵ This entails the intermittent use of military power to undercut any growth by the resistance factions in Gaza. Through three major military assaults and countless incursions since 2007, Israel has used overwhelming military might to break the spirit of resistance in Gaza, pacify Hamas, and work towards deterrence.⁷⁶

Over the course of more than a decade, this dynamic has given rise to an equilibrium of belligerence between Hamas and Israel. Hamas relies on rocket fire as a negotiating tactic, to unsettle the status quo and pressure Israel to ease access of goods and people into the Gaza Strip by loosening the blockade. Israel employs military might to deter Hamas and prevent it from developing its military arsenal. This *modus operandi* has enabled both Israel and Hamas to pursue short-term victories at the expense of a longer-term resolution while they both bide their time. From Israel's perspective, resistance has been sufficiently managed so that Hamas's rule over the Gaza Strip can be tolerated, even abetted. Israeli politicians and the security establishment today speak of the need to "stabilize" Gaza under Hamas's rule and as a separate territory from the West Bank.⁷⁷ As a key member of Israel's security establishment noted, "Israel needs Hamas to be weak enough not to attack, but stable enough to deal with the radical terrorist groups in Gaza. This line may be blurry but the logic is clear. The challenge lies with walking this blurry line."⁷⁸

Such policies have produced a situation whereby Israel is able to exercise effective control over the entirety of the Occupied Palestinian Territories without taking responsibility as an occupying force. Within the West Bank, the occupation has been outsourced to a compliant PA. Even as Israel maintains its settlement expansion throughout the territories, the PA is still held accountable for administering and governing the lives of Palestinians under Israel's occupation and for safeguarding Israel's security through extensive coordination mechanisms with the Israeli army. Even in the absence of an effective peace process, the Palestinian leadership in the West Bank remains rooted in the international legitimacy that was gained following the PLO's concessions in 1988 and the signing of the Oslo Agreement. The ongoing belief is that international law mechanisms and diplomacy will ultimately compel Israel to allow for the creation of a Palestinian state on the 1967 armistice line. As such, commitment to security coordination with Israel persists alongside state-building endeavors by the PNA, despite the absence of the effective sovereignty such tactics entail.

Within the Gaza Strip, Hamas remains ideologically committed to the notion of armed struggle for full liberation, despite the failure of this strategy as well to

achieve any tangible gains for the Palestinian people. Hamas's ideology and its Islamist nature are often described by Israel, cynically or inadvertently, as the local manifestation of global terror networks.⁷⁹ Such demonization has succeeded in marginalizing the Gaza Strip and justifying the collective punishment inherent in besieging two million Palestinians. Operations carried out by the Israeli army against Gaza are then understood as a legitimate form of—most often preemptive—self-defense. By containing Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Israel has effectively cultivated a fig leaf that legitimates its policies of separation towards the strip. Those policies predate Hamas. As home to a high proportion of Palestinian refugees, Gaza had long been a foundation of resistance to Zionism and to Israel's ongoing military rule over Palestinians.⁸⁰ In the 1950s, decades before Hamas's creation, Israel designated Gaza a "*fedayeen's nest*," in reference to the PLO fighters, and thus a territory that merited constant isolation and military bombardment in order to break the resistance.⁸¹ Under Hamas's rule, Gaza moved from being a "*fedayeen's nest*" to becoming a "hostile entity" and an "enclave of terrorism." Israel has leveraged Hamas's entrenchment in Gaza in a manner that allows it to act as an "effective and disengaged occupier," ensuring the containment and isolation of the Palestinians in Gaza without having to incur any additional cost for administration.⁸²

The outcome is two administrative Palestinian authorities operating under an unyielding occupation. Whether there is a systematic Israeli separation policy for the West Bank and Gaza remains unclear, but Israel has nonetheless benefited from and reinforced this division.⁸³ More importantly, by reducing both strands of the Palestinian national movement from liberation to governance and stabilization, Israel has successfully avoided any engagement with the political drivers that continue to animate the Palestinian struggle. Despite their failed strategies, both Hamas and the PLO are driven by key Palestinian political demands that remain unmet and unanswered and that form the basis of the Palestinian struggle: achieving self-determination, dealing with the festering injustice of the refugee problem created by Israel's establishment in 1948, and exercising the right to use armed struggle to resist an illegal occupation.⁸⁴

Hamas's takeover of Gaza marked the failure of Israel's efforts to centralize Palestinian decision-making within compliant structures such as the PA, which in effect allows Israel to maintain its occupation cost-free. Hamas's fate, and with it Gaza's, is emblematic of Israel's "decision not to decide" on the future of the Palestinian territories and its reliance on military superiority to dismiss the political demands animating the Palestinian national movement, choosing instead to continually manage rather than address the question of Palestine.⁸⁵ In this light, Hamas is the contemporary manifestation of demands that began a century ago. Israeli efforts to continue sidelining these demands, addressing them solely from a military lens, have persisted. Having moved from the terminology of "anti-guerilla warfare" to that of its own "war on terror," Israel merely employs contemporary language to wage a century-old war.

Argued in another way, the political reality that makes Gaza “a hostile entity” extends beyond that strip of land and animates the Palestinian struggle in its entirety. Gaza is one microcosm, one parcel, of the Palestinian experience.⁸⁶ Instead of addressing this reality or engaging with Hamas’s political drivers, Israel has adopted a military approach that defines Hamas solely as a terrorist organization. This depoliticizes and decontextualizes the movement, giving credence to the persistent “politicide” of Palestinian nationalism, Israel’s process of erasing the political ideology that animates Palestinian nationalism.⁸⁷ This approach has allowed successive Israeli governments to avoid taking a position on the demands that have been upheld by Palestinians since before the creation of the State of Israel.

GAZA AS HUMANITARIANISM AND THE GREAT MARCH OF RETURN

Under the administration of President Donald J. Trump, American foreign policy towards Israel and the Palestinian territories was clarified. Rather than commit to the two-state model, as historically understood by the international community, President Trump pursued drastic measures to formalize the one-state reality on the ground, and effectively terminated the prospect of a viable and sovereign Palestinian state. Over the course of little more than a year after Trump’s inauguration in 2017, the United States recognized Jerusalem as Israel’s capital; severely defunded the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), the main international body charged with providing social and economic services to Palestinian refugees; reduced financial support to the PA and to development organizations active throughout the territories; recognized Israel’s annexation of the Syrian Golan Heights; and legitimized Israel’s settlement enterprise, paving the way for its *de jure* annexation of up to 30 percent of the West Bank.

Alongside these measures, the Trump administration also pursued policies that focused specifically on the Gaza Strip, and that demonstrated the continued efforts to depoliticize and isolate the coastal enclave. One year into his administration, as reports gathered pace regarding the presence of a “deal of the century” that would presumably resolve the question of Israel/Palestine, the Trump administration hosted a closed, invitation-only conference in the White House. This was attended by politicians and businesspeople from the United States, Israel, and a host of Arab countries. The conference was aimed at promoting foreign investment within the Gaza Strip, ostensibly with the goal of alleviating the dire humanitarian suffering on the ground. Projects ranged from power generation plants that would mitigate the chronic electricity crisis in Gaza to sewage treatment and water desalination plants. These interventions expanded and built on a history of developmental projects, including those that continue to be promoted by economic bodies such as the Office of the Quartet and other development organizations that are active in the Gaza Strip. Alongside planning for these projects, a media campaign was

carried out by the US mediators against Hamas, blaming the movement exclusively for the situation in the Gaza Strip, and failing to mention issues related to the blockade or Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Efforts to deal with Gaza in a humanitarian framing are not new, and with the current reality, they serve Israel's continued occupation of Palestinian territories in two ways. The first is by reducing the humanitarian suffering in the Gaza Strip without challenging the overall political context that is, in reality, the prime driver for that suffering: that of the blockade. Addressing Gaza's humanitarian misery is an urgent priority. Yet doing so in a manner that does not engage with the blockade makes this reality sustainable for much longer than it otherwise might be. With the international community and the private sector underwriting and profiting from the need for humanitarian intervention in Gaza, the structure of the blockade can firmly remain in place without Israel risking a catastrophic humanitarian crisis that would turn the world's opinion against its flagrant violation of international law. The second benefit follows directly from the first, and involves the formalization of policies of positioning Gaza as a challenge to be addressed independently of the rest of the Palestinian territories. With Gaza stabilized under Hamas's governance and with international intervention, Israel's ongoing annexation of the West Bank is free to continue apace with no accountability.

The combination of these two issues has given rise to the reemergence of a "state minus" discourse. This alludes to a "resolution" whereby Palestinians would be placated with measures that are symbolically akin to statehood but that lack constituent elements of true sovereignty. Past and present measures include demanding that the future Palestinian state remain demilitarized, or limiting Palestinian sovereignty to autonomous governance in specific jurisdictions. The Trump plan, released in January 2020, redefined Palestinian statehood to entail self-governance within around 168 urban silos in the Occupied Territories, almost entirely surrounded by Israeli territory and lacking any form of sovereignty. With Jerusalem having been recognized by the United States as the capital of Israel, with major territorial divisions throughout the West Bank as a result of illegal settlements, and with the severance of the Gaza Strip from the rest of the territories, the "state" on offer to the Palestinians through formal diplomatic channels entails a fraction of the 22 percent of historic Palestine that Palestinians had hoped to build their state on when the PLO first accepted the notion of partitioning the land in 1988. Such formulations, although touted as "resolutions," are little more than a continuation of Israeli efforts to manage, rather than resolve, the question of Palestine. With the current failed strategies of both Hamas and Fatah and the institutionalization of the division within the territories, Israel has been able to sustain a cost-free occupation while enjoying Jewish supremacy over the entirety of the land of historic Palestine.

Yet it would be a mistake to overemphasize the sustainability of this situation. The failure of the Palestinian political elite and the slow demise of the Oslo project

have initiated a gradual reorientation on the level of the Palestinian grassroots that is possibly indicative of where the future of the Palestinian national consciousness resides. From the “prayer intifada” of the summer of 2017 in Jerusalem to the “return marches” carried out from Syria outside Israel’s northern front, a significant, if sporadic, mobilization on the grassroots level has been slowly flourishing over the past few years. Such mobilization is taking place outside the context of the PLO or that of the Palestinian political establishment. Previous ruptures in the long history of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination suggest that such sporadic instances of popular resistance to Israel’s occupation are likely to erupt in one form or another. They are a reminder of the political nature of the Palestinian question, which remains unaddressed.

One of the most significant of these mobilizations was, of course, the Great March of Return (GRM), in which Palestinian civil society in Gaza launched a mass movement that cut across political affiliations. The GRM was a popular initiative that mobilized under the single banner of “return”: the demand for the return of the Palestinian refugees to homes from which they had been expelled or had fled in 1948. Although the immediate goal of the GRM was to pressure Israel to lift the blockade, the overarching vision under which it unfolded was one of return. As such, the GRM openly broke from the central tenants of peace-making that marked the Oslo period, which entailed the minutia of diplomatic negotiations around land swaps and the 1967 lines, and instead returned to the roots animating Palestinian nationalism, which remain anchored in the tragedy of al-Nakba. The effect of such discourse was to begin the process of reclaiming a Palestinian narrative that might move beyond the factional fragmentation that was the outcome of the Oslo Accords, the most prominent result of which is Gaza’s geographic isolation. Furthermore, the fact that the GRM was initiated at a grassroots level demonstrates an inherent rejection, or impatience, with factional politics, and a recognition that the Palestinian political elite have become embroiled in a system of power dynamics that has failed to achieve freedom, equality, or justice for the Palestinians.

The initial hope that the GRM could be the harbinger of broader change within the Palestinian struggle dissolved as the movement was challenged by Israel’s disproportionate, and tremendously lethal, use of force, as well as, eventually, by greater involvement from Hamas. Hamas’s efforts to coopt the GRM threatened to subsume it into the very political reality it was hoping to break away from. Yet even with such risks, the protests can nonetheless be understood as a rejuvenated form of Palestinian political mobilization—and possibly, as the catalyst for the launching of the next, post-Oslo, phase of the Palestinian struggle. The inclusive discourse that marked the GRM’s ideology and its rootedness in 1948 have the power to unite Palestinians across geographies in a single narrative based on the Palestinian historical experience of dispossession and exile. It is this kind of narrative that ultimately has the power to lead the Palestinians out of the current political stalemate that first the PLO, then Hamas, have led them into.

In rethinking the notion of Palestinian statehood, one must heed the demands being generated from the grassroots, given that the political elite no longer have the required legitimacy to lead the narrative. Once again, Gaza is leading the path by illuminating the power of defining a Palestinian vision that is rooted in Palestinian rights, like the right of return. These rights and the political demands that emerge around them are the ones that Israel continues to marginalize in the hope of managing rather than resolving the question of Palestine, often through the use of overwhelming military might. The Gaza Strip, while contained and safely isolated under Hamas's government, demonstrates through its marches that even in the face of the greatest adversity, the Palestinian people remain committed in their quest to achieve the justice they have been seeking for the past century. It is imperative to heed this call, and to root the future trajectory of the Palestinian struggle in this call for rights, embracing the power of this narrative to reunify the Palestinian people and dismantle the political structures that have been created to fragment them.

NOTES

1. The term comes from Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). For more on Palestinian politics during this time, see Edward Said, *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination, 1969–1994* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994); and Amal Jamal, *The Palestinian National Movement: Politics of Contention, 1967–2005* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

2. Quoted in Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 212.

3. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle*, 212.

4. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 245–90. For more on the PLO's diplomatic softening, see Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 140–82; and Osamah Khalil, "Pax Americana: The United States, the Palestinians, and the Peace Process, 1948–2008," *The New Centennial Review* 8, no. 2 (2008): 1–42.

5. Yezid Sayigh, "Struggle within, Struggle Without: The Transformation of PLO Politics since 1982," *International Affairs* 65, no. 2 (1989): 247–71.

6. This Islamic endowment is referred to as *waqf*. In its charter, Hamas explains that this history allegedly goes back to the Caliph Umar ibn al-Khatib, who refused the division of the conquered lands in Iraq and Syria, choosing instead to endow them in perpetuity to future generations of Muslims.

7. For more on the use of violence as strategy rather than tactics, see Lawrence Freedman, "Terrorism as Strategy," *Government and Opposition* 42, no. 3 (2007): 314–39.

8. See Helga Baumgarten, "The Three Faces/Phases of Palestinian Nationalism, 1948–2005," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 24–48.

9. For more on the role of Islam in shaping such a worldview, see Hazem Kandil, *Inside the Brotherhood* (London: Polity Press, 2014). For more on the anticipated failure of secularism, see Mahmud Zahhar and Hussein Hijazi, "Hamas: Waiting for Secular Nationalism to Self-Destruct. An Interview with Mahmud Zahhar," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 3 (1995): 81–88.

10. For more on the Oslo Accords and the subsequent decade of the peace process, see Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: Patterns, Problems, Possibilities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 165–253; Ziad Abu-Amr, "The View from Palestine: In

the Wake of the Agreement,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 2 (1994): 75–83; Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 315–98; and Avi Shlaim, “The Oslo Accord,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 24–40.

11. Naseer H. Aruri and John J. Carroll, “A New Palestinian Charter,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 3 (1994): 5–17.

12. Joseph Alpher, “Israel’s Security Concerns in the Peace Process,” *International Affairs* 70, no. 2 (1994): 229–41. For more on the security coordination, see Hillel Cohen, “Society-Military Relations in a State-in-the-Making: Palestinian Security Agencies and the ‘Treason Discourse’ in the Second Intifada,” *Armed Forces and Society* 38, no. 3 (2012): 463–85; and Graham Usher, “Politics of Internal Security: The PA’s New Intelligence Services,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 3 (1996): 21–34.

13. This hope was misplaced. See Rashid Khalidi, “Beyond Abbas and Oslo,” *New Yorker*, October 12, 2015.

14. This alliance, formed in 1991, was called the Ten Resistance Organizations. Despite the fact that its charter excoriated Communists and leftist groups, Hamas had no issues lauding them when they confronted the hegemony of the PLO. See Abd al-Qadir Yasin, *Hamas: Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyah fi Filastin* (Cairo: Sina lil Nashr, 1990), 71. For the impact of the Oslo Accords on Hamas, see Beverly Milton-Edwards, “Political Islam in Palestine in an Environment of Peace?” *Third World Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (1996): 206–10; and Wendy Kristianasen, “Challenge and Counterchallenge: Hamas’s Response to Oslo,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 3 (1999): 19–39.

15. Daoud Kuttub, “Current Developments and the Peace Process,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22, no. 1 (1992): 100–7. In late 1993, polls indicated 73 percent of Palestinians favored negotiations and 60 percent supported the PLO. Only 17 percent supported Hamas; Beverly Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), 163. For more on Hamas’s role as a spoiler movement, see Andrew Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, “Sabotaging the Peace: The Politics of Extremist Violence,” *International Organization* 56, no. 2 (2002): 263–96; Ely Karmon, “Hamas’s Terrorism Strategy: Operational Limitations and Political Constraints,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (2000): 66–79; Claude Berrebi and Esteban F. Klor, “On Terrorism and Electoral Outcomes: Theory and Evidence from the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 6 (2006): 899–925; and Stephen Stedman, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” *International Security* 22, no. 2 (1997): 7–16. Polls indicated that Palestinian support for suicide bombing was very low. In November 1998, 75 percent of Palestinians opposed suicide bombing; in 1999, support for suicide bombing was under 20 percent and for Hamas under 12 percent; Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 25.

16. Between 1994 and 1995, the PA launched twelve arrest campaigns against Hamas, and made more than one thousand arrests. It also launched a system of highly controversial midnight trials and detention. See Khaled Hroub, “Harakat Hamas Bayn al-Sulta al-Filastiniyyeh wa Israel: Min Muthalath al-Ouwwa ila al-Mitraqa wa al-Sindan,” *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyyeh*, no. 18 (1994): 24–37.

17. Abu-Amr, “View from Palestine.”

18. Hamas ultimately allowed members to run as independents. See Wael Abed Elhamid el-Mabhouth, *Opposition in the Political Thought of Hamas Movement, 1994–2006* (Beirut: Al Zaytouna Center, 2012); Tareq Baconi, “The Demise of Oslo and Hamas’s Political Engagement,” *Conflict, Security and Development* 15, no. 5 (2015): 503–20; Naim Ashhab, *Hamas: Min al-Rafd ila al-Saltah* (Ramallah: Dar al-Tanwir, 2006); and Naim Ashhab, *Imarat Hamas* (Ramallah: Dar al-Tanwir, 2006).

19. Lamis Andoni, “The Palestinian Elections: Moving toward Democracy or One-Party Rule?” *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 25, no. 3 (1994): 5–16; and Ahmad S. Khalidi, “The Palestinians’ First Excursion into Democracy,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996): 20–28.

20. Sara Roy, “De-development Revisited: Palestinian Economy and Society since Oslo,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 3 (1999): 64–82. See also Leila Farsakh, *Palestinian Labour Migration to Israel: Labour, Land, and Occupation* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

21. Leila Farsakh, "The Palestinian Economy and the Oslo 'Peace Process,'" *Trans Arab Research Institute*, http://tari.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9&Itemid=11.
22. Sara Roy, "Palestinian Society and Economy: The Continued Denial of Possibility," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 4 (2001): 5–20.
23. "Intifada of Arabs and Muslims," *Filastin al-Muslima*, November 23, 2000, 23–27.
24. Badr al-Din Mohammad, "Differences with the PA," *Filastin al-Muslima*, February 21, 2001, 20.
25. Hamas's focus on the Occupied Territories rather than Israel was conveyed to British and American interlocutors in private meetings. See Mark Perry, *Talking to Terrorists: Why America Must Engage with Its Enemies*, (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 130.
26. "Victory Waves on the Horizon," *Filastin al-Muslima*, December 19, 2000, 3.
27. "Al-Qassam Succeed," *Filastin al-Muslima*, April 12, 2001, 12. For insight into the impact this had on Israelis, see Ari Shavit, "Letter from Jerusalem: No Man's Land—The Idea of a City Disappears," *New Yorker*, December 9, 2002, 56–60.
28. Hamas and Israel became engaged in a "violent dialogue"; Mark Muhannad Ayyash, "Hamas and the Israeli State: A Violent Dialogue," *European Journal of International Relations* 16, no. 1 (2010): 103–23. For more on Hamas's discourse, see Tareq Baoni, "Politicizing Resistance: The Transformative Impact of the Second Intifada on Hamas's Resistance Strategy," in "Transformative Occupations in the Modern Middle East," special issue, *Humanity Journal* 8, no. 2 (2017): 311–33.
29. See Baruch Kimmerling, *Politicide: Ariel Sharon's War against the Palestinians* (London: Verso, 2003); Shlomo Ben-Ami, *Scars of War, Wounds of Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006): 285–312. For more on Ariel Sharon, see David Landau, *Arik: The Life of Ariel Sharon* (New York: Alfred and Knopf, 2013).
30. See "The Zionists Have Had their Say," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 17, 2001.
31. Daniel E. Zoughbie, *Indecision Points: George W. Bush and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 17.
32. See Charmaine Seitz, "Hamas Stands Down?" *Middle East Report* no. 221 (2001): 4–7.
33. The wall is an imposing eight meter-high, 703 kilometer-long concrete structure, fitted with electronic fences, barbed wire, and highly sophisticated surveillance equipment, that cut through Palestinian villages and unilaterally seized around 10 percent of the West Bank; Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007), 161–85. For more on the wall, see Ray Dolphin, *West Bank Wall: Unmaking Palestine* (London: Pluto Press, 2006); and Michael Sorkin, *Against the Wall: Israel's Barrier to Peace* (New York: New Press, 2005). On July 20, 2004, the International Court of Justice issued an advisory opinion ruling that the wall was illegal, to no effect; "The Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," *International Court of Justice*, July 9, 2004.
34. Sara Roy, "Praying with Their Eyes Closed: Reflections on the Disengagement from Gaza," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 34, no. 4 (2005): 64–74, 66.
35. Sharon's disengagement plan entailed an ideological shift within Likud to accept the partition of the land of *Eretz Yisrael*, as a prerequisite to maintaining Israel's Jewish majority. See Jonathan Rynhold and Dov Waxman, "Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza," *Political Science Quarterly* 123, no. 1 (2008): 11–37.
36. Kimmerling, *Politicide*, 155–81.
37. Ari Shavit, "Top PM Aide: Gaza Plan Aims to Freeze the Peace Process," *Haaretz*, October 6, 2004.
38. Maha Abdel Hadi, "Plan to Withdraw," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 25, 2004, 12–13; Ra'fat Murra, "Osama Hamdan Talks to FM," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 25, 2004, 16; and Ibrahim al-Sa'id, "Snowball," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 25, 2004, 14.
39. Author interviews with Hamas's leaders elucidated that its strategy was based on both fixed principles (*thawabet*) and variables (*motaghayerat*). The movement's pragmatic nature is seen in its

ability to adapt its variables, for instance by restraining armed struggle or accepting engagement in the political establishment, as long as its fixed principles are left unharmed. For more, see Ismail Haniyeh's explanation in "Press Release for Ismail Haniyeh," *Palestine-Info*, June 10, 2004.

40. "Position of Palestinian Factions," *Filastin al-Muslima*, February 26, 2014, 32.
41. Author interview, Wassim Afifeh, 2015.
42. "Musa Abu Marzouq," *Filastin al-Muslima*, October 1, 2004, 54.
43. "Press Release for Rantissi," *Al-Noor*, March 1, 2004.
44. This decision was announced through the Cairo Declaration of 2005. "Doc. 29: Closing Statement, March 17, 2005," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 69.
45. Zahhar elaborated in an interview ahead of the 2006 legislative elections that Hamas had needed to wait until the failure of the Oslo Accords would be demonstrated before running. See Badr al-Din Mohammad, "Hamas's Political Vision," *Filastin al-Muslima*, December 5, 2005, 39.
46. See for instance "Press Release for Nazzal," *Al-Hayat*, September 18, 2004, IPS.
47. Ra'fat Murra, "After the Elections," *Filastin al-Muslima*, February 13, 2006, 45.
48. Elliott Abrams, *Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 163.
49. Zoughbie, *Indecision Points*, 104–12. For insight into the American administration's thinking, see Abrams, *Tested by Zion*, 163–77; and Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 413–20.
50. Zoughbie, *Indecision Points*, 104–12; Perry, *Talking to Terrorists*, 135; and Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 39–50. For investigative reporting on this, see John B. Judis, "Clueless in Gaza: New Evidence that Bush Undermined a Two-State Solution," *The New Republic*, February 19, 2013; David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair*, April 2008; and Alastair Crooke, "Elliott Abram's Uncivil War," *Conflicts Forum*, January 7, 2007.
51. "Statement on Palestinian Elections by Middle East Quartet," January 26, 2006, <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-204634/>. For more, see Khaled Elgindy, "The Middle East Quartet: A Post-Mortem," *Brookings Institution*, no. 25 (February 2012): 2–34.
52. See Ibrahim al-Said, "The Occupation Puts a Plan," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 6, 2006, 26–27.
53. "Doc 69: The Political Program, March 20, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 160.
54. "Doc 69: The Political Program," 161.
55. "Interview with Meshal, June 13, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 479.
56. "Doc. 37: Interview with Abu Marzouq, February 2, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 88.
57. "Doc. 30: Letter from Hamas, January 30, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 63.
58. For more on Hamas's views of reformulating the Palestinian reality under occupation, from the political to the economic, see "Doc. 41: Meshal's Speech, February 7, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 96–97; "The New Government's Proposed Economic Agenda," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 6, 2006, 34; "Doc. 13: Interview with Mahmoud al-Ramhi, January 19, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 43–44; and "Doc. 44: Interview with Osama Hamdan, February 13, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 106. Publications discussed how foreign aid was never aimed at producing a functioning economy, but was rather a cover to sustain the diplomatic process; Nasser Atyani, "International Aid," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 6, 2006, 30. See also Yezid Sayigh, "Inducing a Failed State in Palestine," *Survival* 49, no. 3 (2007): 7–40; Mandy Turner and Omar Shweiki, eds., *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy: De-development and Beyond*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); and Shir Hever, *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation: Repression beyond Exploitation* (London: Pluto Press, 2010).
59. "Doc. 47: Interview with Said Sayyam, February 16, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 114–17.
60. "Doc. 24: Release for Dahlan, January 27, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 58. Following Hamas's victory, al-Aqsa Brigades issued a statement calling on Abbas and Fatah's senior leadership to resign rather than partake in a Hamas government. "Doc. 20: Al-Aqsa Bayan, January 26, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 53–54.

61. Abbas passed legislation to become the commander-in-chief of all armed forces; "A High Wire Act," *The Economist*, June 3, 2006. For an overview of the steps taken by Abbas's cabinet to centralize power, see Mariam Itani, *Conflict of Authorities between Fatah and Hamas in Managing the Palestinian Authority, 2006–2007* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna, 2008). For Hamas's reporting, see Ibrahim Hamami, "One Year of Abbas's Presidency," *Filastin al-Muslima*, January 5, 2006, 36–38; and Samir Khweireh, "Priorities Are Now to End Corruption," *Filastin al-Muslima*, May 8, 2006, 47.

62. See "Conspiracy to Defeat Hamas," *Filastin al-Muslima*, March 6, 2006, 3; and Maha Abdel Hadi, "Political and Economic Siege," *Filastin al-Muslima*, May 8, 2006, 36.

63. "Conspiracy to Defeat Hamas," 3.

64. "Doc. 47: Interview with Said Sayyam, February 16, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 114–18. See also "Doc. 45: Press Release for Hamas, February 14, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 111–13.

65. "Doc. 123: Interview with Nabil Sha'ath, April 24, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 280.

66. For Hamas's take on PLO reform, see "Doc. 124: Interview with Musa Abu Marzouq, April 25, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 283–91. See also Kjørlién, "Hamas," 4–7.

67. For instance, "Doc. 13: Interview with Mahmoud al-Ramhi, January 19, 2006," *al-Watha'iq al-Filastiniyyah*, 44–45.

68. Zoughbie, *Indecision Points*, 127.

69. Zoughbie, *Indecision Points*, 127. For more, see "WikiLeaks: Possibility of Israeli-Palestinian Co-operation over Gaza," *The Telegraph*, December 20, 2010; and Barak Ravid, "Fatah Asked Israel to Help Attack Hamas during Gaza Coup, WikiLeaks Cable Shows," *Haaretz*, December 20, 2010.

70. For the blockade's immediate impact, see the collection of reports by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs at <https://www.ochaopt.org/themes/articles/gaza-blockade>.

71. Linda Butler, ed., "A Gaza Chronology, 1948–2008," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 98–121, 120. These policies depoliticized Gaza, separating it from the rest of the Palestinian conflict and presenting it solely as a humanitarian problem. See Ilana Feldman, "Gaza's Humanitarianism Problem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 3 (2009): 22–37.

72. UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gaza Humanitarian Situation Report: The Impact of the Blockade on the Gaza Strip: A Human Dignity Crisis," December 15, 2008, <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/3E3505FD18CFB035852575220052C893>.

73. See Sara Roy, *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995); Sara Roy, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 79–102; and Avi Shlaim, "How Israel Brought Gaza to the Brink of a Humanitarian Catastrophe," *The Guardian*, January 7, 2009.

74. "UN Chief Ban Ki-Moon Calls for Israel to End 'Collective Punishment' Blockade of Gaza," *Haaretz*, June 29, 2016.

75. Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, "Mowing the Grass in Gaza," *Jerusalem Post*, July 22, 2014. See also Mouin Rabbani, "Israel Mows the Lawn," *London Review of Books* 36, no. 15 (July 2014), <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v36/n15/mouin-rabbani/israel-mows-the-lawn>.

76. Rashid Khalidi, "The Dahiya Doctrine, Proportionality, and War Crimes," *Institute for Palestine Studies*, no. 44 (2014–15): 5–13.

77. From author interviews with Israeli security analysts, June–August 2015. See also Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom, eds., *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014).

78. Yaakov Amidror, "Hamas's Irrational Rationale," *Israel Hayom*, July 21, 2017.

79. Israeli politicians, including Benjamin Netanyahu, frequently invoke the claim that Hamas, the Islamic State, and al-Qaeda are one and the same. For instance, see "Binyamin Netanyahu: ISIS and Hamas 'Branches of the Same Poisonous Tree,'" *The Guardian*, September 29, 2014.

80. For more on Israel's historic policies towards Gaza, see Jean-Pierre Filiu, *Gaza: A History*, trans. John King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57–125; and Ahmad S. Khalidi, "Al-Tahuwwlat al-Istratigiyyeh al-Askariyyeh wa al-Amniyyeh al-Israeliyyeh," paper presented at the Institute for Palestine Studies Conference in Ramallah, 2015.

81. Jean-Pierre Filiu, "The Twelve Wars on Gaza," *Journal for Palestine Studies* 44, no. 1 (2014): 53.
82. Gisha, "Disengaged Occupiers: The Legal Status of Gaza," *Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement* (January 2007).
83. Some Israeli analysts noted that Israel has not developed such a policy, mostly because it has no strategy towards Gaza, but has nonetheless actively reinforced it for their benefit. Others stressed that it is policy within Israel to deal with each of the entities, the Palestinian Authority and Gaza, separately. Author interviews with Israeli security analysts. See also Ilana Feldman, "Isolating Gaza," *Stanford University Press Blog*, July 28, 2014, <https://stanfordpress.typepad.com/blog/2014/07/isolating-gaza.html>; and Gisha, "What Is the 'Separation Policy'?" *Gisha: Legal Center for Freedom of Movement* (May 2012).
84. For more on the right to armed struggle, see Richard Falk, "International Law and the al-Aqsa Intifada," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, no. 30 (2000), <https://merip.org/2000/12/international-law-and-the-al-aqsa-intifada/>.
85. Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 44. See also Seth Anziska and Tareq Baconi, "The Consequences of Conflict Management in Israel/Palestine," *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Center* (January 12, 2016): 1–8.
86. For a useful resource, see the website Gaza in Context, www.gazaincontext.com.
87. At least since the eruption of the Second Intifada, successive Israeli leaders have chosen not to engage with Palestinian political demands and have dealt with Palestinians primarily through the prism of Israel's security. See Sylvian Cypel, *Walled: Israeli Society at an Impasse* (New York: Other Press, 2006).

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