

HAMAS IN POWER

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Abstract: In August 2005, Israel's disengagement from Gaza Strip took place, Hamas credited itself that due to its policies and actions Israel was forced to leave Gaza Strip. Hamas' overwhelming electoral victory in the January 2006 elections shocked the entire world. Hamas won 74 seats out of 132. After a long negotiation, a National Unity Government was formed on 17th March 2007 headed by Ismail Haniyeh as Prime Minister accompanied by a Fatah Vice-Prime Minister. The National Unity Government could not last long. Power -sharing proved to be more difficult than anticipated, exclusively within the field of security. In June 2007, the factional conflict between Hamas and Fatah culminated with scenes in Gaza resembling a civil war. The Palestinian civil strife in Gaza led to a political division of the Palestinian territories divided in the West Bank controlled by Mahmud Abbas and the Gaza Strip controlled by the democratically elected Hamas government. This resulted in a subsequent breakdown in the National Unity Government. Aftermath of Hamas' takeover of Gaza, major international players and Israel strengthened their plan of siege, isolating Hamas even more and penalizing the whole of Gaza in the deceptive belief that by undermining Hamas and its capability to deliver they would compel Gazans to overthrow it. This paper is an attempt to examine the challenges faced by Hamas in power.

Keywords: Hamas, Israel, Fatah, National Unity Government, Factional Conflict.

1. INTRODUCTION

ISRAELI DISENGAGEMENT FROM GAZA STRIP (2003 – 2005)

On 18 December 2003, Ariel Sharon revealed his initiative for a unilateral withdrawal from some territory and settlements at the Herzliya Conference of the Private Israeli University, the Interdisciplinary Centre, Herzliya. Later on, it was disclosed that it will be the Gaza Strip and four isolated, nearly empty settlements in the northern part of the West Bank.¹ In the months preceding Sharon revelation of his Disengagement Plan, there had been growing signs of dissatisfaction and protest within Israeli public. This was further accelerated by a chain of events such as² – in September 2003, a group of Israeli Air Force pilots, both on active duty and in reserve, spoke out against the policy of “targeted killings.” In a letter addressed to General Halutz, they refused to participate in the future missions in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank which brought the lives of civilians at risk. Two colonels, five lieutenant-colonels, nine commanders, six captains, and, particularly, General Yiftah Spector, who had led the attack on the Osirak Nuclear Reactor in Iraq in 1981, were the signatories of the letter.³

¹ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 119.

² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

³ Enderlin, Charles, *The Lost Years: Radical Islam, Intifada, and Wars in the Middle East 2001 – 2006*, (New York: Other Press, LLC, 2007), p. 207.

In the midst of these events, the **Geneva Accord** was announced⁴ on 12 October 2003. According to the Accord, Israel would evacuate 98 percent of the West Bank and most settlements, and the entire of Gaza Strip. A protected passage would be built between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem would be the capital of both the states, the Western Wall and the Jewish quarter of the Old City remaining under Israeli control. The Palestinian refugees of 1948 would be compensated and the right of return to Israeli territory would be placed under the control of Israel.⁵ Another contributing factor was the growing concern regarding changing demographics of the area. It was common knowledge that very shortly Jews would become a minority in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This type of situation would bring an apartheid situation – an Israeli minority denying basic rights to an Arab majority under its control, or the extension of rights to all, leading ultimately a bi-national state, which would actually be the end of the Zionist ideal of a state for the Jewish people: the Jews would become a minority population in their historic homeland as in the Diaspora. Due to this realization, Sharon decided that it was time to act unilaterally to reduce the Arab population under Israeli control by 1.3 million (the population of the Gaza Strip) and thereby postpone the demographic sword of Damocles. The Disengagement Plan officially presented on 28 May 2004⁶ but it was approved by the Knesset in October, announcing that Israel “will evacuate the Gaza Strip, including all the Israeli settlements currently existing there, and will redeploy outside the territory of the Strip.”⁷

According to the Disengagement Plan, Israel would withdraw from the Gaza Strip – with the exception of the 100 meter-broad Philadelphia corridor on the border line with Egypt. Israel later on agreed to evacuate the corridor in support of Egyptian military control. Pending the final position of the corridor, Israeli army began to construct a wall along its 12 kilometers that will consist of “eight-meter-tall concrete plates that could easily be eliminated. The new fence will be amalgamated with surveillance posts and a new highway for heavy armored vehicles paved on its southern side.”⁸ The plan provided Israel “absolute authority” over Gaza’s territorial waters, land borders and airspace, which interprets its complete control over the movement of goods and people into and out of the Gaza Strip. Israel will also “carry on, for full charge, to deliver electricity, gas, petrol and water to the Palestinians, in conformity with current arrangements.” Israel will also carry-on collecting customs duties in place of the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli currency (shekel) will continue to be the local currency. Additionally, the Israeli government was constructing a new terminal at the place where the Gaza Strip, Egypt and Israel meet, which would necessitate Palestinian labor and goods to go via Israeli territory. Israel’s Interior Ministry will have the complete jurisdiction over the matters regarding the issuing of Palestinian identity cards and all population statistics such as deaths, births, marriages and besides this all Palestinians must carry on to be registered with the ministry.⁹ As for the border separating the Gaza Strip from Israel, a second wall was already under construction. It was being constructed to the east of the existing wall on Israeli territory and generates a buffer zone around the Gaza Strip 70 kilometers long and several hundred meters wide. The barrier will be supplemented with optical and electronic sensor that will discover any attempts to cross it.¹⁰

The Disengagement Plan, was a mechanism for Israel’s prolonged occupation of the West Bank land and the physical amalgamation of that land into Israel. In the one hand, the plan states that “in any future permanent status arrangements, there will be no Israeli villages and towns in the Gaza strip. On the other hand, “it was obvious that in the West Bank there are areas which will be part of the State of Israel, together with major Israeli population hubs, villages, towns, cities and protected areas and other places of exclusive interest to Israel.” Therefore, it was the first instance that the formal annexation of the West Bank land has been openly and officially proposed. The Disengagement Plan was not intended to provide more territorial compromise, concessions and withdrawals, unilateral disengagement can only strengthen Israeli

⁴ Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 121.

⁵ Enderlin, Charles, *The Lost Years: Radical Islam, Intifada, and Wars in the Middle East 2001 – 2006*, (New York: Other Press, LLC, 2007), p. 210.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-122.

⁷ Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 184.

⁸ Roy, Sara, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian – Israeli Conflict*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 314. See also, “Israel bolsters security before Gaza Strip pull-out,” *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, April 27, 2005, p. 14.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 314-315; Galia Golan, *Israel and Palestine: Peace Plans and Proposals from Oslo to Disengagement*, (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007), p. 122.

¹⁰ Roy, Sara, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian – Israeli Conflict*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 315.

control, leading Palestinians towards greater oppression, isolation and ghettoization.¹¹ The actual withdrawal occurred in mid-August 2005, ending just within a week. Israeli defense forces and police personnel performed the evacuations, which shifted 15,000 civilians (in which 6,000 were nonresidents) out of four settlements in the northern West Bank and 21 in the Gaza Strip. Although resistance arose, by means of few detentions, the process of disengagement went comparatively smoothly. Once the settlements were evacuated, the Israeli soldiers completed the process and left the Gaza Strip in early September 12, finishing its 38-year presence in the territory.¹² In the period earlier to Israeli disengagement, news on Gaza were already revealing its grave economic condition and attendant effects of occupation, isolation and the population's immobility. Malnutrition levels reached at alarming stage and were being compared to sub-Saharan Africa, with unemployment at more than 50 percent, and almost everybody relying on, to varying degrees, on assistance from international aid agencies.¹³ The situation continues to deteriorate, with UN relief organizations, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and UNRWA, alerting that Gaza is "on the threshold of a humanitarian disaster due to lack of money and food."¹⁴

After the final Israeli defense forces withdrawal of the Gaza Strip, there have been almost daily battles between Hamas and the PNA, Hamas and Fatah, and Gaza's various clans, militia and security forces. Although the disengagement did not result in the disintegration of the Palestinian politics or a breakdown of the Palestinian community but it has undoubtedly made the condition worse, prearranged Israel's policy to redesign the occupation without ending it.¹⁵

HAMAS ELECTORAL VICTORY (2006)

After Arafat's death in 2004, the political vacuum created by his absence and January 2006 elections presented new opportunities for Hamas political participation. From 1996 Hamas' prime rival Fatah dominated the PNA. Hamas refused to participate in legislative elections of 1996 because it viewed that it was the product of Oslo Accords which it had vehemently criticized on ideological grounds. Hamas also feared that by participating in legislative elections of 1996, the movement is going to recognize a peace-process which has been rejected by it earlier and the growing popularity of the Oslo Peace Process among Palestinians is not going to bring better results in those elections for Hamas.¹⁶

The electoral platform 'Change and Reform' was a fourteen-page election manifesto presented by Hamas. The electoral platform 'Change and Reform' adopted by Hamas for the 2006 legislative council elections explains that Hamas' participation in the elections 'takes place within a comprehensive program for the liberation of Palestine and return of the Palestinian people to their lands, and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.'¹⁷ The circumstances had changed dramatically by 2006. The Peace Process was in tatters and Fatah was increasingly weakened and fragmented internally and as perceived by general Palestinians that was increasingly ineffective and venal. Fatah and President Mahmud Abbas were unable to improve law and order or deteriorating economic conditions. Now, the political system was opened for Hamas participation with presumed prospects of success. To participate in elections presented an opportunity to maintain the position of Hamas which it had achieved in Al-Aqsa Intifada and to cope with decreasing public support for violence.¹⁸

¹¹ Geoffrey Aronson, "Issues arising from the implementation of Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Summer 2005), pp. 49-63. See also, Roy, Sara, *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian - Israeli Conflict*, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), pp. 315-317.

¹² Greg Myre, "Israel Lowers its Flag in the Gaza Strip," *New York Times*, September 12, 2005. See also, Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine - Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 185.

¹³ Ben Russell, "Palestinian malnutrition at African levels under Israeli curbs, says MPs," *Independent*, February 5, 2004, <http://www.independent.co.uk>; Peter Hansen, "Hungary in Gaza," *Guardian*, March 5, 2003; <http://www.guardian.co.uk>. See also, Gregory Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine - Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 185-186.

¹⁴ Akiva Elder, "UN aid workers: Gaza on verge of disaster," *Ha'aretz*, April 4, 2006.

¹⁵ Darryl Li, Interview, Fall, 2005; and idem, "The Gaza Strip as Laboratory," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2. (Winter 2006), pp. 38-55.

¹⁶ Akbarzadeh, Shahram, *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 69; Hroub, Khaled, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), pp. 140-141.

¹⁷ Hroub, Khaled, *Hamas: A Beginner's Guide*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), p. 141.

¹⁸ Akbarzadeh, Shahram, *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 69. See also, Palestinian Centre for Policy and Research (2008c), Public Opinion Poll No.18; available at www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2005/p18e1.html

During Al-Aqsa intifada, the military wing of Hamas was greatly weakened due to the Israeli counter attacks and improved intelligence. Furthermore, Hamas had to compensate for the loss of the senior leadership due to the Israeli targeted killings and arrests. The Israeli containment policy of its military activities greatly undermined its armed operational capabilities. Syria withdrew its strong support for Hamas and pressurized its leaders to halt their military operations because it was concerned about the possible U.S. actions against it. The political legitimacy Hamas could achieve from elections presented an ‘insurance policy’¹⁹ against possible repressive actions by PNA. Further, the Israeli disengagement from Gaza Strip in 2005 made a suitable starting point for political participation as Hamas credited itself for forcing Israel to withdraw from Gaza.²⁰ In the broader political context Hamas had shown pragmatism and moderation during the past years and this tendency had been crystal clear since the movement opted for political participation. This tendency culminated during the 2006 election campaign and in negotiations with Fatah and other Palestinian secular forces.²¹ Hamas nevertheless eagerly plunged into the campaign for elections to the legislative council.²²

Hamas decisive electoral victory on 26 January 2006 surprised most analysts, including Palestinians. Hamas’s Change and Reform list won 74 seats out of 132, with Fatah trailing with only 45.²³ Hamas’ electoral victory was also a reaction against the inefficiency, corruption and internecine fighting characterizing the PLO and Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Hamas made history in January 2006, sweeping away Fatah’s monopoly of power in free and fair democratic elections. A new phase in Palestinian politics dominated by Islamist political culture began.²⁴ Although Hamas won political power in January 2006 but they had severe difficulties in exercising it.²⁵ Hamas subsequently came under massive pressure after their electoral victory, as the United States and European Union insisted that Hamas must recognize the state of Israel, renounce violence and recognize the previous agreements. When Hamas refused to accept these demands, economic and aid sanctions were imposed on the Palestinian Authority (PA).²⁶ Immediately Israel withheld its monthly payments of more than \$50 million, consisted of tax receipts and customs generally collected for and paid to the Palestinian Authority. The tactic to withhold revenue that assists “the most foreign-aid dependent society on earth” was casually described by Dov Weisglass: “*The idea is to put the Palestinians on a diet.*”²⁷ “The intention” as reported in the *New York Times*, “*is to starve the Palestinian Authority of money and international connections to the point where... the Palestinians will be so unhappy with life under Hamas that they will return to office a reformed and chastened Fatah movement.*”²⁸ The incapacity to pay over 150,000 state-owned staffs, most getting nothing and not more than 50 percent of their salaries is just an example of the consequences brought to bear by such sanctions. Moreover, the boycott sustained until June 2007 creating a bad condition far worse in the occupied territories, and the Gaza Strip bearing the majority of the hardship.²⁹

Hamas democratic victory not lasted for long not only for Hamas but also for the Palestinian people, followed by an U.S. and Israel – led international economic and political sanctions of the newly elected Palestinian government. The embargo amounted to a kind of collective penalty against the whole Palestinian population and, it was the first example in the

¹⁹ Klein, Menachem, ‘Hamas in Power,’ *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 3, (Summer 2007), p. 446.

²⁰ Akbarzadeh, Shahram, *Routledge Handbook of Political Islam*, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2012), p. 70.

²¹ Michael Irvin Jensen, *The Political Ideology of Hamas: A Grassroots Perspective*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), p. 147; Hroub, Khaled, *Hamas: A Beginner’s Guide*, (London: Pluto Press, 2006), pp. 140-145.

²² Ibid.,

²³ Ibid., pp. 98-99.

²⁴ Michael Irvin Jensen, *The Political Ideology of Hamas: A Grassroots Perspective*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), pp. 148-149.

²⁵ Ibid.,

²⁶ Beverley Milton-Edwards, Hamas: Victory with Ballots and Bullets, *Global Change, Peace & Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3, (October 2007), p. 302. To link this article- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14781150701599515> ; Zweiri, Mahjoob, The Hamas Victory: Shifting Sands or Major Earthquake? *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4. (2006), pp. 681-682. See also, Michael Irvin Jensen, *The Political Ideology of Hamas: A Grassroots Perspective*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), p. 149. Also, Shikaki, Khalil, With Hamas in Power: Impact of Palestinian Domestic Developments on Options for the Peace Process, *Crown Centre for Middle East Studies*, (Brandeis University, 2007), p. 7.

²⁷ Greogarry Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 188.

²⁸ Erlanger, Steven, “U.S. and Israelis Are Said to Talk of Hamas Ouster,” *New York Times*, February 14, 2006.

²⁹ Greogarry Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 188.

history of this struggle that the international community enforced embargo on the occupied rather than the occupier. Through imposing international economic and financial sanctions, the boycott intended to force Palestinians to overthrow the government they had democratically elected. The Bush administration was unwilling to accept or incapable of realizing that Fatah had been vanquished politically for its years of corruption and incompetence and that no amount of coercion could overturn that. The tragic mockery is that Hamas announced repeatedly that it wanted to rule normally in absence of sanctions³⁰ but bloodshed between Gaza and Israel continued well into post-disengagement period, characterized by regular Israeli air attacks against militants and supposed bomb-manufacturing locations. The casualty on the civilian population in these targeted killings, was generally significant. However, regardless of the expected consequences of firing at human being from helicopter gunships – Prime Minister Ehud Olmert vowed to continue the policy, stating “*I am deeply sorry for the residents of Gaza, but the lives, security and well-being of the residents of Sderot is even more important.*”³¹ At the last part of June the hostility reached war-like situation.

On June 24 the Israel army, in its first raid ever since the August 2005 pulling out, entered Gaza and kidnapped two civilians.³² The two brothers, Mustafa Abu Maumar and Osama, were suspected by Israeli in connection with Hamas terrorist activity, while Palestinian sources together with Hamas, stated that the two brothers were sons of a Hamas activist and have nothing to do with the organization. On the next day, Palestinian militants assaulted IDF post just outside a border crossing at the south end of the Gaza Strip, in this attack two Israeli soldiers were killed and a third was kidnapped, Corporal Gilad Shalit.³³ Nevertheless, Shalit’s abduction started a tornado in the media, together with orders by Ehud Olmert for immediate attacks on the Gaza Strip under the codename “**Operation Summer Rain.**” After two days of Corporal’s kidnapping, IDF troops and tanks poured into the Gaza Strip, supported by aerial bombardment. The offensive marked the bombings of bridges, water tanks, roads, and power plants, as a result 75 percent of the region’s electricity being knocked out. Increasing its reaction, Israeli defense forces captured 64 Hamas’ members in the West Bank in which 23 were democratically elected legislators. Further, Israeli fighter jets bombed the residence of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, allegedly sending a message to the Hamas’ leadership residing in Syria, namely, Khaled Mishal, whom Israel was asserting orchestrated the June 25 attack and abduction.³⁴ The offensive lasted until Israel and Palestinian Authority agreed to a ceasefire which came into effect on 26 November, bring about a short break of the death and destruction, and Israel’s withdrawal from coastal territory.³⁵

FORMATION AND BREAKDOWN OF THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT

After winning election in January 2006, Hamas made it clear that it wanted to form a national coalition government together with Fatah and other political factions represented in the Palestinian Legislative Council.³⁶ As Fatah refused to participate in a government of national unity, the cabinet formed by Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) at the end of March 2006 was made up exclusively of members or allies of Hamas. Unwilling to participate in any meeting of Council of Ministers, president Abbas was particularly adamant in denying Hamas any competence in matters of internal security. Abbas did not believe that Hamas cabinet would last, and in June 2006 Abbas called for a national referendum (never

³⁰ Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 41.

³¹ Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff, “Palestinian woman hurt in IAF strike deliveries still-born baby,” *Ha’aretz*, June 24, 2006; Donald Macintyre, “Olmert: Israeli lives worth more than Palestinian ones,” *Independent*, June 23, 2006.

³² Chomsky, Noam and Gilbert Achcar, *Perilous Power: The Middle East and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), pp. 237-242, 265 and 29.

³³ Greogarry Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 190.

³⁴ Llène R. Prusher and Nicholas Blandford, “Israel goes after both Hamas leadership,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 30, 2006; Erlanger, Steven, “Seizures Show New Israel Line Against Hamas,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2006. See also, Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 41. Also, Greogarry Harms and Todd M. Ferry, *The Palestine – Israel Conflict: A Basic Introduction*, 2nd, ed., (London: Pluto Press, 2008), p. 190. Also, Caridi, Paola, *Hamas: From Resistance to Government*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), pp. 235-237.

³⁵ Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

held).³⁷ Fatah, for its part, continuously showed its refusal to let Hamas govern. Informal groups and members of security forces attached to the presidency assailed the very symbols of the Authority; ministries as well as Palestinian legislative council (PLC) and Prime Minister's offices were vandalized. The Israeli government, aside from its routine occupation and blockade of the Gaza Strip, froze the transfer of taxes levied on all merchandise imported to Palestinian territories in the name of the PNA. The total sum in 2005, according to the World Bank, came to at least 60 percent of the PNA's revenue. As of 30 January 2006, the Quartet (the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and Russia) made all cooperation conditional on a "commitment to the principles of non-violence, recognition of the State of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the roadmap."³⁸ As Hamas refused to comply with the demands, the Quartet froze all its direct aid. The United States further forced the international banking system to discontinue transactions with the cabinet. These measures brought an immediate social crisis. In the Gaza Strip, unemployment reached 36 percent and it was estimated that 87 percent of its population was living below the poverty line.³⁹

After more than a year of intense negotiations, and Palestinians on the verge of a civil war together with Saudi mediation bring a summit meeting of Mecca in February 2007. The summit brought together the President, Prime Minister, and responsible parties in Fatah and Hamas. The parties reached an agreement for the framing of a Unity Cabinet, based on the Document of National Accord.⁴⁰ Thus, Hamas and Fatah and a large number of other secular forces created the first ever fragile Palestinian National Unity Government in March 2007. In fact, this event witnessed the level of pragmatism shown by the leadership of Hamas.⁴¹ However, on 17 March 2007, the PLC approved a National Unity Cabinet. Ismail Haniyeh confirmed in his duties as Prime Minister, headed it, accompanied by a Fatah Vice-Prime Minister. With the Popular Front of Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Islamic Jihad refusing to become associated with the executive, cabinet consisted of 12 Hamas ministers, 6 Fatah ministers, 4 ministers from "small" parties, and 3 independents. Officially, the Quartet timidly welcomed the installation of this cabinet. Announcing the resumption of its aid, it nonetheless maintained the TIM and abstained from renewing direct financing. Moreover, the Israeli government refused to resume the transfer of the taxes it collects for the PNA and to handover the roughly \$600 million it had placed in escrow.⁴²

Actually, the National Unity Government did not last for long. Power sharing proved to be more difficult than anticipated, especially within the field of security. The factional conflict between Hamas and Fatah culminated in June 2007, with scenes in Gaza resembling a civil war. The Palestinian civil strife in Gaza led to a political division of the Palestinian territories divided in a West Bank controlled by Mahmud Abbas and Salam Fayyad and a Gaza Strip controlled by the domestically elected Hamas government. This resulted in eventual break down of the National Unity Government.⁴³

GAZA CIVIL WAR AND HAMAS' TAKEOVER OF GAZA

Domestically, the newly emergent Hamas government had to face the reality of a split regime: a parliamentary majority and cabinet headed by Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and an incumbent President Abu Mazen who enjoyed the support of the security forces. For Hamas, it was critical to bring the security forces under the control of its government, and more specifically, under the jurisdiction of the Hamas controlled Ministry of Interior. The new Hamas government argued plausibly that placing the bulk of security forces under the government's wing was in accord with the modifications in the PNA Basic Law, which ironically Mahmud Abbas had introduced when he was Prime Minister

³⁷ Samer S. Shehata, *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movements and Change*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p. 191.

³⁸ John V. Whitbeck, "What Israel's Right to Exist Means to Palestinians," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 2, 2007. (<http://www.csmonitor.com/2007/0202/p09s02-coop.html>).

³⁹ Samer S. Shehata, *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movements and Change*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), pp. 191-192.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*,

⁴¹ Michael Irvin Jensen, *The Political Ideology of Hamas: A Grassroots Perspective*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), pp. 149-150.

⁴² Samer S. Shehata, *Islamist Politics in the Middle East: Movements and Change*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), p. 192.

⁴³ Michael Irvin Jensen, *The Political Ideology of Hamas: A Grassroots Perspective*, (New York: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), p. 150.

during his struggle with Yasser Arafat.⁴⁴ In April 2006, Abbas reinforced the Palestinian Guard and made it answerable directly to him, and also established an organization tasked with monitoring the borders, which in practice meant the crossing between Gaza and Egypt at Rafah. Hamas responded by establishing the Security Forces Unit, a body that took its orders from the Ismail Haniyeh government's Interior Ministry, thereby challenging Abu Mazen's authority. These security forces later called Executive Force⁴⁵ was headed by Said Siam, well known one of the movement's hawks and one of the men who had contacts not just with Hamas's military wing, but with other armed factions within the Gaza Strip.

The Executive Force brought together the groups that had been established and consolidated during the Al-Aqsa intifada. Thus, it was not just Hamas's militants who joined the Executive Force, but more importantly the members of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), as well. In a move that appeared to be aimed at strengthening links with PRC, Siam appointed as Director General of his ministry the founder of the PRC, Jamal Abu Samhadana. Abu Samhadana's appointment, therefore, was yet another spark over a very dry pyre, and one that seriously embarrassed Abbas.⁴⁶ Abbas quickly ruled it illegal and ordered its dissolution. In a meeting of the PLO Executive Council, he claimed that the attempt to transform Hamas's military arm into an official PNA security force could begin a round of internal strife that had to be avoided at all costs.⁴⁷ The Executive Force initially comprised 3,000 men but practically doubled within a few months. The sheer numbers were still relatively small, compared to the 60,000 – strong forces controlled by the Presidency. The 3,000 men initially incorporated under Siam heralded a confrontation that could be expected to be bloody.⁴⁸

Within five months of the election, the Executive Force was involved in violent confrontation with both rival security forces and Fatah. The conflict took an international dimension after the United States, worried about the empowerment of the Hamas government and its strong links with Iran, began to train the new Special Presidential Guard in August 2006. The target was to expand the force from 3,500 to 6,000 by the end of the year and deploy most of them in Gaza's sensitive border crossing with Israel and Egypt. Regional power politics soon conflated with growing civil strife when Rafah border crossings, witnessed the most serious confrontation in December 2006.⁴⁹ The violence was sparked by an attempted assassination of a senior PNA officer suspected of arresting and torturing Islamist opposition members. In the attack on his car, three of his children, his driver, and a bystander were killed. The following day a judge linked to Hamas was executed, thus starting a heavy round of violence between the PNA's security forces and Hamas.⁵⁰

To deal with the crisis, the Hamas Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, decided to cut short a month-long trip to Iran and Arab capitals. The United States, perturbed by Haniyeh's visit to Iran where he was apparently provided with the \$36 million, he was suspected of carrying with him, pressed Israel to close Rafah crossing. Israel readily complied, and Haniyeh and his bodyguard were detained on the Egyptian side. The Egyptians stepped in and succeeded in reaching a compromise. Meanwhile, hundreds of Hamas and Executive Force members descended on the Rafah border crossing site, where fighting broke out between the Presidential Guard guarding the crossing and Hamas. The melee turned into fierce firefights after unknown assailants attacked the Prime Minister and his entourage, killing Haniyeh's bodyguard and wounding his son and a senior aide. Senior Hamas officials accused the Presidential Guard of stimulating an assassination attempt. In retaliation, the Hamas government announced that it would double the Executive force from 6,000 to 12,000 personnel.⁵¹

⁴⁴ Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 99.

⁴⁵ Roland Friedrich and Arnold Luethold, *Entry-Points to Palestinian Security Sector Reform*, ed., (Geneva: DCAF, 2007), p. 22; Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 99.

⁴⁶ Caridi, Paola, *Hamas: From Resistance to Government*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), pp. 227-228.

⁴⁷ Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 99.

⁴⁸ Caridi, Paola, *Hamas: From Resistance to Government*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), p. 228.

⁴⁹ Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 99.

⁵⁰ Caridi, Paola, *Hamas: From Resistance to Government*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), p. 241; Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 99-100.

⁵¹ Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 100. See also, Ghanem, As' ad, *Palestinian Politics After Arafat: A Failed National Movement*, (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 143-144.

Hamas' accusation was clear: it was Mohammed Dahlan who had orchestrated the assassination attempt on Haniyeh, and Abbas was morally responsible because control of the Rafah crossing was in the hands of the Presidential Guard. Fatah rejected the accusations, threatened to call the early election, and violence spread throughout the streets and towns of the Gaza Strip, with the risk of spreading to the West Bank, as well.⁵² In 2006 and 2007, 407 Palestinians were killed – the vast majority in Gaza – and thousands wounded as a result of internecine violence, and attack against institutions associated with every faction increased.⁵³ Severe Human rights violations – abductions, torture, extrajudicial executions, vandalism of homes and institutions – were committed by both sides in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁵⁴ Despite the short-lived establishment of a unity government, the rifts between Hamas and Fatah had become so sharp and so deadly that by May 2007, whole neighborhoods of the Gaza Strip were under the control of either Hamas or Fatah; in some locality, factional control came down to individual street blocks.⁵⁵ The fight with Israel also intensified, due to Israel's growing concern that Hamas' increasing power and influence would ultimately spread not only in the Gaza strip but also to the West Bank which is more important for Israel. This violence was marked by continuous and terrifying bloodshed mostly from Israel, whose military invasions into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank continued almost daily.⁵⁶ According to Israel's Human Rights group B'tselem, during the years between January 2006 and December 2007 Israeli defense forces killed 1,041 Palestinians in which 657 in 2006 and 384 in 2007, almost half (480) civilians and the majority (823) from the Gaza Strip. During the same period 42 Israelis were also killed by Palestinians, nearly 13 of them by Qassam rockets fired from Gaza.⁵⁷

It took one more round of massive violence in January 2007 to reflect shift in the balance of power in Gaza in Hamas' favor. On 4 January, Hamas and the Executive Force laid siege in a refugee camp wherein the home of Colonel Muhammad Ghurrayib, head of one of the main security services in northern Gaza was located. Neither repeated attempts by Fatah fighters to reach his home in order to break the siege nor his own desperate appeal on Palestinian TV for help prevented subsequent waves of attacks, which resulted in the death of Ghurrayib and six others, including his brother and two daughters. It took two more rounds of fighting in May and June for Hamas to rout the President's security forces and Fatah militia and take over Gaza completely. Hamas military takeover of Gaza Strip, palpably demonstrated through the conquest of all key institutions associated with the Presidency and the brutal public killings of senior members of the security forces and of Fatah, led to the effective emergence of two political entities: the Hamas – dominated Gaza Strip, in which the elected government of Ismail Haniyeh prevailed, and a West Bank PA under Mahmud Abbas.⁵⁸

The inter-factional violence also was rooted in U.S. government's plan to weaken and ultimately overthrow the Hamas-led government. While the Palestinian leadership – both Fatah and Hamas – must take responsibility for the anarchy they created, foreign powers have also contributed directly and destructively to the combustion, which Hamas constantly and perfectly analyzed as an attempted coup against its democratically elected government.⁵⁹ The U.S. plan to turn back a national unity government and overthrow Hamas through arming Fatah so it could combat against Hamas for the control

⁵² Caridi, Paola, *Hamas: From Resistance to Government*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), p. 241.

⁵³ Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, (B'tselem), *Severe Human Rights Violations in Intra – Palestinian Clashes; and idem, Statistics*, (www.btselem.org/english/statistics/casualties); See also, for example, the reports of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR) in Gaza: PCHR, "*Internal Palestinian Fighting Continues . . .*," Gaza, January 29, 2007; "Attacks on Public Institutions Continue: Over the past two days, scores of armed Palestinians have carried out attacks on Al-Aqsa University in Khan Yunis, Al-Karama Military Hospital in Khan Yunis and the Electric Power Station located in the centre of the Gaza Strip," Gaza, March 13, 2006.

⁵⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Internal Fight: Palestinian Abuses in Gaza and the West Bank*, (New York, 2008).

⁵⁵ Sami Abdel-Shafi, "We Are Being Suffocated," *The Guardian*, February 10, 2007. See also, Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 213.

⁵⁶ Amira Hass, "The Fear in Gaza," *Ha'aretz*, October 8, 2006.

⁵⁷ Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 213.

⁵⁸ Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 100.

⁵⁹ Alvaro de Soto, *End of Mission Report, May 2007, Under Secretary General, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority, Envoy to the Quartet*, United Nations May 2007.

of the government (and thereby ignited internal clash), which Israel itself realized as unworkable folly.⁶⁰ In April 2008 *Vanity Fair* magazine published “The Gaza Bombshell” in which the U.S. plot was exposed.⁶¹ The United States and Mahmud Abbas had allegedly demanded Israel to approve the shipment of weapons, armored vehicles and ammunitions into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to assist Fatah’s Presidential Guard a policy that endangered and aroused Hamas leaders and supporters.⁶² It was also revealed that Israel informed the U.S. that it would forbid weapons from entering Gaza for panic that Fatah would lose them. In reality, the United States preferred \$86.4 million in security assistance for the Presidential Guard. A further source citing a U.S. government document expressed a \$1.27 billion plan (over five years) that would have additional 4,700 men to the 15,000 – member Presidential Guard. To strengthen Fatah by supplying weapons in which Jordan and Egypt also contributed was openly intended for obliterating Hamas and its military infrastructure.⁶³

By middle of the June 2007 the Palestinian National Authority was effectively devastated,⁶⁴ and both factions, Hamas and Fatah, were involved in eradicating each other, a truth that was usually new and terrifying. Hamas was now the unchallenged power in the Gaza Strip. Following the Hamas takeover of Gaza, Israel and other major players in the international community strengthened their plan of siege, isolating Hamas even more and penalizing the whole Gaza in the deceptive belief that by undermining Hamas and its capability to deliver, they would compel Gazans to overthrow it. Israel strictly cut down cross-border transportation, whereas the Ramallah-based Authority curtailed connections with Gaza, blocking the normal functioning of government. In the last part of August 2007, Salam Fayyad proclaimed the shutting down of 103 religious, charitable and educational institutions connected to Hamas, saying that they were running in violation of Non-Profit Organizations law. In October 2007, the PNA further closed the Hamas charity committees in the West Bank with the goal of transforming and restructuring these groups, since they “serve as the terror group’s civilian infrastructures and operate a network of mosques, schools, institutions that support jailed terrorists.”⁶⁵ It is safe to say that though Hamas has gained total control in the Gaza Strip, it paid heavily for that victory in the West Bank.⁶⁶

Hamas takeover of Gaza, followed by several other crucial events such as:

❖ **OPERATION CAST LEAD (2008):** - On 27 December 2008, Israel launched an extensive military campaign known as “Operation Cast Lead” against Hamas in the Gaza Strip with the aim to counter Hamas rocket fires into southern Israel and generally, to severely weaken all aspects of Hamas rule in Gaza.⁶⁷

❖ **MAVI MARMARA INCIDENT (MAY 2010):** - The *Mavi Marmara* had sailed from Istanbul under the Turkish Flag ten days earlier, and was the largest in a convoy of six ships, called the Freedom Flotilla, that intended to break the siege Israel had imposed on the Gaza by bringing 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid. The Israeli navy’s special operations unit Shayetet 13, along with helicopter, started the attack against the *Mavi Marmara*. The whole operation was recorded by the journalists on the board. The Shayetet 13 men were fully armed as they attached their ropes to the ship and climbed the board. They started shooting indiscriminately. The nine dead in the attack of the *Mavi Marmara* were all Turks.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Conflicts Forum, “Elliot Abrams’ Uncivil War,” *Conflicts Forum Reports*, January 7, 2007. See also, Mark Perry and Paul Woodward, “Document Details ‘U.S.’ Plan to Sink Hamas,” *Asia Times*, May 16, 2007; and Jonathan Steele, “Hamas Acted on a Very Real Fear of a US – Sponsored Coup,” *The Guardian*, June 22, 2007. Also, Kathleen Christison, “Thoughts on the Attempted Murder of Palestine: The Siren Song of Elliot Abrams,” *Counterpunch*, July 26, 2007, www.counterpunch.org/christison07262007.html ; and Norman Olsen, “An Inside Story of How the US Magnified Palestinian Suffering,” *Christian Science Monitor*, January 12, 2009.

⁶¹ David Rose, “The Gaza Bombshell,” *Vanity Fair*, April 2008.

⁶² Amira Hass, “Growing Bitterness in Gaza,” *Ha’aretz*, February 9, 2007.

⁶³ Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 43.

⁶⁴ Danny Rubinstein, “Occupation Under the Guise of Self-government,” *Ha’aretz*, June 13, 2007.

⁶⁵ Roy, Sara, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 44.

⁶⁶ Rubin, Barry, *The Muslim Brotherhood: The Organization and Policies of a Global Islamist Movement*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 101.

⁶⁷ Kardelj, Nejc, *Israel vs. Hamas*, (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2010), p. 69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

❖ **SOUTHERN ISRAEL CROSS – BORDER ATTACKS (AUGUST 2011):** - On 18 August 2011, a series of cross-border attacks with similar attacks and mutual cover was performed on Highway 12 in southern Israel close to the Egyptian border by a team of possibly 12 militants in four units.⁶⁹

❖ **OPERATION RETURNING ECHO (MARCH 2012):** - Operation Returning Echo was an Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) military operation in the Gaza Strip from 9 March to 14 March 2012. It was the most horrible eruption of hostility covered by the media in the territory since the Operation Cast Lead or the Gaza war of 2008 – 2009.⁷⁰

❖ **OPERATION PILLAR OF DEFENSE (NOVEMBER 2012):** - Operation Pillar of Defense (literally means: “Pillar of Cloud”)⁷¹ was an eight-day military operation by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, formally launched on 14 November 2012 with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, head of the Gaza military wing of Hamas.⁷²

Throughout the operation, the al-Qassam Brigades and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad further accelerated their rocket attacks on Israeli towns and cities, in an operation code named **Operation Stones of Baked Clay** by the al-Qassam Brigades,⁷³ firing more than 1,456 rockets into Israel, and an extra 142 which landed within Gaza itself.⁷⁴

2. CONCLUSION

Following the Israeli disengagement from Gaza in August 2005, the political system was open for Hamas’ participation with presumed success. On 26 January 2006, the elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Councils in which Hamas won 74 seats out of 132. After winning election Hamas subsequently came under massive pressure as the United States and European Union insisted that Hamas recognize the State of Israel, renounce violence and recognize the previous agreements. When Hamas refused to accept these demands, economic and aid sanctions were imposed. The boycott intended to force Palestinians to overthrow the government they had democratically elected. A National Unity Government headed by Ismail Haniyeh as Prime Minister accompanied by Fatah Vice-Prime Minister on 17th March 2007 was formed. The National Unity Government ultimately failed, the factional conflict between Hamas and Fatah culminated in June 2007, with scenes in Gaza resembling a civil war. The inter-factional violence which resulted in subsequent Hamas’ takeover of Gaza and confined Fatah to the West Bank. Although, both Hamas and Fatah were responsible in creating anarchy, but foreign powers have also contributed directly to the combustion.

Following the Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, Israel and other major players in the international community strengthened their plan of siege, isolating Hamas even more and penalizing the whole Gaza in deceptive belief that by undermining Hamas and its capability to deliver they would compel Gazans to overthrow it. Therefore, the path of Hamas in power was more difficult than anticipated and it was not the end of story. Followed by several crucial events such as Operation Cast lead, Operation Summer rain, Mavi Marmara Incident, Operation Returning Echo etc., The life in Gaza under Hamas rule became hell as Israel became more aggressive.

⁶⁹ Issacharoff, Avi, “Three Egyptians took part in terrorist attacks on southern Israel” *Ha’aretz*.

⁷⁰ Mitnick, Joshua & Bradley, Matt, “Israel-Gaza Clash Calms After Egypt Mediates a Truce” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 13, 2012.

⁷¹ “Chief of Staff Declares ‘Operation Pillar of Cloud’” *Arutz Sheva*, November 14, 2012.

⁷² “Day 2: 300+ Rockets Fired at Israel Since Start of Operation Pillar of Defense” (live updates) *Algemeiner*, November 15, 2012; Retrieved 15 November 2012; See also, Lappin, Yaakov, “Israeli air strike kills top Hamas commander Jabari” *The Jerusalem Post*, November 14, 2012; Also, Kalman, Matthew, “Massed Israeli troops poised for invasion of Gaza” *The Independent* (UK), November 15, 2012.

⁷³ *Al-sharq.com*, November 15, 2012; Retrieved November 20, 2012.

⁷⁴ Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General, “Secretary-General’s remarks to the Security Council (as delivered)” *Tel Aviv*, November 21, 2012, Retrieved November 22, 2012: “Overall, in that same time period, more than 1,456 rockets have been fired from Gaza into Israel. 142 have fallen inside Gaza itself. Approximately 409 were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-missile system. Since Israel’s targeted assassination from the air, on 14 November, of Ahmed Jabari, chief of Hamas’ military wing, and with Israel’s offensive in Gaza in its eighth day, the Israel Defense Forces publicly reported that it has conducted strikes at more than 1,450 targets in Gaza.”