



“Martyrdom is Life”: *Jihad* and Martyrdom in the Ideology of Hamas

Meir Litvak

To cite this article: Meir Litvak (2010) “Martyrdom is Life”: *Jihad* and Martyrdom in the Ideology of Hamas, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:8, 716-734, DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2010.494170](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2010.494170)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2010.494170>



Published online: 13 Jul 2010.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 3000



View related articles [↗](#)



Citing articles: 3 View citing articles [↗](#)

“Martyrdom is Life”: *Jihad* and Martyrdom in the Ideology of Hamas

MEIR LITVAK

Department of Middle Eastern History
Tel Aviv University
Tel Aviv, Israel

This article analyzes the articulation of the doctrine of “Jihad of the Sword” and martyrdom by the Islamic Resistance Movement of Palestine, Hamas, as a central pillar of Palestinian identity and as a major source of political mobilization and national empowerment. As part of this concept Hamas presents martyrdom as the epitome of jihad and of Islamic belief. The end-goal of jihad is the destruction of Israel and the elimination of the Jews. By emphasizing the centrality of “Jihad of the Sword” Hamas’s ideas reveal a certain similarity to, or inspiration by, radical Salafi-jihadist Islamic movements. While Hamas adopted a pragmatic approach on short-term tactics, these doctrines impose constraints on the scope of a profound ideological transformation it can undergo.

“There is no solution to the Palestinian question except through Jihad.”¹ This statement written in the preamble of the Hamas Charter, the canonical document of the Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, Hamas), marks the transformation that took place in December 1987, of the Palestinian Muslim Brethren (MB) from a religious social movement into a political, military one. The statement reflects an attempt to elevate the concept of “Jihad of the Sword” into one of the pillars of Palestinian identity and into a major source of mobilization behind the movement and of national empowerment. Hamas is unique among all MB movements in the Middle East by being simultaneously a religious and nationalist movement and by confronting a non-Muslim enemy, Israel, rather than a rival Arab-Muslim government. Consequently, it is the only one to practice “Jihad of the Sword,” and this doctrine has a central place in its ideology and self identity. In view of its unique situation, Hamas adopted few ideas from the more radical *Salafi-jihadist* camp. Still, its overall concepts regarding *jihad* and martyrdom have enjoyed the support of all mainstream Islamist movements in the Middle East, most probably because of shared animosity toward Israel.

Hamas’s victory in the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) legislative elections in January 2006 and the complete takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 turned the organization into a major, if not the leading, force in Palestinian politics. But while the political fortunes of Hamas have changed significantly, its ideology in advocating the elimination of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state on the entire territory of

Received 8 July 2009; accepted 23 December 2009.

Address correspondence to Meir Litvak, Department of Middle Eastern History, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, 69978, Israel. E-mail: litvak@post.tau.ac.il

Palestine has remained consistent. And, while differences over tactics have emerged among Hamas leaders since its electoral victory, the consensus around its ideology appears to have remained unchanged. Many ideological movements are forced to compromise once they attain power but the distant that they can make is influenced and often constrained by their basic worldview. Hamas is no exception, as it has continued to promote the *jihadi* discourse and has refused to cross certain ideological red lines even when it was forced to follow a more pragmatic path in its day-to-day conduct. In other words, even if ideology is not the sole factor guiding Hamas’s actions, it is still an important one. With these points in mind, this article seeks to analyze the concept of *jihad* as a central element in the broader ideology of Hamas.²

The Centrality of *Jihad*

The idea of *jihad*, literally an effort for the sake of God, has always enjoyed great importance in the teaching of the MB, which were founded in Egypt in 1928. However, Hasan al-Banna (d. 1949), the movement’s founder and leading ideologue, usually accorded a higher priority to social and educational activity as the noblest expression of *jihad*, while not rejecting its combative component.³ Although the MB in all Arab countries advocated an uncompromising stance against Israel’s existence, they viewed the loss of Palestine in 1948 primarily as a symptom of a deeper moral and social malaise within the Muslim world that stemmed from the abandonment of Islam and the adoption of Western ideologies and culture. The Palestinian MB concluded that educational *jihad* and the return of the Muslim masses to true Islam were the essential preconditions for any confrontation with Zionism. In consequence, they refrained from taking part in the Palestinian armed struggle against Israel following the 1967 war, and were less popular than the nationalist Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) organizations.⁴

This position began to change in the early 1980s due to several reasons. The defeat of the secular PLO organizations during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the success of the newly born Lebanese Hizballah, acting under the banner of Islam, to inflict heavy casualties on Israel, as well as the emergence of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement increased the appeal of *jihad*, particularly among younger activists.⁵ The final shift occurred shortly after the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising (Intifada) against Israel in December 1987, largely in response to pressures by younger, more radical, activists and out of fear that unless the movement took an active part in the struggle, it would be marginalized by the PLO in the future Palestinian state that was thought to be imminent. In August 1988, Hamas published its Charter outlining the movement’s new ideological position of *jihad* against Israel. This has been followed, ever since, by a stream of publications expanding the movement’s ideological message.⁶ In the course of time, Hamas has become the most effective Palestinian organization fighting Israel, carrying out a series of suicide attacks, against mostly civilian Israeli targets, in the years 1994–1996 and 2001–2007, which caused the death of over 1,000 Israeli civilians.⁷

Every national or religious conflict entails the justification of the “self” and the demonization of the rival. There is, in addition, a tendency among all radical religious movements to view their struggles in “cosmic” terms, to use Juergensmeyer’s words, relating to metaphysical conflicts between good and evil, between those fighting on the side of God against those on the side evil. Thus, if those fighting for Islam are fighting a holy war “in the path of God,” it follows that their opponents are “the enemies of God.”⁸ Consequently, in the view of Hamas the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is not merely a territorial dispute between Palestinians and Israelis: it is first and foremost a “war of religion and faith” between Islam

and Judaism and between Muslims and Jews. As such, it is portrayed as an unbridgeable dichotomy between two opposing absolutes—as a historical, religious and cultural conflict between faith and unbelief, between the true religion that supersedes all previous religions, that is, Islam, and the abrogated superseded religion, Judaism. It is a war between good, personified by the Muslims representing the party of God (*Hizballah*), and “the party of Satan” (*hizb al-shaytan*) represented by the Jews. Consequently, the conflict is considered as an “existential battle, rather than a dispute over borders” (*ma‘rakat wujud wa-la hudud*).⁹

The resort to *jihad* is based on two complementary sets of arguments: a practical one, which will be dealt with briefly, and a theological set that will be the main focus of this article. While Hamas is a modern Islamist movement, it makes a great effort to ground its concept of *jihad* in the teachings of the great scholars of traditional Islam in order to acquire greater religious legitimacy and respectability. In the view of Hamas, the doctrinal basis for the importance of *jihad* in Islam is evident in the large number of explicit passages in the Qur’an and numerous references in the *hadith* (traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad), which discuss *jihad* and prove “beyond any doubt” that it is a duty (*wajib*) incumbent on the Muslims, and not simply a permissible principle (*ibaha*). Therefore, laxity in the practice of *jihad* is viewed as reprehensible (*munkar*). Hamas also maintains that there is a consensus among jurists that none of the Qur’anic passages on *jihad* have been superseded (*mansukh*) by subsequent passages and, therefore, they are valid until the Day of Judgment. Those who abandon the path of *jihad* are considered misguided, and responsible for the rise of infidels and hypocrites (*munafiqun*), who only pretend to be Muslims.¹⁰

Hamas spokesmen reject the view advocated by Sufis (mystics) in the past, and by liberal Muslims in modern times, that real *jihad* refers to a spiritual effort. Instead, they maintain that it means solely combative warlike operations, and they lament the fact that the majority of Muslims have forgotten this truth. They insist that the passages in the Qur’an that deal with *jihad*, in which the words “*uktulu*” (kill), “*anfiru*” (scare away), or “*qatiluhum*” (wage a battle against them) appear, are unequivocal in their reference to actual combat and there can be no other interpretation.¹¹ On this particular point, Hamas stands closer to the radical-*jihadi* school than any other MB movements, which advocate all types of *jihad* “of the sword” and “of the spirit.”¹² This position reflects the sense of gravity of the Palestinian situation, particularly during the years of heightened violence from 2000 to 2007, but possibly also frustration at the inaction of other Islamic movements regarding the Palestinian predicament.

Islamic legal doctrine recognizes two types of “Jihad of the Sword.” The first is offensive *jihad*, whose goal is to expand the territory ruled by Islamic law and justice in places previously governed by laws of oppression and moral corruption. Victory, here, is not limited to the military defeat of the oppressors, but requires the elevation of God’s religion and application of the *Shari‘a* (Islamic law) in the conquered territory. The supreme goal of this type of *jihad* is the affirmation of Islam’s moral superiority over other religions.¹³ The other type is defensive *jihad*, when a non-Muslim enemy occupies a territory that belonged to the Abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), and where God’s laws were practiced. In this case, it is incumbent on the Muslims to restore the territory to Islamic rule regardless of the period of time, which may have elapsed. If the generation in whose time the foreign invasion took place, was weak, neglected its Islamic obligations, or suffered oppression, the duty of defensive *jihad* is incumbent on all future generations until the end of time.¹⁴

Like all other Islamic movements, Hamas regards the *jihad* against Israel as defensive for two reasons: the first is what it sees as the usurpation of Palestine and the dispossession of its true inhabitants, the Muslim Palestinians, by the Zionists. In this perspective, Zionism is viewed as the latest and most fateful phase of the relentless onslaught waged by Western

imperialism and culture against Islam since the eleventh-century Crusades; the second reason is the war that, Hamas claims, the Jews have waged against Islam in order to eliminate or, at the least, denigrate it, since the time of the Prophet Muhammad. In the eyes of Hamas, the 1967 Israeli capture of the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, combines both these elements. The movement asserts that when the Israeli soldiers captured the Temple Mount in June 1967, they declared: “Muhammad died, and his descendants were girls.” (*Muhammad mat wa-khalafa banat*), thereby mocking the Prophet’s manhood.¹⁵

Islamic law views offensive *jihad* as a collective duty, which requires only a sufficient, although unspecified, number of Muslims to take part in it in order for the entire Muslim community to have fulfilled its duty. But, since Hamas views the Jews as the usurpers of Muslim territories, the struggle against them is defined as a defensive war, and *jihad* becomes an individual duty (*wajib ‘ayn*) incumbent on every able-bodied Muslim. Here too Hamas adopted the position of ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam, the radical Palestinian thinker and ideological mentor of Osama bin Laden and of the transnational *jihad* movement, who asserts that any land that was once under Muslim rule but was subsequently lost to the infidels, should be restored to Islam only through *jihad* as the individual duty of every Muslim.¹⁶

Moreover, in light of the loss of Palestine and the resultant necessity of *jihad*, Hamas adopted the ruling of Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), which was further elaborated in the modern period by ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam. This view elevated *jihad* to one of Islam’s central pillars (*arkan al-Islam*), second only to the statement of monotheistic belief (the *Shahada*), and even preceding prayer and pilgrimage to Mecca.¹⁷ Thus, Ahmad Bahr deputy speaker of the PNA Legislative Council expressed his amazement, if not open disappointment, at the fact that Muslims, who devoutly practice the duties of prayer and fasting, neglect the duty of *jihad* in spite of the many explicit references to it in the Qur’an. In view of the attacks on the Muslim world, and citing the Qur’an (Chapter 9:36 Repentance) and the *hadith*, Bahr concluded that whoever dies without taking part in *jihad*, has died a “*jahili death*” (i.e., the death of an ignorant in the pre-Islamic period). In other words, he made *jihad* the essence of the believer’s life.¹⁸

Although ‘Azzam shifted his activities to Afghanistan, which he regarded as the first priority of Muslim *jihad*, Hamas appropriated him and his ideas to its campaign.¹⁹ Likewise, the website of the ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military arm of Hamas, contains chapters from Sayyid Qutb’s *ma‘arakatuna ma‘a al-yahud* (Our Struggle Against the Jews), in which he explains the religious importance of this conflict.²⁰ The endorsement of ‘Azzam and Qutb, who have been leading ideologues of the radical Islamist camp, partly stems from the fact that Hamas lacks high-caliber thinkers and has to resort to non-native luminaries. This reliance may also point to a common denominator between the mainstream Islamist trend, founded by the MB, and the radicals regarding the essence of *jihad* against non-Muslims. Concurrently, Hamas rejects the *Salafi-jihadist* concept of declaring Muslims as apostates (*takfir*), if they fail to follow the strict Salafi interpretation, and the declaration of *jihad* against irreligious Muslim rulers. Likewise, as a nationalist Islamic movement, Hamas focuses on the fight against Israel, while the *Salafi-jihadists* give priority to fighting the United States and sinful Arab rulers. On 14 August 2009 Hamas eliminated the Salafi *Jund Ansar Allah* (Soldiers of God’s Helpers) group, which declared the city of Rafah an Islamic emirate. Still, the reliance on Qutb reflects a difference from the Egyptian MB, whose attitude toward him is much more ambivalent.²¹

Citing prominent scholars from earlier periods, such as Ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Ibn Qudama (d. 1223), and al-Nawawi (d. 1277), Hamas writers oppose a situation where a

group of Muslims wage *jihad* in one part of the world, thereby exempting all other Muslim communities from this duty, while disbelief prevails elsewhere, since it is the Muslim duty to fight the infidels on all fronts. Furthermore, if the goal of a *jihad* is not attained by the fighting minority, the duty to pursue it is transferred to all Muslims for all of them are considered guilty for the loss of that territory. The stress on the responsibility of the entire Muslim world is seen in the accusations of its inaction regarding the Palestinian struggle against Israel. "It is a shame on Arabs and Muslims," an August 2001 communiqué declared, "to stand idle in the face of the daily and continuous extermination of an Arab, Islamic people on the land of *al-Isra' wal-Mi'raj!* There is no excuse for the [Islamic] Nation to avoid shouldering its duty towards Palestine and its people." Hamas writers assert that, in the absence of a comprehensive Arab strategy, Palestinian armed activity is the only guarantee for the liberation of Palestine.²²

The importance of regaining Palestine does not stem solely from its being part of *dar al-Islam*, but also from the fact that it is the land dearest to the Muslims, following Mecca and Medina; it is called the Holy Land (*al-ard al-muqadassa*) in Arabic, and it is viewed as a religious endowment (*waqf*) that belongs to the Muslim nation as a whole for eternity. Palestine, Salah al-Khalidi states, is an "eternal frontier land" (*ribat*) where the battle between the Muslims and their enemies takes place, and it is "the land of decision" in the battle between truth and falsehood. On its pure land the "armies of disbelief and evil will be crushed, and the banners of victory and liberation will rise."²³

Hamas endows *jihad* with greater spiritual value than the mere liberation of Muslim territory and consider it as representing a tight highly significant bond between the believer and God. *Jihad* is a "pledge of allegiance (*bay'a*) to God" made by each believer as well as a grace that God grants to whoever he wishes. Following traditional interpretations of Qur'an Chapter 9 (Repentance), Hamas writers describe *jihad* as a "transaction" between God and the Muslims, which combines both rational and mystical components. Allah is "the buyer and the believer is the seller [of his soul] and paradise is the reward which no merchandise can equal." As proof of the mystical blessings of *jihad*, Ahmad Bahr argues that the failure of Israeli planes to kill Hamas leaders is due to the "miracles" (*karamat*) that took place thanks to their practice of *jihad*.²⁴ The glorification of *jihad* and its blessings enabled Hamas activists to present Palestinian suffering in a positive light as a sign of having been chosen by God to carry on *jihad* against his "enemies, the brothers of pigs and apes."²⁵

In broader terms, *jihad* represents "the spirit of Islam and the secret of its success." The establishment of justice, a central tenet of Islamic political thought, requires constant struggle against oppression and moral-spiritual corruption (*ifsad*) whose primary aim is the destruction of religion in all its aspects. The believing Muslim has a duty to defend himself and eliminate such corruption from the face of the earth, but the elimination of corruption is impossible without struggle and combat. *Jihad*, asserts Muhammad al-Rashid, is the duty to remove corruption and liberate the oppressed (*mustad'afun*), a term apparently borrowed from Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution. Victory for Islam does not end with the defeat of the oppressor, but requires the elevation of God's religion and the upholding of Islamic law. *Jihad* is therefore viewed as the means of achieving the great goals of Islam: to cause humankind to worship God instead of idols, to liberate it from oppression by other religions and bring it under the justice of Islam. God gave the Qur'an, the absolute truth, to the Muslims together with the sword to protect the Qur'an and pave its way, for right without might will not be respected or preserved, but only despised and mocked.²⁶

Based on these characteristics of and the motivation for *jihad*, Hamas writers reject the charges that offensive *jihad* is violent and expansionist in nature. They dismiss these charges as a fundamental misunderstanding of the essence of Islam particularly, when compared

to the status of war in Western civilization and the practices of war that, they claim, Jews are commanded to carry out by their religion. They note that Western civilization has been characterized by endless wars instigated solely for plunder and wealth, which culminated in two World Wars in the space of 25 years, and the use of nuclear weapons causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people. In contrast, Islamic conquest, in the eyes of Islamists, represents the implementation of a divine ordinance commanding believers to bring the divine message to those who have not yet received it. Islam, they purport, resorts to *jihad* only when it is required to remove the obstacles that impede the transmission of God’s message. Infidels who oppose by force the genuine, well-meaning attempt to offer them Islamic justice, in other words, to place them under the rule of Islam, are in fact the aggressors, and the *jihad* against them becomes a defensive measure.²⁷

***Jihad* Against Israel**

According to Hamas, the advocacy of *jihad* does not mean rejection of peace but represents the path to true peace, and whoever chooses a different path perpetuates the domination of oppression. Hamas asserts that the peace promoted by the forces of “fallacy” (*al-batil*) is nothing but “usurpation, destruction and oppression.” As proof, Ahmad Bahr cites passage 120 from the Qur’an Cow Chapter (*al-Baqara*), which warns of the true aims of the enemies of Islam: “But the Jews will not be pleased with thee, neither the Christians, until thou follow their religion.”²⁸

Thus the peaceful offer, made by Hamas to the Jews, is conditional on the latter agreeing to give up their state and live as a protected minority under benevolent Islamic rule. “Peace and quiet will not be possible,” warns Hamas, “except under the rule of Islam.” It argues that it is the duty of the followers of other religions to cease disputing the sovereignty of Islam in this region, for if non-Muslims take over the region, they will cause only carnage, displacement and terror. In contrast, Islam, it says, confers on each person his legitimate rights.²⁹

Hamas believes that ending the war with the enemies of Islam is legally permissible, only if the Muslims are absolutely unable to overcome the enemy’s overwhelming, military superiority. Even in such circumstances, the peace that ensues cannot be permanent (*sulh da’im*), but is only a temporary armistice (*hudna*), until such time when the Muslims regain their strength and defeat their enemies (see later).³⁰ For Hamas, the present conflict is not one that permits peace, since the Jews do not possess such an overwhelming superiority that cannot be confronted by the Muslims, and because the latter’s situation is not so dire as to necessitate suing for peace. Most importantly, peace with the Jews contradicts the *Dhimma* (protection of minorities) rules, whereby a permanent peace can only exist when a territory accepts Muslim protection and agrees to pay the head tax (*jizya*) imposed on non-Muslim subjects. Peace with the Jews having the upper hand contravenes this rule as it would place Muslims under Jewish rule. Peace today is seen as opposing the positive action of propagating (*da’wa*) the Islamic message, implying that this goal is served by a continuation of the conflict.³¹

Consequently, Hamas maintains that any peace negotiation with the enemy would represent a “concession of principle, and a granting of recognition to murderers and usurpers of rights which are not theirs over land in which they were not born.” A Hamas “document for history” states that recognition of the “false Jewish entity,” is tantamount to “betraying God, his messenger and the faith.” The document adds that all “so-called peaceful solutions” are illusions and a waste of time, and provide the infidels with an additional opportunity to impose themselves on the believers.³² As in other issues, Hamas is anxious to show that

position is based on a broad consensus of Muslim scholars, as it cites rulings (*fatawa*) of individual scholars and resolutions of Muslim conferences going back to the 1930s, which prohibit any peace with the Jews.³³

The unavoidable conclusion from these arguments is that the only course left for the Palestinians is *jihad* until final victory. The *jihad* pursued by Hamas has both short- and long-term goals. On the strategic level, it aspires to drain the energies of the Zionist enemy, humiliate it, sow fear among its ranks and eventually bring about the disintegration and total collapse of the Zionist state. In the short run, it seeks to deprive Jews of a life of comfort when Palestinians live as dispossessed refugees, and to take revenge for the killing of Palestinians.³⁴ A ruling issued by the Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Scholars League (*Rabitat 'Ulama' Filastin*) combines the practical and doctrinal elements of *jihad* when it states that harming the Israeli enemy “by killing, injuries, inflicting fear in their hearts, destabilizing the foundations of their state and inducing them to leave Palestine,” fulfills the Qur’anic command (Chapter 8:60, The Accessions): “And prepare against them what force you can and horses tied at the frontier, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allah”—an injunction that serves as the leitmotif of all MB movements.³⁵

The present *jihad* is the latest link in a long chain of holy wars that have been waged in the name of Islam since its inception. The most important were the wars of the Prophet Muhammad against the Jews of Medina and Khaybar. In the eyes of every radical Islamic movement, these wars represent the ultimate proof of the treachery of the Jews and serve as a source of inspiration for Muslims and, in particular, for Palestinians. Hamas founder, Ahmad Yasin (killed 2004), compared the Palestinians to the *Muhajirun*, the Prophet’s companions who accompanied him from Mecca to Medina in 622, who were dispossessed of their homes and land because of their belief in God. Yasin urged the Palestinians to draw inspiration from Muhammad’s victories over the Jewish tribe of Nadir, which possessed fortresses and weapons at a time when the Prophet suffered from material inferiority. Numerous Hamas leaflets during the 1989–1993 Intifada urged the Palestinians to transform the “memory of Khaybar into a new bloody battle with the occupier.” The slogan “*Khaybar, Khaybar ya yahud, jaysh Muhammad saya’ud*” (Khaybar Khaybar O Jews, the army of Muhammad shall return) has been often used by Hamas in its demonstrations and wall graffiti.³⁶

According to Hamas, the significance of the present *jihad* extends beyond the borders of Palestine, primarily because it brings about greater unity among Muslims. Hamas charges that the Jews are trying to sow discord among the Muslims, just as they did during the Prophet’s time, in order to control them. Furthermore, Israel, it says, aspires to expand its rule over parts of Syria and Iraq, and, specifically, over Medina in the Hijaz, where Jewish tribes resided during the time of the Prophet. History has shown, states Hamas writer Hafiz al-‘Alawi that the Islamic nation united only around the questions of Palestine, Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque. *Jihad* in the name of Palestine is, therefore, essential in order to bring about the unification of the Islamic world and the establishment of a future Caliphate. Al-‘Alawi notes that humanity everywhere looks forward to the defeat of the oppressive, American imperialist and Zionist powers as a first step toward its liberation. He further concludes that there is no future for Islam and the Arabs except through the removal of the Zionist state.³⁷

More importantly, Hamas endowed the *jihad* against Israel with religious and spiritual qualities when it declared that its *jihad* strives to defend “the Muslim person, Islamic culture, and the Muslim holy sites, first and foremost al-Aqsa Mosque as well as establish the “state of Islam,” and “hoist Allah’s flag” over all of Palestine.³⁸ For Hamas, the struggle against the Jews represents a spiritual revolution that aims to restore the Islamic identity

of the Palestinian people. Hamas leader ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Rantisi (killed 2004) stated that 5,000 mosques preaching for Islam did not affect the hearts of Palestinians, as much as the pure blood of Yahya ‘Ayyash (nicknamed the “engineer”), who masterminded the murder of ca. 50 Israeli civilians, and was killed by Israel in January 1996. Khalid al-Khalidi also commented that, thanks to the *jihad* against the Zionists, mosques that were empty when Palestine fell to the Jews in 1948 are now filled with young people, young women are wearing the *Hijab* (head scarf), and religious seminaries are full of youngsters wishing to study Islamic law.³⁹

The aspiration of Hamas to expand the *jihad* against Israel to the entire Muslim world began from an awareness, which emerged in the early 1990s, that the Palestinian *jihad* alone would not succeed in defeating Israel. Hamas therefore constructed a three-tiered *jihad*—Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic, each with its own role and obligation. If the Muslims approach *jihad* in this way, victory would be assured.⁴⁰ Hamas has thus assumed the role of keeping the flame of *jihad* against Israel burning until the day when Muslims and Arabs join it. Since the Palestinian issue is viewed as crucial to achieving the “political, social and cultural liberation” of the Muslim world, Hamas considers the *jihad* it is waging as the first step in the effort to establish a great Islamic state governed by the laws of Islam. In this sense, Hamas considers itself as the vanguard that fights to defend the honor of the entire Arab and Islamic nation.⁴¹ The fact that victory may seem far away has little ideological significance for Hamas, although it may influence its tactics, for the movement believes that every generation has a duty to carry on *jihad*, if only to preserve the spirit of *jihad* for future generations until Allah will make victory possible.⁴²

Behind this long-term view lies the conviction that victory by the Muslims has been preordained by God. Thus, Imam (prayer leader) Khalid Tafish, a senior Hamas activist from Gaza, stated that it is “written in the Qur’an, with no possibility of mistaking the interpretation,” that the “Jews must be destroyed twice in terrible wars,” adding that the first destruction took place in ancient Babylon during Nebuchadnezzar’s war in 587 BCE, while the second is about to take place.⁴³ For his part, Ahmad Yasin predicted that Israel would be eliminated by the year 2027. Applying the traditional Islamic concept of a 40-year historical cycle to the Palestinians, Yasin noted that the first cycle began in 1947 with the UN Partition of Palestine and ended with the outbreak of the 1987 Intifada, while the second one would end with the destruction of Israel.⁴⁴

Martyrdom as the Epitome of *Jihad*

Meir Hatina argues that the motif of national self-sacrifice (*fida’*) was intertwined with religious martyrdom (*istishhad*) as a necessary step in the effort to rehabilitate the Palestinian people following the 1948 defeat, and it became a broad semantic reservoir familiar to all Palestinians regardless of their ideological inclination.⁴⁵ The notion of self-sacrifice was familiar to the MB already in the 1940s. In an article dedicated to this concept, Hasan al-Banna coined the term “the craft of death” (*sina’at a-mawt*), stating that “a nation familiar with the art of death, and that knows how to die an honorable death, will be bestowed by Allah a glorified life on earth and eternal pleasures in the hereafter.”⁴⁶

While drawing heavily on earlier Islamic traditions and concepts of martyrdom,⁴⁷ Hamas elevated it into a supreme value as the epitome of *jihad* and as an object of personal and collective aspiration for Palestinians. “The blood of the martyrs (*shuhada’*) has always served as the fuel of jihad, of resistance and liberation, and as a light which illuminates the way in the darkness of oppression,” wrote the anonymous Hamas editor of a collection

of articles on the status of martyrdom (*shahada*) in Islam. In a similar vein, Ahmad Bahr states that *jihad* will not be accomplished unless the eyes of the holy warriors turn toward paradise rather than toward earthly goals.⁴⁸

Scholars disagree as to the direct cause that led Hamas to launch suicide operations. Some consider the trigger to have been the massacre of 29 Palestinians in Hebron by Jewish settler, Baruch Goldstein, on 25 February 1994. However, as early as 1992, a Hamas publication extolled suicide attacks and predicted they would be carried out as soon as the technical capability became available. It should also be noted that the first suicide attack, albeit against a military target, took place on 16 April 1993, prior to the Oslo Accords and to the Hebron massacre. The ideological motivation for suicide bombings had therefore been constructed well before 1994 and had a primarily religious justification. The push toward action came as a result of political developments, mainly progress in the Israeli–Palestinian peace, and the increasing sense of threat to the movement and its chances of pursuing its ideological strategic goals.⁴⁹

As in the discussion on *jihad*, Hamas officials differentiate between practical and doctrinal justifications for suicide attacks. The practical justifications emphasize the harm these attacks inflict on Israeli society and the attainment of “deterrence” vis-à-vis Israel, while the doctrinal justifications glorify martyrdom as the most noble manifestation of *jihad* and Islamic belief. The glorification of martyrdom reflects a sense of frustration and defiance in view of the weakness shown by Arab rulers in their struggle against Israel and the Palestinians’ military inferiority vis-à-vis Israel. Hamas writers insist that the use of suicide bombers has been a major force in the empowerment of the Palestinians as a people.⁵⁰ Even though the Palestinians were not the first to introduce this weapon, Hamas maintains that they brought it to full strategic fruition and that it constitutes a manifestation of “Palestinian innovative genius” (*‘abqariyyat al-ibda’ al-filastini*). The culture of martyrdom, wrote Rantisi, “distinguishes the Palestinian people” from others, and represents the strongest weapon the Palestinians possess, which no one can defeat or take away from them. It is not an imported weapon and it does not require foreign experts to operate, but it emerged from the depths of Palestinian soul, suffering and heroism. Thanks to it and in contrast to the past, the Palestinians are now able to control and direct the course of events. Rantisi credited the success of Palestinian resistance not to weapons or numbers but to the fact that those who were ready to die prevailed over those who feared death, and he observed that nations which acquire honor in history do so through death. He concluded that the human bomb was the most powerful ideological expression of the Palestinian national struggle in the past century.⁵¹

Hamas claims that martyrdom operations achieve strategic deterrence (*tawazun ra‘b*—literally, balance of fear) against Israel’s technological and conventional military superiority thanks to two factors. The first is the heavy casualties and the resultant psychological damage inflicted on the Israelis, in view of their excessive sensitivity to the loss of human life. The second is the Israeli failure to counter these attacks or deter those who are not afraid of death but aspire it. Thus, in 2001, following a series of successful attacks, Hamas spokesmen boasted that in addition to the heavy economic losses inflicted on Israel, suicide operations spread fear in the hearts of the “Zionist occupiers,” who were afraid to come out of their homes. They exulted that life in Israel had become “hell” and that supposedly over a million Israelis had fled the country since 2000. The suicide attacks, they said, had shattered the Zionist ethos of creating a safe haven for Jews and Israelis had begun to question the future existence of their state. Thus, the martyrdom operations reflected the victory of the Muslim soul its faith and spirituality, over the Israeli or Western technological mentality.⁵²

Hamas officials reject the argument that suicide attacks harmed the Palestinian cause, and assert instead that the excessive concessions made by the Palestinians in the negotiations with Israel stemmed from the absence of such a leverage. They consider the failure of the Israeli–PNA negotiations, which was partly due to the suicide attacks, as a positive development since it ended harmful Palestinian commitments.⁵³ While Hamas spokesmen concede that the Palestinians suffered heavier casualties than the Israelis, they insist that the Palestinians demonstrated greater perseverance and morale than the Israelis and were more capable of sustaining higher casualties. They reject the charges that martyrdom operations were tantamount to the collective suicide of the Palestinian people, and point to the successful struggle carried out by Hizballah in Lebanon that, despite causing heavy casualties to the Lebanese population, forced Israel to withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon in 2000. While martyrdom operations led to the collapse of the Israeli army in Lebanon, they enhanced the morale of the Palestinians and enabled them to continue their *jihad*.⁵⁴

According to Hamas writers, the great advantage enjoyed by the Palestinians over the Israelis in this case derives from the different perception of death in the two societies: Israel is a “materialistic hedonistic” Western society that views this world as its end goal and is extremely sensitive to the loss of human life while the Palestinians, and Hamas in particular, represent a religious society that regards this world merely as an entry to eternal life in paradise. Exploiting this crucial difference, Hamas promoted the cult of death as an ideal and as the epitome of the believer’s aspirations. The phenomenon of martyrdom in the occupied Palestinian territories, explains Dr. Yusuf Rizqa, constitutes an important component of the wise return to Islam. Religion, in Islam, is more powerful than life, and the harm caused to a Muslim’s faith is considered graver than the harm caused to his body, child, or property. The true believer knows that an honorable life can be attained only through martyrdom. Hamas asserts that the path to happiness for the present generation is through martyrdom, not life, and had the Palestinians fully understood the grace that God awarded them through it, they would have thanked God for opening the gates of martyrdom to those who defend His religion. The Israelis “crave life,” Yasin explained, while “we are not afraid of death: we seek death for the sake of God, and the day one of us dies for the sake of God is a day of joy for us.”⁵⁵

On the doctrinal level, Hamas stresses the distinction between martyrdom (*istishhad*) for the sake of Islam and ordinary suicide (*intihar*), which is illegal in Islamic law.⁵⁶ The distinction has been discussed at length in Islamic legal literature, and recently came to the fore when senior Saudi and Egyptian establishment clerics, led by Shaykh al-Azhar of Egypt Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, issued religious rulings condemning suicide attacks following the 11 September 2001 attack and other terrorist attacks in Arab countries.⁵⁷ Lacking its own high-caliber clerics and ideologues, Hamas prefers to rely both on rulings of establishment clerics as well as those of Islamist thinkers associated with various Islamist movements in order to acquire legitimization for its suicide attacks.⁵⁸ Following a series of suicide attacks in March 1996, *Filastin al-Muslima* published a “historic ruling” by the al-Azhar Clerics Front (*Jabhat ‘ulama’ al-Azhar*), stating that those who carry out suicide attacks “are the most preferable martyrs” since Palestine is a holy land, worthy of the sacrifice of “spirit, blood and property.”⁵⁹

All Hamas publications have promoted the ideal of martyrdom and a culture of death, with a visible correlation between the improvement of Hamas’s combative capabilities and the promotion of martyrdom as a noble ideal and an object of yearning or even passion. Hamas has published books commemorating the lives and deeds of prominent martyrs and its written and electronic media has disseminated elaborate eulogies on each suicide bomber, detailing the operation in which the martyr was killed and the casualties he

inflicted on the enemy. Each eulogy cites the Qur'anic passages that state that those who sacrifice themselves for God are not really dead, but remain alive in heaven. Pictures of suicide bombers have been distributed as posters, often accompanied by the statement that the act of martyrdom represents the betrothal of the martyr with the land of Palestine. More significantly, perhaps, the Hamas children's magazine, *al-Fatih*, features in each issue the story of the life and death of a martyr, as well as the will he signed before his death. In most such wills, the suicide bombers urge their families and friends to rejoice at their coming martyrdom and follow their example. Children, who participated in a popular Hamas children's TV program, spoke of their wish to die as martyrs when they grow up, while the program's hero, a Palestinian Mickey Mouse figure called Farfour, presents a model to the children by ending his life in a suicide operation. Participants in Hamas rallies sometimes dress their children up as suicide bombers, with simulated explosive belts strapped to their bodies, as a demonstration of their readiness to sacrifice their children for the struggle.⁶⁰ Echoing these sentiments, the mother of a Hamas suicide bomber stated in a newspaper interview: "I am a compassionate mother to my children. . . . Because I love my son, I encouraged him to die a martyr's death for the sake of Allah . . . Jihad is a religious obligation incumbent upon us, and we must carry it out. I sacrificed Muhammad as part of my obligation."⁶¹

Basing themselves on the passage that says "count not those who were slain in God's way as dead, but rather living with their God" (Sura 3:169), Hamas writers extol the bounties bestowed by God on martyrs, which greatly surpass those he gives to believers in this world. Particular emphasis is attributed to the 72 "dark-eyed" virgins that are promised to each martyr: "this is part of Islamic belief," Isma'il Abu Shanab states, "and if the martyr dreams of the dark-eyed, he will get her."⁶² The numerous references to the "dark-eyed" virgins that await future martyrs in paradise may serve as a compensation for the sexual repression prevalent among young men in conservative Muslim society. In the view of Palestinian-American sociologist Hisham Sharabi, such repression produces an almost obsessive preoccupation with sexuality. As a result, young Muslim men have taken the promise of 72 dark-eyed virgins quite literally. When asked why he did not marry, one young suicide bomber answered: "Why should I forsake the dark-eyed to marry women of clay" [i.e., flesh and blood], while a 16-year-old Hamas youth activist in Gaza confessed to an American reporter that "[m]ost boys can't stop thinking about the virgins."⁶³

The emphasis placed on self-sacrifice and on the benefits and pleasures that await future martyrs most likely reflects a genuine belief. It also serves to overcome basic human instincts that are opposed to the cult of death and helps to rationalize the high Palestinian casualties incurred in the conflict with Israel, presenting them as a positive achievement, instead of as a source of pain. However, as Eli Alshech has shown, Hamas rhetoric on martyrdom has undergone a change following the outbreak of the Israeli-Palestinian violent confrontation in 2000 (the al-Aqsa Intifada in Palestinian parlance). Formerly, it emphasized the importance of suicide attacks "as acts whose purposes include liberating Islamic land, freeing the Palestinian people of the Israeli occupation, avenging the blood of previous martyrs, and spreading Islam." With the escalation of violence since 2000, the rhetoric have stressed "more strongly the notion that martyrdom is warranted as a means of attaining paradise." While the goals of liberating the land or freeing the nation were not totally abandoned in this period, they are clearly downplayed in some and are marginalized in others.⁶⁴

The culture of martyrdom and death produces macabre linguistic turnarounds, as in Rantisi's statement equating martyrdom to the "industry of life," or Bahr's assertion that "martyrdom is life, a life of heroism and valor." Such statements are reminiscent of the

slogan, “*Viva la Muerte!*” (Long-live death), coined by the Fascist Colonel Millán-Astray during the Spanish Civil War.⁶⁵ While there are many fundamental differences between Fascism and contemporary radical Islamic movements, the glorification of violence and death is something they have in common.⁶⁶

The End-Goal of *Jihad*

Like most other Sunni movements, Hamas has relegated the messianic elements of Islam to a secondary level, for it has been much more interested in establishing an Islamic state in the here and now. The one exception is the eschatological meaning given by Hamas to the *jihad* against the Jews, which it claims is a prerequisite for fulfilling God’s promise to establish His rule over the earth. The resort to messianic symbolism may have stemmed from the particular predicament endured by the Palestinians since 1948 or was designed to stave off calls for a compromise with Israel. Citing the tradition of the Salt-bush (*hadith al-gharqad*), which is also known as “the promise of the stones and trees” (*wa’d al-hajr wal-shajr*), the Hamas Charter states that the final hour will not come until the day when the Muslims will fight the Jews and kill them.⁶⁷ A preacher in Hamas al-Aqsa TV channel explained that the Jews in Israel plant these trees all over the country in order to hide behind them when the Muslims will come to kill them on Judgment Day.⁶⁸

Various Hamas writers have tried to explain the full meaning of this statement. Thus Salah al-Khalidi writes that, following the complete liberation of Palestine, the Jews will first return to the status of a dispersed, humiliated minority among the nations, and, in a second phase, all the Jews of the world will be exterminated and “humanity will be relieved of their presence, since subsequently, not one Jew will remain alive.”⁶⁹ Writing in Hamas organ *al-Risala*, Kan’an ‘Ubayd states that suicide operations are necessary so that “people will know that the extermination of Jews is good for the inhabitants of the worlds,” while the Hamas children’s organ, *al-Fatih*, urges children to ask God to “annihilate the Jews, the oppressors, the usurpers.”⁷⁰ The calls for the elimination of the Jews stem from the position that the Jews had lost their right to life as a protected minority, since they defied Muslim superiority by establishing the state of Israel, and is shared by numerous clerics and Islamist preachers all over the Middle East.⁷¹

***Jihad* and Politics**

As a mass movement with clear political aspirations to lead the Palestinian people, Hamas always had to operate in a “context of opportunities and constraints, conflicting interests, and cost-benefit considerations and is attentive to the fluctuating needs and desires of the Palestinian population and cognizant of power relations and political feasibility.”⁷² Moreover, following its 2006 electoral victory and after the violent takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Hamas was also forced to balance between its ideology and the practical needs and constraints of a government. These developments produced a substantial scholarly literature, which sought to examine the actual manifestation and extent of Hamas’s pragmatism,⁷³ and are beyond the scope of this article. While there is no denial that Hamas has indeed followed a pragmatic approach in certain aspects of its dealings with Israel, the ideological framework under which it operates imposes significant limitations on the distance it can go. In addition, Hamas developed creative solutions designed to bridge between its ideological commitment and practical necessities. One such solution, which has been dealt extensively elsewhere, was the idea of temporary armistice (*hudna*). It is lawful for the Muslims, Hamas spokesmen explained, to accept such an armistice if the enemy

is powerful while the Muslims are weak and need time to recover their strength. Such an armistice should not exceed ten years, the period that the Prophet accepted in his agreement with the people of Mecca at Hudaibiyya in 628 CE. The *hudna* can be extended for similar periods as long as the enemy remained powerful, and would end once the Palestinians could renew the struggle. As preconditions for accepting a *hudna*, Hamas leaders demanded that Israel should withdraw back to the 1967 borders and allow all Palestinian refugees to return to their lost homes. Yet they insisted that such a truce would not mean giving up Palestinian claim and rights for all of Palestine. A Palestinian state on part of Palestine was acceptable provided that it advanced the strategic goal of liberating all of Palestine.⁷⁴

A complementary solution was the development of the doctrine of *Muqawama* (Resistance) or a long-term war of attrition, which may include short periods of cease-fire necessary for rebuilding Palestinian fighting capabilities. Accordingly, the Palestinians should not wait for the balance of power between them and Israel to change. Rather they should perform the imperative of continual warfare, if only on a small scale, by employing innovative tactics in order to bleed the enemy and change the balance of power in their favor. In this war of attrition, the decisive factors are will-power and perseverance of each society that will bring about victory in the long run. Consequently, taking casualties is not a defeat or loss but a manifestation of victory as long as the movement survives. There is no need to defend territory against Israeli occupation, or to try to conquer land, as the goal of the *muqawama* is the methodical erosion of the enemy's resolve. The motto is blood, not land, and the effort is directed at denying the enemy of victory, not at achieving a quick result. *Jihad* is not a national struggle, and fighting is undertaken for the sake of God. In other words, it is not confined to Palestinians but designed to bring along other Arab and Muslim peoples. The essence of this doctrine is that the Palestinians and Hamas can suffer heavy almost unlimited casualties or tactical defeats, since as long as the struggle continues the enemy's attrition is achieved. Moreover, the mere survival of the movement is in fact a victory over the enemy, since its actions are designed to bleed the enemy until the attainment of victory.⁷⁵

Khalid Mash'al, Head of Hamas Political Bureau, explained in April 2008 that people should not interpret Hamas's agreement for a temporary lull (*tahdi'a*) in the fighting against Israel as a shift from "a phase of resistance and battles to a phase of calm." Rather according to Hamas's "concept of the management of this conflict, the *tahdi'a* is a tactical means. It is a step within the resistance and is not detached from it." It is only natural for any resistance movement, which cares about the interests of its people to bear in mind the general Palestinian condition. At times, it generates an escalation, and at times, it withdraws a little. It is a process of ebb and flow." Hamas, he added, conducted resistance from within the government, as well as when it was not in the government. This is a method of conflict management.⁷⁶ Still, various Hamas leaders insisted that tactical flexibility did not mean the abandonment of the movement's strategic goals. Both during the 1990s, when Hamas was in opposition to the Palestinian Authority, and after it has won the 2006 elections, Hamas spokesmen stated that "jihad against Israel was the movement's *raison d'être*, and that while it could be escalated or relaxed depending on circumstances, it would not be stopped."⁷⁷

These developments raise the question of the prospects of ideological change and moderation. Students of history should never preclude the possibility of change, and history has shown many examples of radical movements undergoing moderation. However, neither is ideological moderation inevitable as it faces several obstacles. For example, the sanctification of land renders territorial concessions much more difficult for religious movements than for secular politicians, as shown in the Jewish side of the conflict. The entrenched

Islamic doctrinal position against Jewish sovereignty and on the necessity of Islamic superiority over the Jews, render recognition or long-term acceptance of a Jewish state much more difficult for Islamist movements. The asymmetrical nature of the conflict based on overwhelming Arab and Muslim superiority in numbers, territory, and resources enhance the conviction of Islamic movements in the inevitable victory of Islam over its opponents and diminish the urge to compromise. Finally, the flexibility of Islamic exegetes can work in both ways. It provides Islamist movements with the tools to accept or perform tactical adjustments, which may or may not transform into long-term changes, but it also absolves these movements from the need to undergo profound ideological change.

Conclusion

The unique position of Hamas as a religious–nationalist movement engaged in a national struggle against a foreign enemy has led it to regard “Jihad of the Sword” as a central article of faith in its ideology, overshadowing many other aspects of Islam.

In its effort to mobilize the Palestinian masses behind its platform, Hamas has employed both practical and doctrinal arguments in favor of *jihad*, which it has drawn from earlier Islamic tradition as well as from modernist interpretations. Hamas has gone further than most other movements in endowing *jihad* with spiritual, mystical, and even eschatological significance as a necessary precondition for the coming of Judgment Day. Moreover, Hamas highlighted martyrdom as the epitome of *jihad*, and cultivated a “cult of death,” which glorified it as an ideal and as the “true meaning” of life.

In some aspects, Hamas’s views on *jihad* place it closer to radical *Salafi-jihadist* movements than to mainstream Islamist movements presumably due to its perception of the gravity of the conflict or the challenges it faces. Yet, unlike the *Salafi-jihadists*, Hamas directed its *jihad* solely against one enemy: Israel. The culmination of its *jihad* was not merely replacing Israel with an Islamic Palestinian state, but the expected elimination of the Jews. Still, Hamas was always careful to solicit the doctrinal backing of establishment clerics and of leaders of Islamic movements in the Arab and Muslim world, and it can be argued that its views on *jihad* against Israel enjoy widespread support among all Islamist circles.

Like many other political movements, Hamas has faced the dilemma of reconciling its ideology with political constraints, particularly since it has come to power in Gaza. Hamas was able to cope with this dilemma by formulating the strategy of *muqawama*, which enables it to adhere to its long-term strategic-ideological goals, while practicing tactical flexibility. However, this flexibility does not mean that its public pronouncements should be dismissed as mere rhetoric since Hamas has been willing to pay a heavy political and economic price for its refusal to budge on ideological issues, which it deemed crucial. One such example is its insistence that ceasefires with Israel would be limited in time so as to enable it to resort to *jihad* and *muqawama* once it ends. In addition, dozens of Hamas activists sacrificed their lives in suicide attacks, after having been motivated by this discourse. Students of history should never preclude the possibility of change as difficult as it may be, and only time will tell whether Hamas will adhere to its current position of tactical flexibility in the pursuance of radical ideological or be forced to make substantial ideological compromises.

Notes

1. “The Hamas Charter.” Available at <http://www.mideastweb.org/hamas.htm>

2. On the birth and political history of Hamas, see Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Ziyad Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Hisham H. Ahmad, *From Religious Salvation to Political Transformation: The Rise of Hamas in Palestinian Society* (Jerusalem: PASIA, 1994); Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of Militants, Martyrs and Spies* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

3. For Banna's concept of *Jihad*, see Richard Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 215–216. During the early 1940s, Banna sanctioned the formation of the “secret apparatus” (*al-jihaz al-sirri*) that was engaged in terrorist activities in Egypt and of the “Battalions of Jihad” (*Kata'ib al-jihad*) that later waged a guerilla war against British forces in the Suez Canal area.

4. Amnon Cohen, *Political Parties in the West Bank under the Jordanian Regime, 1949–1967* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 205.

5. “Kata'ib al-shahid 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam—al-nash'a.” Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/?action=us> (November 2007). On the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, see Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement* (Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001).

6. Hamas publishes at least four magazines and newspapers: The London-based monthly *Filastin al-Muslima* was the oldest; *al-Risala* daily in the Gaza Strip; *al-Fatih* magazine intended for children and *Majallat Qassamiyun*, organ of the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade (see <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/books.php>). In addition Hamas sponsors three websites: Most important is the Palestinian Information Center (<http://www.palestine-info.info>), which appears in seven languages. The Arabic-language site offers sections on a variety of issues from Land and Heritage; Jerusalem and al-Aqsa Mosque; Martyrs; Jurisprudential Problems; the Palestine Problem; official statements; and published books. The book section alone provides links to over 20 Hamas books and booklets on various aspects of the movement's positions. The website of the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigade has a special section for the jurisprudence of *jihad* (*fiqh al-jihad*) that contains (as of November 2009) 8 books and booklets as well as over 80 articles (<http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/fiqih.php?from=1>). The website's Books and Publications section provides links to over 30 publications addressing various aspects of the Hamas ideology including titles such as *Kitab al-ijtihad fi talab al-jihad* (The Book Reasoning in the search of Jihad); *al-jihad fi sabil Allah* (Jihad in the Path of God), and *Nihayat Isra'il wal-Wilayat al-Muttahida* (The End of Israel and of the USA). It also contains more than 11 booklets commemorating leading Hamas martyrs. The website (<http://www.rapeta.org/default.asp>) of the Palestine Scholars League (Rabitat 'Ulama' Filastin) affiliated with Hamas has a special section (*abhath*) dedicated to questions related to *jihad* and political issues. The religious ruling section (*fatawa*) contains several rulings related to *jihad*.

7. For its terrorist and political activity, see Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, pp. 49–146; Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

8. For this worldview, see Mark Jurgensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 145ff; David Zeidan, “The Islamic Fundamentalist View of Life as a Perennial Battle,” *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 5(4) (2001); Bernard Lewis, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990), pp. 47–60.

9. Ibrahim Quqa to *al-Anba'* (Kuwait), 8 October 1988; “Hiwar shamil ma'a qiyadat Hamas,” *Filastin al-Muslima* (Hereafter, *FM*), April 1990; “Shi'arat harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya Hamas,” *Ila Filastin*, February 1990; “Haqiqat sira'una ma'a al-yahud,” *Nida' al-Aqsa*, January 1989. For a more detailed analysis of Hamas's view of the conflict, see Meir Litvak, “The Islamization of the Israeli-Arab Conflict: the Case of Hamas,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 23(1) (1998), pp. 148–163.

10. *FM*, October 1988; Ahmad Muhammad Bahr in *al-Risala*, 17 March 2005; Dr. Yusuf Musa Rizqa, “Falsafat al-mudafa'a,” available at www.palestine-info.info; *al-Risala*, 4 November 2004.

11. Muhammad Ahmad al-Rashid, “al-Ta’sil al-shar‘i li-jihad harakat Hamas,” available at www.Palestine-info.info; Yunus al-Astal in *al-Risala*, 23 December 2004; Dr. Khalid al-Khalidi, “Jihad al-Islamiyyin fi filastin,” available at www.Palestine-info.info; “Mashru‘iyat al-jihad al-jima‘i,” available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/fiqih.php?id=34> (accessed August 2008).
12. On the current views of *jihad*, see Shmuel Bar, “Jihad Ideology in Light of Contemporary Fatwas,” *Hudson Institute Research Monographs on the Muslim World*, Series 1, Paper no. 1 (August 2006), p. 7.
13. Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Marcus Wiener, 1996), pp. 3–4; R. K. Pruthi (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Jihad* (New Delhi: Anmol Publications, 2002), Vol I: “Types of Jihad,” pp. 57–71.
14. Rashid, “al-Ta’sil al-shar‘i”; *Hamas Charter*, article 15.
15. *Hamas Charter*, articles 15, 28; Hamas Communiqué No. 65, October 1990.
16. *Hamas Charter*, articles 14 and 15; “The Influence of the Legacy of Global Jihad on Hamas,” Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center: *Special Information Bulletin*, November 2004. Available at http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/sib/11_04/legacy.htm. On ‘Azzam’s ideas, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, “The New Global Threat: Transnational Salafis and Jihad,” *Middle East Policy* 8(4) (2001), pp. 18–38.
17. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatawa al-Kubra* (Beirut: Dar al-Arqam, 1999), Vol. 4, pp. 607–610 cited in Meir Hatina, “Theology and Power in the Middle East: Palestinian Martyrdom in a Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 10(3) (2005), p. 246.
18. Bahr in *al-Risala*, 3 April 2003; Idem., *al-Risala*, 26 June 2003; Idem., *al-Risala*, 17 March 2005; Astal in *al-Risala*, 23 December 2004; Khalid Yunus al-Khalidi in *al-Risala*, 24 February 2005.
19. For ample examples of this appropriation, see “The Influence of the Legacy of Global Jihad on Hamas”; “al-Dhikra,” *FM*, December 1994.
20. See, “Min al-shahid sayyid qutb ila al-mutanaqilin ‘an al-jihad.” Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/fiqih.php?id=28> (accessed June 2009).
21. *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 13–19 August 2009. For a discussion of the rivalry between Hamas and the Salafis, see “Al-Qaeda Confronts Hamas: Divisions in the Sunni *Jihadist* Movement and its Implications for U.S. Policy,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32(7) (July 2009), pp. 576–590. For an analysis of affinities between the two trends, see Guilain Denoëux, “The Forgotten Swamp: Navigating Political Islam,” *Middle East Policy* 9(2) (June 2002), pp. 72–78.
22. Al-Rashid, “al-Ta’sil al-shar‘i”; Hamas Communiqué dated 1 August 2001 in Yonah Alexander, ed., *Palestinian Religious Terrorism: Hamas and Islamic Jihad* (Ardslay: Transnational Publishers Inc., 2002), p. 115.
23. Al-Rashid, “al-Ta’sil al-shar‘i,” Salah al-Khalidi, “Filastin ard al-ribat wal-jihad wal-husm,” *FM*, August 1993. On Palestine’s sanctity in the ideology of Hamas, see Meir Litvak, “The Islamization of Palestinian Identity, the Case of Hamas,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 2(4) (1996), pp. 500–522.
24. Ibrahim al-‘Ali, “Hawla al-‘amaliyat al-istishhadiyya,” pt. 1, *FM*, October 1995; “Fi Rihab Aya,” *al-Risala*, 4 November, 2004; Bahr in *al-Risala*, 18 November 2003. For the traditional view, see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 31–44.
25. Bahr, *al-Risala*, 17 March 2005; Legislative Council Member “Umm Nidal” Farhat to Saudi Iqra TV, on 19 February 2006—Middle East Media Research Institute [Memri], Special Dispatch No. 1111, 10 March 2006. On the use of this pejorative regarding the Jews, see Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 36; Aluma Skolnick, “Based on Koranic Verses, Interpretations, and Traditions, Muslim Clerics State: The Jews Are the Descendants of Apes, Pigs, And Other Animals,” Memri, Special Report—No. 11, 1 November 2002.
26. Rizqa, “Falsafat al-mudafa‘a”; al-Rashid, “al-Ta’sil al-shar‘i”; Bahr in *al-Risala*, 17 March 2005.
27. *Al-Risala*, 11 October 2001. On this approach, which regards offensive *jihad* as essentially defensive, see Bassam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 54–55.
28. Bahr, *al-Risala*, 17 March 2005.

29. *Hamas Charter*, article 31. Islamic law guarantees security of life and property as well as religious freedom to those who surrender to its rule peacefully. See similar statements by Hamas founder and leader, Ahmad Yasin and others in *al-Safir*, 31 July; *Stern*, 7 August; *al-Musawwar*, 8 August; *al-Dustur*, 17 August; *Jerusalem Post*, 17 October 1997.

30. For the agreement, see W. Montgomery Watt, "al-Hudaybiyya," *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, e-book).

31. Al-Rashid, "al-Ta'sil al-shar'i."

32. *Hamas Charter*, articles 11, 13; "Wathiqā lil-ta'rikh," *FM*, September 1989; "Harakat al-muqawama al-Islamiyya Hamas: hadha huwa mawqifuna min al-taswiyya," *FM*, July 1991; Communiqués nos. 8, 28, 30.

33. Rabitat 'Ulama' Filastin, "Fatawa 'ulama' filastin wa-'ulama' al-umma al-islamiyya fi umur hamma tata'llaqu bil-qadiyya al-filastiniyya," 28 June 2008. Available at <http://www.rapeta.org/fatwadetails.asp?ID=116>; Salman al-'Awda, "Nazra shar'iyya: hukm al-shar' fi mu'ahadat al-salam ma'a al-yahdu." Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/fiqih.php?id=23> (accessed August 2008).

34. Muhammad Siyam to *Ila Filastin*, May 1990; Bahr in *al-Risala*, 18 December 2003; Khalid al-Khalidi, "Jihad al-Islamiyyin fi filastin."

35. Rabitat 'Ulama' Filastin, "al-'amaliyat al-istishadiyya: min a'zam anwa' al-jihad fi sabil Allah." Available at <http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/fatawa/alfatawa/olamafalasten.htm>, 5 May 2001.

36. Yasin to *FM*, March 1989; *Sawt al-Aqsa*, 15 January 1990, *Ila Filastin*, February 1990; Communiqués nos. 13, 14, 16, 22, 29 and 31.

37. *Hamas Charter*, articles 7, 9, 13; Communiqué no. 82; al-Rashid, "al-Ta'sil al-shar'i"; 'Abd al-Hafiz 'Alawi, "Filastin al-thawabit," *FM*, March 1995.

38. *Hamas Charter*, articles 6, 9, 15 and 33; "Wathiqā lil-ta'rikh," *FM*, September 1989; Communiqué no. 25.

39. Rantisi to *al-Hayat*, 23 April 1997; Khalidi in *al-Risala*, 24 February 2005.

40. *The Hamas Charter*, articles 14, 15; "Wathiqā lil-ta'rikh," in *FM*, September 1989.

41. "Al-Intifada al-mutamayyiza," *FM*, 1989; "Hiwar shamil ma'a qiyadat Hamas," *FM*, April, May 1990; Ibrahim Ghusha, to *al-'Alam*, 26 October 1991; Bahr in *al-Risala*, 18 December 2003.

42. Rashid, "al-Ta'sil al-shar'i."

43. *La Stampa*, (Turin), 14 October 2000 (DR).

44. Yasin to *La Stampa*, 14 October 2000; Elie Rekhess and Meir Litvak, "Palestinian Affairs," *Middle East Contemporary Survey 1997* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), p. 203; "Basha'ir al-mustaqbal wa-intisar al-muslimin 'ala al-yahud." Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/fiqih.php?id=24> (accessed August 2008).

45. Hatina, "Theology and Power," p. 250.

46. Hasan al-Banna, "Risalat al-Jihad," in (no editor) *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-Imam al-Shahid* (Beirut: s.n., 1970), p. 264, cited in Hatina, "Theology and Power," p. 241.

47. For an analysis of these concepts, see Cook, *Martyrdom*; "Shahāda," *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Second Edition), Vol. VI, p. 613.

48. "Al-Shahada," in Anon, ed., *al-Shahada wa-makanat al-shuhada' fi filastin* (N.P., N.D.). Available at http://www.palestine-info.net/arabic/spfiles/suhada_2005/makanat/suhada05.htm (accessed 28 November 2007); Bahr in *al-Risala*, 17 March 2005.

49. Anat Kurz and Nahman Tal, "Hamas: Radical Islam in a National Struggle," *Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies: Memorandum* No. 48, July 1997; Yoram Schweitzer, "Palestinian Istishhadia: A Developing Instrument," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30(8) (2007), p. 670.

50. For an incisive analysis of suicide attacks as a source of national empowerment, see Meir Hatina, 'The 'Ulama' and the Cult of Death in Palestine', *Israel Affairs*, 12(1) (2006), pp. 29–51.

51. Rantisi, "Thaqafat al-shahada" in *al-Shahada wa-makanat al-shuhada' fi filastin*; Rantisi to *al-Mujtama'*, 21 September 2001.

52. Abu Muhammad Mustafa to *Mashad Khorasan*, 22 August 2001; Maha 'Abd al-Hadi in *FM*, September 2001; Anon, 'Kata'ib al-Qassam tafrudu twazun al-ra'b 'ala al-'adu al-sahyuni, *FM*,

November 2001, Yasin and Zahhar to *FM*, November 2001; *FM*, March 2001, which dedicated most of its pages to the glorification of suicide attacks; Rantisi, “Thaqafat al-shahada.”

53. Usama Hamdan to al-Manar TV, 29 August 2005. Available at <http://www.memritv.org/search.asp?ACT=S9&P1=820>

54. Mash’al to *al-Majd*, 15 January 2001; Rantisi to *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 3 February 2001; Yasin to *al-Dustur*, 29 September and to *FM*, November 2001.

55. Rizqa, “Falsafat al-mudafa’a”; Yasin to *FM*, November 2001. See also, Isma’il Sa’id Ramadan, who describes martyrdom as “self purification,” in “al-Shahada Bawabat masjid al-Aqsa,” *al-Shahada wa-makanat al-shuhada*; and Rantisi’s statement, “those who love death will defeat those who are afraid of it,” in “Thaqafat al-shahada.”

56. See Franz Rosenthal, “On Suicide in Islam,” in idem, *Muslim Intellectual and Social History* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), pp. 239–259.

57. For these rulings, and the debate that ensued in the Arab world, see Haim Malka, “Must Innocents Die? The Islamic Debate over Suicide Attacks,” *Middle East Quarterly* 10(2) (2003), pp. 19–28; Yotam Feldner, “Debating the Religious, Political and Moral Legitimacy of Suicide Bombings,” MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series, No. 53, 2 May 2001. Tantawi issued conflicting rulings on this issue, see “Jihad Against the U.S.: Al-Azhar’s Conflicting Fatwas,” Memri, Special Dispatch Series, No. 480, 16 March 2003.

58. Among these clerics and thinkers were: The Sudan Authority of Clerics (*Hay’at ‘ulama’ al-Sudan*); The Association of Islamic Jurisprudence in Sudan (*Majma’ al-fiqh al-Islami*); Shaykh Ibrahim Al al-Shaykh, former Mufti of Saudi Arabia; and Shaykh ‘Abdallah bin Muni’, member of the Supreme Council of Clerics in Saudi Arabia. Among the non-establishment thinkers, most prominent were the Egyptian Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who apparently serves as Hamas’s supreme religious authority and shaykh ‘Abdallah bin Muhammad al-Sayf, Mufti of the Mujahidun in Chechnia.

59. *FM*, May 1996. See also the series of articles that seek to prove the religious basis of martyrdom “Hawla al-‘amaliyat al-istishhadiyya,” *FM*, October, November, December 1996.

60. For a few among the many such articles, see Ibrahim al-‘Ali in *FM*, October–December 1995. See eulogies in Hamas’s official website, www.palestine-info.com, as well as in *al-Fatih* no. 1 (September 2002) to no. 112 (November 2007); Hamas Al-Aqsa TV, 6–13 April 2007—Memri, Special Dispatch Series, No. 1577, 9 May 2007; Memritv.org, Clip No. 1497, 29 June 2007.

61. *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 5 June 2002. It is totally irrelevant whether or not the mother truly believed in her statement or was forced to pronounce it. What matters is the message that Hamas wished to convey.

62. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 17 August 2001; *al-Risala*, 11 October 2001; Rizqa, “Falsafat al-mudafa’a; Sa’id Ridwan, ‘al-Shahada: bawabat masjid al-Aqsa” in *al-Shahada wa-makanat al-shuhada*; Khalidi, *al-Risala*, 24 February 2005; Bahr in *al-Risala*, 24 July, 18 November 2003.

63. *Al-Hayat al-Jadida*, 11 September 2001; *USA Today*, 26 June 2001; www.memri.org, Inquiry and Analysis Series, No. 74, 30 October 2001. On Sharabi’s statement, see Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 32–33.

64. Eli Alshech, “Egoistic Martyrdom and Hamas Success in the 2005 Municipal Elections: A Study of Hamas Martyrs’ Ethical Wills, Biographies, and Eulogies,” *Die Welt des Islams* 48 (2008), p. 32.

65. On this episode, see R. Geoffrey Jensen, “Jose Millan-Astray and the Nationalist ‘Crusade’ in Spain,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 27(3) (1992), pp. 425–447.

66. For a different view on Islamists and Fascism, see David A. Charters, “Something Old, Something New . . . ? Al Qaeda, Jihadism, and Fascism,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 19 (2007), pp. 65–93.

67. *Hamas Charter*, articles 13, 9, and 7; Hamas Communique no. 82. According to Islamic tradition the Jews will flee from the Muslims on that day and “when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O ‘Abdulla (slave of God), there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him. Only the Gharkad tree, (saltbush) would not do that because it is one of the trees of the Jews.”

68. Shaykh Muhammad al-'Arifi, al-Aqsa TV, 12 September 2008. Available at www.memritv.org, clip no. 1867.

69. Cited in Livnat Holtzman and Eliezer Schlossberg, "The Modern Religious Polemic between Muslims and Jews as Reflected in the Book Haqaiq Quraniyya Hawla al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya," *Historia* 10 (2002) (Hebrew), p. 156.

70. *Al-Risala*, 23 April 2007; *al-Fatih*, No. 8. Available at www.al-fateh.net

71. The "supplications" to God to exterminate the Jews and Christians are articulated by numerous Islamist spokesmen in the Middle East, so much so that Kuwaiti Minister of Religious Endowments, Ahmad Baqir, and Deputy Saudi Minister for Religious Affairs, 'Abd al-'Aziz al-'Ammar, urged their cessation, see www.islamonline.net/Arabic/news 30 April and 15 May 2002; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 29 December 2002.

72. Shaul Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension of the Palestinian Hamas: A Network Perspective," *Armed Forces & Society* 29(4) (Summer 2003), p. 570.

73. For a small sample, see Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters* (London: Hurst & Co., 2007); Menachem Klein, "Hamas in Power," *The Middle East Journal* 61(3) (Summer 2007), pp. 442–459; Khaled Hroub, "A 'New Hamas' through Its New Documents," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 35(4) (Summer 2006), pp. 6–27; Mishal, "The Pragmatic Dimension."

74. For a sample of such statements, see *Al-Wasat*, 1 November 1993; Yasin to *FM*, March 1995; Khalid Mash'al to *al-Majd*, 15 January 2001; Zahar to *al-Dustur*, 19 February; Yasin to *al-Dustur*, 29 September 2001; Klein, "Hamas in Power," pp. 454–455; "What Hamas Really Wants," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 2007; Isma'il Haniyya to Reuters, 22 January 2007; Mash'al to NYT, 5 May 2009.

75. For an analysis of this concept, see Ehud Yaari, "The *Muqawama* Doctrine," *Jerusalem Report*, 13 November 2006. For statements of Hamas spokesmen along these lines, see Ahmad Bahr, "al-Muqawama hiyya al-tariq al-wahid li-tahrir filastin." Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/dialogue.php?id=186> (accessed June 2009); Ismail Ridwan, "al-Muqawama khiyruna al-istratiji wal-asasi lil-difa 'wal-tahrir." Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/dialogue.php?id=200> (accessed June 2009); Yusuf Farahat, "Tahrir filastin bata qariban wal-muqawama hiyya khiyar al-sha'b." Available at <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/dialogue.php?id=195> (accessed June 2009).

76. Khalid Mash'al to Al-Jazeera TV on April 25, 2008. Available at [Memritv.org](http://www.memritv.org), Clip No. 1750, 25 April 2008. See also Mushir al-Masri to *al-Risala*, 31 May 2007.

77. *Ha'aretz*, 5, 11, 13 June; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 17 June; *FM*, July 1995; Mahmud al-Zahhar to Al-Manar TV, 25 January 2006. Available at [memritv.org](http://www.memritv.org), clip no. 1014, 25 January 2006; *al-Risala*, 2, 19 April 2007.