

Chapter 4

Hamas, the Road to 7th October 2023

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Abstract

In this chapter I will examine the changes in the ethos of conflict of the Hamas movement in the Gaza Strip, following the generational revolution in the Hamas leadership that resulted from the exchange deal with Israel in 2011, in which 1,027 Palestinian prisoners were released from Israeli prisons in exchange for a single Israeli soldier. During the decades of their imprisonment, the released prisoners, all members of the Hamas military branch, had undergone a process of militant radicalization, increased religious-based patriotic national beliefs and preparation towards integration into the leadership of Hamas. They considered themselves the jihad generation.

Under the leadership of Yahya Synwar, the new leadership of those released from prison developed. In a short period of time, Synwar succeeded in gaining control of the Hamas leadership. In the midst of the religious Dawa and national indoctrination, whose core was the cultivation and assimilation of the right of return to pre-1948 Palestine, he recruited a new generation of jihadists and by applying a strategy of gradual escalation, paved the way for the attack on the 7th of October 2023, triggering the Middle East into warmongering chaos.

INTRODUCTION

For over a decade, Hamas prepared itself for the “Jerusalem Flood”¹—an initiated massive, intensive and prolonged military confrontation with Israel.² Led by Yahya Sinwar, the war

¹ “The Flood of Jerusalem”—طوفان الأقصى, that is the name Hamas set for the war. The name carries religious significance—protecting the al-Aqsa Mosque from the Jews. It symbolizes that the war is not only for Palestine, but for all of Islam, to protect the third most holy site of Islam.

² This chapter addresses the preparations for war from the Hamas perspective and does not touch upon Israel’s perspective of Hamas. The chapter traces the motives behind Hamas’ socio-psychological behavior and the path leading to 7 October; the socio-psychological changes that assisted Hamas, forces that to a great extent reflect the manner in which the conflict is perceived by Hamas, both emotionally and cognitively. This is not to say that the blame for the crisis that began on 7 October lies totally with the Palestine side—with Hamas. On the Israeli side as well there are many factors that led to the creation of the crisis but as mentioned, this chapter addresses the Palestinian side alone.

architect, Hamas created a progressive plan of escalated warfare in order to reshape the Palestinian question in general, and the Gaza Strip in particular, and to bring the discussion on the Palestinian question to the forefront of Arab and international discourse. One of the first steps taken was to establish a special commando unit—the *Nukhba*,³ an elite force that received intensive training along with religious indoctrination. The *Nukhba* was the spearhead that led the attack on October 7, 2023.

Parallel to military preparations, Hamas implemented the *dawah*⁴—a network of religious and nationalist indoctrination aimed at winning the hearts and support of the Palestinian people in its struggle against Israel. Public support was attained by assimilating Islamic and national and cultural products, especially in the minds of the young generation. Emphasis was placed on societal beliefs, like the justness of the intergroup's goals, patriotism, positive collective self-image, the de-legitimization of Israel; on the collective memory grounded in the *Nakba* of 1948 and the myth of “The Return”; on embedding collective emotional orientation, mainly of hatred, anger, and revenge against Israel, and pride and hope. All these are intertwined with religious beliefs that emphasize *jihad* (Litvak 2010), a holy war (Sivan 1988) aimed at the destruction of Israel—as well as a readiness for self-sacrifice and the death of martyrs, as “there is no other solution to the Palestinian problem but through the *jihad*.”⁵

Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, never concealed its goal to destroy Israel. Its aspirations were manifest in official documents, in its leaders’ speeches, at rallies and ceremonies. The Hamas Charter, a defining document of the movement’s chosen path published in August 1988, expresses the ideology and Islamic theocracy at whose center lies the destruction of Israel through *jihad*—“Israel will rise and continue to exist only until Islam annihilates it”—(as it appears in the introduction to the Islamic charter). Article Seven states that Hamas aspires to fulfill its promise to Allah: “The Day of Judgement will not come about

³ The word *Nukhba* means “elite,” i.e., an elite commando unit.

⁴ The *Dawah*—دعوة: Its etymological meaning is “a calling” or “preaching” for a belief in Allah. The *Dawah* is a process of indoctrination to win over both the individual and society towards the establishment of an improved society based on Islamic values. *Dawah* is the process of imparting education and Islamic values in order to bring people closer to the religion and to the ideological concepts of Hamas, in preparation for the stage of *Jihad*, the holy war. The *Dawah* regimen relies upon a socio-educational, religious and economic infrastructure and embodies the central pillar of the Hamas movement’s activity and is a major means towards achieving its goals. In the long term, Hamas aims to create, via *Dawah*, an alternative civilian infrastructure that will facilitate replacing the secular rule with an Islamic rule in the spirit of the movement’s ideology.

⁵ Article 13 of the Hamas Charter

until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him." Article Fifteen of the charter determines that "The *jihad* for freeing Palestine is the personal duty of every Muslim."

The founder and leader of Hamas, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, predicted in 1998 that Israel would disappear within twenty-five years,⁶ meaning, by 2023. Another prediction of Sheikh Yassin set the year 2027 as the final demise of Israel: "There is an ever-growing belief that the State of Israel is no more than a passing phenomenon. There are increasing signs to that effect. Hamas is headed towards the strategic goal of an armed struggle against Israel. Only an armed struggle will bring Israel's occupation to an end. The Palestinians will readily sacrifice their people for even another hundred years" (Litvak 2010). Yahya Sinwar also believes in the total destruction of Israel and, in October 2021, claimed that "We are now discussing as to when we will annihilate Israel...⁷ We will soon be praying at the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem."⁸

Annihilating the State of Israel is an ideological axiom deeply rooted in the faith and essence of Hamas. Hamas leaders have educated kindergarten children, school children and college students in that spirit. They have preached this axiom in mosques, video films, via the media, at cultural venues and on the movement's internet sites. Even during the current war in Gaza, in which thousands of Palestinians have been killed and nearly a million Palestinians have become displaced persons, the Hamas leadership continues to adhere to the destruction of Israel as its cause. Khaled Mashaal, who served as chairman of Hamas' politburo (2006–2017), mocked the West: "Western politicians are discussing the question of Gaza after the fall of Hamas. I am telling you: Don't waste your time, within several years, you will be busy discussing the state of the region after Israel's disappearance."⁹ Ghazi Hamad, a relatively moderate Hamas leader, ascertained after

⁶ "Yassin Sees Israel 'Eliminated' Within 25 Years," Reuters, May 27, 1998.

⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10156173789289893> 20.10.2017, last viewed 13.1.2024.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukZuhvT5ibA20.6.2021> Yahya Sinwar speech 20.6.21, viewed 13.1.2024

⁹ Khaled Mashaal in a speech before the World Forum of Muslim parliament members, 24.11.2023. Quoted in memri, <https://www.memri.org/il/cgi-webaxy/item?5993> viewed 22.2.2024

the war broke out that “There is no place for Israel on our lands, we must remove that country from all Palestinian soil, the existence of Israel is totally illogical.”¹⁰

The Palestinians maintain a clear, indisputable picture of the conflict with Israel, its causes and origins. The Palestinian narrative explains the conflict, defines its goals and serves as an ideological and epistemological basis for its understanding. This narrative, which impassions the conflict and serves as a tool of mobilization and recruitment, is consensual and hegemonic in Palestinian society, and its first priority is the destruction of Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people. Hamas embraces this Palestinian narrative as well (Shaked 2018).

A society cannot exist without establishing canonic stories that embody the central element in narratives and myths which, once inculcated, transform into an actuality that has the power to propel and recruit society—even towards war. Emanuel Sivan (1988, p.9) claims that myths deal mostly with events from the past, yet they may also relate to future events that may occur, or even the end of the days. A myth describing the future and focusing on the end of “normal” history and the beginning of a new era is called an eschatological myth (Sivan 1988 a). A futuristic myth fulfills a practical and behavioral function—to enlist and cause people to perform according to a specific behavioral mold; and a cognitive, interpretive function—to grant society tools to help understand its future and what it must do in order to attain that future. A myth fulfills these functions, not through rationality and logical persuasion, but rather by addressing the emotional layer. Thus, the myth’s future promise and its interpretation are transmuted into a formative, permanent cultural base, an inspiration to action according to which people are called upon to think, live and die.

Hamas turned the axiomatic ideology of Israel’s annihilation into an apocalyptic eschatology that feeds upon the principle of *sabar* (صبر) (Shaked 2018) that is, patience, perseverance and tenacity (Shaked and Shaabi 1994) Hamas leaders have strengthened this myth by inculcating societal beliefs, collective emotions and the Palestinians’ collective memory. The new generation shaped by Hamas turned the eschatological

¹⁰ Lebanese television interview, quoted in memri - https://www.memri.org.il/cgiwebaxy/sal/sal.pl?ID=875141_memri&dbid=memri_tv&act=show&dataid=417&r=0.238130746732594 viewed 2.2.24.

myth of the destruction of Israel and the return to Palestine into actuality. Armed with this belief and ideology, Hamas troops launched their attack on October 7th.

It is easier to assimilate futuristic myths into a religious society engaged in a national struggle, in a collective crisis or economic adversity. At such times, it is easier for its leaders to create a social-psychological-cultural-religious package through which ideology and myths are transformed into actual, achievable goals (Rogers, M. Brooke, et al. 2007).

In 2014, Hamas established the Commission to “Ensure the End of Days,” whose task is to prepare the infrastructure for assuming responsibility for Palestinian territories after Israel’s destruction. Following data collection and policy formulation, a conference was held in Gaza on 30 September 2021, under the banner “Ensuring the End of Days—Palestine After Liberation.” Its participants, including senior Hamas leaders, discussed the civilian and military administration of Palestine after the destruction of Israel.¹¹ The conference was held under the auspices of the Hamas leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, who in his opening remarks to the participants, stressed:

“The conference’s activities are in accord with our assessment that victory is near. The liberation of Palestine from the sea to the river is at the heart of our strategic vision, it is now closer than ever before. Towards that goal, we are hard at work and are making great efforts both above and below the ground, out at sea and in the skies... we can see our independence flourishing and are therefore preparing for what will follow...”¹²

The conference discussed the future of the Jews that will remain on Palestinian land after Israel’s fall, distinguishing between Jews who would have to be killed or expelled from Palestine, and Jews with knowledge in various fields of science with an emphasis on health, engineering, technology, civil and military industries—who must be kept in Palestine in order to exploit their knowledge.¹³ The conference decided to establish a network responsible for implementing the return of refugees to their homes, from which they were expelled in 1948.¹⁴ In 2023, the conference committees continued their work,

¹¹ <https://felesteen.news/post/94849>. Viewed 5.2.2024.

¹² <https://safa.ps/post/313372> viewed 5.2.24

¹³ <https://palinfo.com/news/2021/09/30/60902> viewed 30.1.24

¹⁴ <https://felesteen.news/post/94849> Viewed 30.1.24

including addressing the question of how Israel’s nuclear missiles will be handled, and what will be the fate of the many Jews who will remain in Palestine: “Will we throw them into the sea to be food for the fish?”¹⁵

The path leading to the October 2023 war began with the establishment of the Hamas movement on 14 December 1987. It gained momentum after attaining control over the Gaza Strip in 2007 and was further consolidated in 2012. In this chapter I argue that the prisoner exchange deal carried out in 2011 between Israel and Hamas led to a generational upheaval in the Hamas movement, a dramatic turnabout in its ideology and in its fighting strategy against Israel. It was the prisoner exchange deal that paved the way for Hamas towards October 7.

FIRST STEPS

The Hamas movement is a unique Palestinian permutation of the Muslim Brotherhood, established by Hassan al-Bannah in Egypt in 1928, who called for the Islamization of the state, and society (Abed-Kotob 1995; Al-Anani 2016). Until 1967, the Muslim Brotherhood played a marginal role in Palestinian society (Al-Anani 1988). However, following the Naksa (Shaked 2022), the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies in the 1967 war against Israel, the Arab world suffered a deep shock that damaged its self-image. Israel conquered Arab territories, including Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque, the third most holy site for Islam and one of its most important national religious symbols. The 1967 defeat undermined the status of the Arab national ideology led by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and gave rise to a process of Islamic religionization. It was in this climate that the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood renewed its activities.

In 1968, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin was appointed *Amir Al-muaminin*—leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip. Following the Muslim Brotherhood’s doctrine, he began

¹⁵ https://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/sal/sal.pl?!ID=875141_memri&dbid=memri_tv&act=show&dataid=399&r=0.463599078680517_viewed_5.2.2024

building up a force from bottom up. He focused his efforts on returning children and adolescents to the fold of Islam (Shaked and Shaabi 1994).

After the 1973 war between Egypt and Israel, which was replete with religious symbols, there began a strong religious reawakening (Shaked 2018). That year, Sheikh Yassin established the *Mujama' al-Islami*—a socio-religious NGO with clearly stated objectives: “To disseminate the religion, the faith, the moral code, and to care for the needy and provide health services” (Shaked and Shabi 1994) that is, *dawah*, in order to shape Palestinian society in the spirit of Islam.

FROM DAWAH TO JIHAD

The founding of Hamas on 14 December 1987, at the beginning of the first Intifada, marks the transition from the stage of *Dawah*—indoctrination, to the stage of *jihad*—a holy war whose stated goal is Israel’s annihilation (Abu-Amr 1993) Two years earlier, in early 1985, as part of the preparatory transition to the stage of *jihad*, Sheikh Yassin established *al-majad*, the movement’s security organization, and appointed Yahya Sinwar as its commander in the south of the Gaza Strip (Shaked and Shaabi 1994).

At the same time of the Madrid Conference on October 30, 1991, an "International Conference in Support of the Intifada" was held in Tehran, with the participation of all organizations opposed to a political settlement with Israel. To some extent, this convergence gave birth to the Iranian Resistance Axis. About a month later, the military arm "Ezz Adin Al Qassam Brigades" (hereafter, Al-Qassam)—the *jihad* arm of Hamas—was established.

Ever since its transition to *jihad*, Hamas has implemented terrorism through every possible means in order to fulfill its supreme goal—“Raising the flag of Allah over all of Palestine,”¹⁶ throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, shootings, explosive devices, stabbings, car bombs, kidnapping Israelis, suicide terrorism, rockets, UAVs and drones, all of which continued up to the attack of 7 October 2023.

In the wake of a wave of terrorism carried out by Hamas in 1992, the Israeli government expelled 417 Palestinian *jihad* and Hamas activists to Lebanon for a limited time period. In

¹⁶ Article 6 of the Hamas Charter.

Lebanon, Hezbollah and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps welcomed them. Thus began the military ties and cooperation on security matters between Hamas and Iran, and between Hamas and Hizballah. Since then, Iran—who brought Hamas into the “Iranian Axis”—has been supplying Hamas with weapons, ammunitions, logistic help, financing, training and political support. Iran achieved its goal: the “Axis of Resistance” successfully gained a foothold in southern Israel while at the same time Hezbollah threatens Israel from the north.

Ismail Haniyah, Head of Hamas’ Political Bureau, admitted in June 2018 that “without the support of Iran, Palestinian resistance wouldn’t have come into existence.”¹⁷ It is highly doubtful that Hamas could have carried out the 7 October 2023 attack without Iran’s longstanding support.

Between 1993 and 1996, Hamas carried out terrorist attacks to thwart the Oslo Accords. Israel and the United States pressured Yasser Arafat to constrain Hamas. In response, the Palestinian Authority (PNA) detained hundreds of Hamas operatives and decreased the level of terrorism (Bloom 2004). With the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada in September 2000, the PNA released Hamas prisoners and rekindled terrorist attacks. Hamas carried out suicide bombing attacks and as of 2001 has carried out high-trajectory rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

In 2005, Israel decided to disengage from the Gaza Strip. Since then Hamas in Gaza has transformed from a terrorist organization into an armed militia of a semi-military nature.

So long as Arafat was alive, Hamas chose not to take part in the Palestinian elections. Three months after his death, in January 2006, Palestinian general elections were held, in which Hamas won by an overwhelming majority—74 seats of the 132 seats in the Palestinian Parliament. The election results defined religious Palestinian nationalism as an alternative to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) (Robinson 2004). Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahar, a senior Hamas leader, stressed that “we joined the Parliament armed with our weapons” (Rose 2008).

In April 2006, Ismail Haniyeh was appointed Prime Minister of the Palestinian National Unity government. However, following Hamas’ refusal to accept the demands of the Quartet on the Middle East to recognize the State of Israel, condemn terrorism and honor the agreements

¹⁷ Hamas telegram channel, 19 June 2023
See also Sinwar’s statement of 30 May 2019
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9DIPhqALM0&t=33s> viewed 2.3.2024

that the Palestinian Authority had signed, including the Oslo Accords,¹⁸ the government lost its international legitimacy. This led to repeated conflicts between Fatah and Hamas. In June 2007, Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas) declared a state of emergency and discharged Ismail Haniyeh from his position.¹⁹ In response, Hamas led an armed revolt, gained control over Gaza and declared the Hamas government as the legal Palestinian government. The resulting Palestinian divide created two antagonistic entities – one in Gaza and the other in the West Bank.

FROM A TERRORIST ORGANIZATION TO A NON-STATE PLAYER

The split between Hamas and Fatah turned Hamas into a “non-state player” (Naveh 2015; Abdalhadi 2023), a non-state entity that wields significant political, economic and social powers; has influence at both the national and international levels (La-Porte 2015); and employs terrorism to achieve its goals (Bruderlein 2000). A non-state entity is obligated to provide civilian services to its residents, a situation that created tension within Hamas between its identity as a *jihadi* terrorist movement and fulfilling its responsibilities as a civilian ruling body.

Since 2007, Hamas has dedicated all its efforts and abilities as a non-state player to build a well-organized, trained and armed military force capable of facing the challenges of the conflict with Israel, following the *jihad* doctrine. Along with its military activities, Hamas also functioned in the civilian arena, establishing government bureaus and cultivating the local government, public order and security. In 2010, Hamas was functioning with political and administrative coherence and control, which enabled it to increase its control over the public sphere (Sayegh 2011). Hamas retained control by enforcing a totalitarian religious ideology, such as separation of boys and girls in schools and compelling women to wear the hijab. At the same time, Hamas continued its *jihad* agenda, mainly through high-trajectory fire, a course which led to a round of war in December 2008. In this round of war, an active Iranian presence was evident. A joint operations room of the pro-Iranian Palestinian organizations

¹⁸ <https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-204615/> viewed 15.1.2024

¹⁹ https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/20090609_RL33530_Odea9f166fd5ea533a3fa867d12b1bb2177646f6.pdf viewed 15.1.2024

was established in Damascus, and the Commander of the Quds Force in the Revolutionary Guards, Qassem Soleimani,²⁰ led the war.

In the eyes of Hamas, this round ended in victory and a demonstration of offensive capability against Israel.²¹

Earlier, on 25 June 2006, Hamas terrorists, in collaboration with two other Palestinian terrorist organizations, kidnapped the soldier Gilad Shalit from Israeli territory. After five years of negotiations, the Israeli soldier was released by Hamas in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, of which 450 were Hamas prisoners, including about a dozen members of the Hamas leadership's political bureau in prisons, headed by Yahya Sinwar.²²

THE SHALIT DEAL

THE GENERATIONAL REVOLUTION AND ITS OUTCOME

The development and trends of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be examined from the perspective of the Palestinian prisoners, who reflect the intensity of the conflict and the development of national or religious streams.

From the Israeli and western perspectives, the Palestinian prisoners are murderous terrorists, whereas from the Palestinian perspective, they are heroes of the national struggle. According to estimates by the Palestinian Authority Prisoners Ministry, since 1967 nearly 800,000 Palestinians have entered Israeli prisons,²³ turning Israel's prisons into part of the collective experience and part of the ethos of conflict in Palestinian society (Shaked 2016).

The prisoners perceive themselves as part of the Palestinian fighting network. While in prison, they learn Hebrew, read books, write political essays and translate books from Hebrew to Arabic, especially those dealing with security, sociology and Israeli politics. They utilize their

²⁰ For more about Iran's most powerful military commander, Gen Qasem Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Quds Force, see:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50979463> viewed 18.2.2024

²¹ <https://nournews.ir/ar/news/50366> viewed 2.3.2024

<https://www.memri.org/tv/saleh-arouri-hamas-political-bureau-intifada-coming-soon-praise-soleimani-iran-qatar-abbas>. Viewed 3.2.2024

²² <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/s1d9ygtqk> last viewed on 16.1.2024

²³ <https://www.zman.co.il/419828/popup> Viewed 15.1.2024

imprisonment in preparation for their eventual integration into the national leadership after their release. Understandably, they have nicknamed the Israeli prison the “Palestinian National Academy.”

The leadership of the Hamas prisoners in jail consists of one of the four branches that form the political bureau of Hamas—*Majlis al-Shura*: the political bureau of Gaza; the political bureau of the West Bank; the political bureau of Hamas prisoners; and the political bureau abroad. Each bureau is elected once every four years.

Inside the prison walls, a new generation was formed and has taken shape. A new generation is materializing within a matrix of changing social and historical processes, which include certain experiences that are reforming the different views and beliefs of previous generations (France and amp 2014). These also create political and collective identities influenced by social trends and political changes that have occurred over the years. The new generation assimilates these events and experiences, which in turn shape its beliefs (Howe and Strauss 1991) and the ambition to implement them.

The founding generation of Hamas was schooled by the Muslim Brotherhood, whose ideological perception was mainly religious and looked upon the national aspect of the conflict through a religious lens. The founder generation’s outlook was for the long term and, as such, invested its efforts in the *dawah*. Since then, however, the reality of the conflict has changed, and the ideology of the founder generation is no longer as relevant.

Thus changes were undertaken by Yahya Sinwar and his mates inside the prison walls who were later released in the Shalit deal. Nearly all of them are members of the military wing of Hamas, and are far more militant and patriotic, imbued with self-assurance and the belief that they can bring about change. This generation perceives itself as the *jihad* generation, the generation that liberates Palestine and al-Aqsa, a generation that strives to achieve its goals in the short term.

As a result, in Hamas' view, the Shalit deal became the "a strategic turning point in our [Hamas's] struggle against the Zionist enemy."²⁴ Following are some of the consequences and changes of the Shalit deal on Hamas:

- a. **A generational transformation.** In 2012 Yahya Sinwar took control of the leadership of the al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas. In 2017, Sinwar was elected head of the Hamas' political bureau in Gaza.
- b. **Returning Hamas' power to Gaza.** After the assassination of Sheikh Yassin in 2004, the central leadership of Hamas was transferred abroad and headed by Khaled Mashaal;²⁵ the new generation returned the hub of leadership to Gaza.
- c. **A strategy of gradual intensification of war.** Up until the Shalit deal, Hamas maintained a policy of controlled armed struggle (Mishal and Sela 2006). The new generation changed its strategy into gradual, continuous, progressive intensification of armed struggle, in order to reach a decisive strategic conflict with Israel.
- d. **Empowerment and military readiness.** The new generation prepared itself for a strategic military campaign against Israel and, to that end, altered Hamas' agenda, placing the building of military power at its core.
- e. **Ties with Iran.** Reinforcing ties with Iran, mainly with al-Quds headquarters of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), as a central part of the military preparations.
- f. **Building "the new Palestinian"**—that is, a fighter imbued with religious faith and Palestinian patriotism. Preparations began by providing the youth with religious and nationalist indoctrination and pre-military training,
- g. **Setting the kidnapping of Israeli citizens and soldiers** as a goal and a means for releasing Palestinians from Israeli prisons.²⁶
- h. **Nationalism.** The new generation set the national struggle as a goal for the Hamas movement, and the war against Israel as a national struggle, not just a religious one.
- i. **The decision-making process.** The young generation tightened the connections between the military and political echelons, upgrading Hamas' decision-making abilities. The new generation is characterized by a combination of military experience and political skill.

"The Document of General Principles and Policies"

²⁴ <https://www.haaretz.com/2011-10-18/ty-article/hamas-leader-shalit-deal-turning-point-in-struggle-against-israel/0000017f-db2f-d3ff-a7ff-fbaff0980000> viewed 15.1.2024

²⁵ Khaled Mashaal served as head of the Hamas Political Bureau from 1996–2017.

²⁶ <https://web.archive.org/web/20111023084919/http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=430508> viewed 23.12.2021

Ideological Changes—the New Hamas Principles and Policies

A social movement that is disconnected from the changes and transformations that reality has undergone, loses its relevance and must therefore modify and adapt its ideological perceptions to such changes (Shaked 2012). However, the primary ideological formulation created by a social movement upon its establishment, which serves as its conceptual and interpretive anchor, constricts the change-makers' efforts to modify it. Hence, they introduce changes based on the primary basic principles, but do not change its basic principles (Snow, David and Benford 1998).

On May 1, 2017, Hamas presented its new political **principles** in: "The Document of General Principles and Policies."²⁷ The new document is written in a pragmatic, political language and does not relinquish Hamas' basic principles. It does not replace the 1988 charter, but introduces modifications suitable to the current climate that formulate an updated political program that shapes Hamas' policies.

The writing of the document, which began as early as 2013, aimed at expanding the movement's legitimacy both locally and abroad, while adjusting Hamas' ideology and political tactics to the geopolitical reality. The changes and modifications, as appear in the political document, were not meant to advance a political process vis-à-vis Israel, but rather to advance Hamas within the Arab, international and intra-Palestinian arenas. It aimed especially at attaining political gains vis-à-vis Egypt and to extricate Gaza from the isolation in which it finds itself. The document expresses the Hamas leadership's wishes to attain intra-Palestinian reconciliation and Hamas' readiness to temporarily recognize a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital—in other words, its agreement to a long-term truce with Israel—*hudna* (Hroub 2017).

The major innovation in the document focuses on the relatively small weight of the Islamic dimension as compared with the national Palestinian dimension, to which primacy is granted;

²⁷ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/doctrine-hamas> Viewed 29.4.2024

more “Palestinization” and its preference over “Islamization” is expressed mainly by ending the connection with the Muslim Brotherhood movement. This prioritization makes the document more nationalistic and less religious.

Following are the basic changes in the political document:

1. **Definition of Hamas:** “An Islamic movement for liberation and a struggle for Palestinian nationalism, aimed at liberating Palestine and prevailing against the Zionist enterprise.”
2. **Disconnecting Hamas from the Muslim Brotherhood movement.** The Egyptian regime viewed the takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas with severity, mainly for fear of the spillover of radical Islamic subversion to Egypt. The disengagement from the Muslim Brotherhood was therefore aimed at Egypt to enable the opening of positive relations, especially since the only connection to the Arab world is through the Egyptian Rafah crossing. The process of disengagement from Hamas began in June 2016. In Gaza, posters of the Muslim Brotherhood were removed, including posters quoting the movement's founder, Hassan al-Banna, and the deposed Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi. A large banner was placed in the center of Gaza: "The resistance does not aim its weapons outwards. Our compass is aimed at the liberation of Palestine."
3. **A willingness to establish an independent Palestinian state** with Jerusalem as its capital, along the lines of 4 June 1967, including the return of refugees to their homes, the release of prisoners and the dismantling of all the Jewish settlements in the territories: “Hamas considers the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital along the lines of the 4th of June 1967, with the return of the refugees and the displaced to their homes from which they were expelled, to be a formula of national consensus.” This article expresses the concept of *hudna* (truce) over a long time period, which Hamas publicly announced in 1994 after signing the Oslo Accords.
4. **Defining Palestine as the land of the Palestinian people,** “from the River to the Sea, the land and homeland of the Palestinian people.” This replaced the 1988 charter that stated that Palestine is the Islamic holy land (*waqf*)

5. **Jerusalem:** “The city al-Quds [Jerusalem] is the capital of Palestine... and all the holy places of Islam and Christianity, most importantly the al-Aqsa Mosque, are the unwavering right of the Palestinian people and the Arab and Muslim nation. The blessed al-Aqsa Mosque is the exclusive right of our people and our nation, and the occupation has no claim to it.”
6. **Jews and Zionist:** The confrontation of Hamas is with the Zionist enterprise, that is, “against the aggressive Zionist occupiers” and is “not with the Jews because of their religion.” This article contradicts the Hamas charter which defines the confrontation as a religious struggle against the Jews and Judaism.
7. **Recognition of the PLO.** The PLO is the national framework of the Palestinian people, “it is mandatory to preserve it, develop and expand it, to rebuild it upon democratic foundations that will ensure the inclusion of all the elements and forces of the Palestinian people, and will protect Palestinian rights.”²⁸
8. **Resistance [*muqawama*]:** Liberating Palestine is an exclusive obligation incumbent upon the Palestinian people; “Resisting the occupation with all means and methods is a legitimate right guaranteed by divine laws and by international norms and laws.”
9. **Refugees and the Right of Return:** “The right of the Palestinian refugees and displaced persons to return to their homes from which they were expelled, whether in the areas occupied in 1948 or 1967, is a natural right”.

The modifications introduced into the document were manifested in the public sphere as well: Thus, for example, the Palestinian flag is flown above the Hamas government buildings in Gaza; the Palestinian flag has been raised at Hamas ceremonies; the flag has been sewn unto the shirts of Hamas military uniforms; schools in Gaza have begun raising the Palestinian flag and singing the Palestinian national anthem at the morning school ground ceremonies. The Right of Return has also been manifested via giant keys that symbolize the refugees and are placed at the entrance to refugee camps; maps of British Mandate Palestine have been hung in schools and public institutions, and the leaders’ speeches emphasize the right of return.

²⁸ Al-Ayyam (Palestinian daily) 26.5.2021

Yahya Sinwar

Ever since Yahya Sinwar's release from prison in October 2011, he has succeeded in shaping the Hamas movement in keeping with the perceptions, plans and concepts that he developed over the 23 years of his imprisonment. Three sources served to modify his character and his aspirations: his refugee status in Gaza, the religion of Islam and the Israeli prison. Out of this composite grew his aspiration for *jihad*, the right of return and the belief that the Palestinian people can be victorious over Israel.

Yahya Sinwar was born in 1962 in the Khan-Yunis refugee camp to parents who were refugees of the 1948 war. In his youth he had joined the Muslim Brotherhood and when the Mujama' al-Islami was established, he became an activist. In the early 1980s, he studied Arab Literature and Language at the Islamic University of Gaza. On campus, he became politically active, was elected to the Student Council and served as its chairman during his last two years at university. While there, he frequently visited Sheikh Ahmad Yassin's home to consult with him on matters of the Muslim Brotherhood and with time became his confidante.

In January 1988, Sinwar was arrested and sentenced to four life sentences for the murder of four Palestinians suspected of collaboration with Israel. In his statement before the military court, he said: "I ask that I be sentenced to death so that my blood will be the first to be spilled and I will be a torch for the mujahideen."²⁹

In prison, Sinwar learned Hebrew, read books on Israeli politics and security issues and translated two books into Arabic: *Israel's Security Agency (ISA): Between the Cracks*, by Carmi Gilon, head of the ISA at the time of Prime-Minister Rabin's assassination; and a book published by the Israel Institute for Democracy on Israel's political parties. He also wrote a novel, *The Thorn and the Carnation*,³⁰ published in 2004, and *Hamas: Trial and Error*, a book on the history and development of the Hamas movement. In 2010 he published another book, *Glory* that describes the methodology of the ISA.³¹ He served as

²⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20171010104442/https://www.paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?t=602970> viewed 15.1.2024

³⁰ Sinwar Yahya. *The Thorn and the Carnation*, Amazon Edition, ISBN-13 979-8870606637 (2023)

³¹ <https://palinfo.com/news/2010/08/17/243789> viewed 30.1.2024

head of the Political Bureau of the Hamas prisoners for eight years during his incarceration.

Sinwar frequently met with other imprisoned leaders of Palestinian organizations, such as PLO leader Marwan Barghouti, and Ahmad Sa'adat, Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), with whom he would hold political discussions and arguments. In 2006, Sinwar and others formulated the Prisoners' Document³²—calling for reconciliation between the Palestinian factions, including Hamas.

After Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, was captured on 25 June 2006 and held hostage, Sinwar joined the Hamas team that negotiated Shalit's release in exchange for Palestinian prisoners. Sinwar was released in October 2011 as part of the Shalit deal and was appointed consultant to Ismail Haniyeh.

In early 2012, several months after his release, Sinwar was elected to the Hamas Political Bureau in Gaza and appointed representative of its military wing—the “War Minister” of Hamas.³³ His appointment reflected the power he and his peers had amassed while in prison. His position granted him priority in all military issues, that included creating a military force, developing military ties with Iran and directing the *jihad* strategy.

On 14 November 2012 Israel assassinated Ahmad Jabri, the Hamas actual Chief of Staff and commander of the al-Qassam Brigades,³⁴ initiating a round of war during which Hamas fired about 1700 rockets into Israel, including Tel Aviv.³⁵ Sinwar exploited Jabri's assassination and with his supporters' backing gained control of the al-Qassam Brigades.

In January 2017, Sinwar won the elections as Hamas leader in Gaza. On 13 February 2017 he was appointed head of the Hamas Political Bureau. His election reflected the

³² The 18-point document calls for the unification of Palestinian factions and a revival of the PLO as the representative organization of Palestinians. It also calls for the retraction of Israeli forces back to the boundaries of 1967, the right of return, and the release of prisoners. See:

<https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-200070/> Viewed 27.2.2024

³³ <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2017/2/13> Viewed 31.1.2024

³⁴ <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/operation-pillar-defence-israels-strategic-objectives> Viewed 28.2.2024

³⁵ <https://www.jpost.com/features/in-thspotlight/2012-story-of-the-year-operation-pillar-of-defense>

extensive power gained by the Hamas military wing vis-à-vis its political wing, and returned the control of Hamas leadership to Gaza. In March 2021, Sinwar was elected to a second term³⁶ as head of the Political Bureau in Gaza. His full control of the movement was completed in June 2023, after pressuring Khaled Mashaal, who stepped down as head of Hamas' Political Bureau.³⁷ Instead Khaled Mashaal, who held a less aggressive line and distanced himself from Iran, Ismail Haniyeh was chosen by Sinwar to head Hamas' political bureau abroad.

While gaining control of Hamas, and in order to promote his plans, Sinwar succeeded in bringing together the twelve active resistance factions in Gaza, promoting cooperation and coordination. In 2018, through his initiative, a Joint Operations Room³⁸ was established for all the resistance factions in Gaza and served as Gaza's high military command, under Sinwar's full control.

"I am the leader of Hamas in Gaza. It is not a militia, but something far more complex: it is a national liberation movement. And my primary obligation is to work in the interest of my people. To protect them and their right to freedom and independence," Sinwar stated in an interview with Israel's *Yediot Ahronoth* newspaper on 4 October 2018.³⁹

SINWAR AND IRAN

A Secret Visit to Iran 2012

Sinwar and his cohorts in the military leadership, including Mohammed Deif, set as Hamas' top priority the reinforcement of its military arm. Only Iran was willing to supply them with weaponry, training and funding. Therefore, despite Hamas' contradiction, and absolute rejection of Shiite theology, they were left without a choice, as no one but Iran could fulfill their military needs.

³⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2017/2/13> Viewed 3.2.2024

³⁷ <https://www.mako.co.il/weekend-articles/Article-414ef420afb3a51004.htm> 14.2.2023 Viewed 3.2.2024,

³⁸ The joint operations room serving all 12 resistance organizations active in Gaza was established in July 2018 at Hamas' initiative to coordinate and promote cooperation between all the organizations in their fight against Israel. See: <https://felesteen.news/post/13649> viewed 28.2.2024.

³⁹ *Yediot Ahronoth* newspaper, 4.10.2017

In late 2012, Sinwar paid a secret visit to Tehran.⁴⁰ Sinwar's departure from Gaza to Tehran through the Egyptian Rafah crossing, was made possible during the honeymoon period of the presidency of Mohammed Morsi, a member of the Muslim Brotherhood and his pro-Hamas policies. I propose that the commander of Al-Quds forces, Qassem Soleimani, was interested in meeting Sinwar, who was a "rising star" in Hamas, and it was expected that he would reach Hamas leadership. The meeting in Tehran was the beginning of a close relationship between them.⁴¹ It is likely that during the secret visit Sinwar presented his military plans. Since that visit, all of Hamas' military expenses have been covered by Iran—weaponry, intelligence, the construction of tunnels, training camps, training, manpower, communication, propaganda and public relations (Colin 2015). Indeed, shortly after the visit, Iranian commander Muhammad Ali Jafri announced that Iran would supply Hamas with the technology of the Fajer 5 long-range artillery rockets,⁴² requested by Sinwar in order to attack Israel's "soft underbelly"—Tel Aviv.

In the summer of 2013, Sinwar established the Nukhba, an elite commando force, created with Iran's guidance and assistance. I submit that the force was established following Sinwar's visit to Iran. The Nukhba is a twin of Hezbollah's Radwan Force,⁴³ dedicated to target attacks in Israel's territory. The commando's fighters were hand-picked from the al-Qasam Brigades according to strict criteria that included religious dedication, physical fitness and security clearance.⁴⁴ In 2014, after the Nukhba force was

⁴⁰ In a speech delivered in Gaza on 25.12.2017, Sinwar told of his visit and meeting with Qasem Suleimani in 2012. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjipX7h7Boo>

See also: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iJ5OnRWghdl&t=77s>

See: <https://samanews.ps/ar/post/323101> 6.2.2024

⁴¹ No details are known regarding this visit, except for Sinwar's report of his visit in a speech given in 2017.

⁴² <https://iranwire.com/en/politics/122054-hamas-and-iran-from-muslim-brotherhood-to-suleimanis-legacy> viewed 25.2.2024. The Iranian Fajr 5 rocket was developed in the 1990s, it carries a warhead weighing 170 kg and its range is over 75 km, covering the distance from Gaza to central Israel including Tel Aviv. For further reading on the rocket development see: <https://www.idf.il/en/mini-sites/the-hamas-terrorist-organization/special-report-the-deadly-rocket-arsenal-of-hamas>

⁴³ The Radwan Force, in Arabic name فوج الحاج رضوان, was established by Hezbollah in 2006, and in 2008 after the assassination of Hezbollah commander Imad Mughniyeh, its name was changed to the Radwan Force, commemorating Mughniyeh's name. The force was created by Qasem Soleimani, commander of the Iranian al-Quds forces, for special invasion missions into Israel and occupying the northern Galilee. The Radwan Force adopted the doctrine of tunnels as well.

⁴⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/10/18/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9> viewed 3.3.2024

consolidated, Hamas commanders began to sound the slogan, “We will invade them,” indicating the new strategy to transfer the war into “enemy territory,”⁴⁵ inside Israel.

The Nukhba forces, which numbered 5000 fighters, were intensively trained and its men underwent religious indoctrination.⁴⁶ The commanders of the Nukhba and dozens of its fighters trained in Iran or in Hezbollah camps in Lebanon. The training took place under the supervision of Qassem Soleimani and his replacement, Ismail Kahani.⁴⁷ For their training, models of army camps and Israeli settlements were built in Gaza. It was the Nukhba force that carried out the attack on October 7, 2023.

Alongside the establishment of the Nukhba, Sinwar instructed the acceleration of the construction of the underground city of Gaza—the network of tunnels. When Sinwar was released from prison, tunnel construction was already well under way. The idea first emerged during the al-Aqsa Intifada period, due to the topography of Gaza—a small, flat territory with little vegetation and no place to hide. The more sophisticated tunnels were begun in 2007, immediately after Hamas had gained control over Gaza. Hamas leaders claimed that building the tunnels was the idea of Imad Mughniyeh⁴⁸ and Qasem Soleimani. Iran financed the construction and Hamas recruited thousands of employed workers from Gaza who labored around the clock to build the tunnels. From the Hamas perspective, the tunnels were not intended only as hiding places during Israeli attacks on Gaza, but also as offensive tunnels that would conceal infiltration into Israel and firing of rockets.

Ever since Sinwar concentrated the power and leadership of Hamas into his own hands, he has worked to improve Hamas’ relationship with Iran and reinforce its ties with Hezbollah. Within a short time period, after he was elected as the Head of the Politburo in Gaza, official Hamas delegations repeatedly visited Tehran and met with Iranian leaders and commanders of the IRGC of Iran’s military forces. In January 2016, Dr. Ahmad

⁴⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/10/18/%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%86%D8%AE%D8%A8%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D9%88%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AA%D9%8A-%D9%83%D8%B3%D8%B1%D8%AA-%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%A8%D8%A9> viewed 22.2.2024

⁴⁶ <https://www.trtarabi.com/explainers-15529357> viewed 3.3.2024

⁴⁷ The Wall Street Journal. 25.10.2024

⁴⁸ Imad Fayeze Mughniyeh was head of the Hezbollah’s military arm. He was killed on 13.2.2008 in a car bombing in Damascus implemented jointly by the CIA and the Israeli Mossad.

Yosef, a Hamas leader in Gaza, declared that “Iran’s financial and military support of the movement’s military arm has never stopped” (Abu Amer 2016). Saleh al-Arouri, Haniyeh’s deputy and contact person between Hamas and Iran, admitted that though the political ties with Iran were harmed with the eruption of the Arab Spring, at the height of their disagreement and despite the severance of relations, Iranian military help never ceased and Iran continued to supply Hamas with its primary aid.⁴⁹

According to testimony of the Hamas leadership, Qasem Soleimani visited Gaza more than once.⁵⁰ On 11 December 2017, Sinwar received a phone call from Qasem Soleimani, which received publicity both in Iran and Gaza in order to stress its contents. In this call, Soleimani informed Sinwar that the al-Quds Brigades would provide every necessary aid and support to Hamas in its war against Jerusalem.⁵¹ Several days later, Sinwar stated that the Iranians’ aid was offered without any conditions.⁵² This phone call signaled a renewal of open ties between Hamas and Iran.

In May 2019, in a speech delivered in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar admitted that “without the help from Iran with weaponry, we couldn’t have attained military capabilities... Iran supplied us with rockets and also supported us financially and technically in developing the rockets we used to bomb Tel Aviv. And this was during a time when the Islamic nation gave up on us. Therefore, we needn’t be condemned for our gratitude to Iran, it is our duty to thank whoever supports and helps us.”⁵³

Up until 7 October, Iran continued to be the sole supplier of weaponry, training and financing for Hamas. It is doubtful that Iran had previous knowledge of Hamas’ October 7th attack, but one thing is clear: without Iran’s military support, Hamas would have been incapable of implementing its attack.

⁴⁹ Al-Quds television, 30.12.2017.

⁵⁰ <https://al-efagh.net/99181/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B4%D9%87%D9%8A%D8%AF-%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%85%D9%83%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%85%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%88%D9%85%D8%A9-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%84%D8%B3> 8/1/2018

⁵¹ <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%86%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1-%D9%8A%D8%AE%D9%84%D9%82-%D8%AC%D8%AF%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%8B-%D8%A8%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA%D9%87-%D8%AD%D9%88%D9%84-%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%B3%D9%85-%D8%B3%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A>

⁵² Palestine Today newspaper, 21.12.2017.

⁵³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRZlPFpKGf8> viewed 28.2.2024

Dawah

By applying the *dawah* system, Hamas succeeded in the Islamization of Gaza's society and culture, recruiting the population and propelling the struggle forward. Indoctrination was implemented through the formal and informal education system, the contents of the kindergartens' end-of-year parties, via television and radio, the social media, street displays, including military parades, billboards, graffiti and sermons in the mosques. Since 2017, Sinwar has repeatedly organized forums, especially for youngsters, students and journalists, to explain Hamas' policies and recruit his audiences to join the struggle against Israel. These forums received extensive media coverage.

Summer Camps

In order to advance national religious education, the Hamas government established a ministry dedicated to indoctrinating young children and youth, headed by a member of Hamas' political bureau in Gaza. The ministry has been active in schools, mosques, youth movements and social clubs in order to disseminate the values of Islam and Palestinian nationalism. One of the more successful means has been indoctrination through summer camps.

Up until the summer of 2010, Hamas ran summer camps whose activities were of an Islamic cultural nature, such as learning the Koran and recreational activities. In 2007, Hamas started to implement pre-military training programs in the high schools. In the summer of 2011, Hamas extended this framework for different age groups, both boys and girls, and introduced military training alongside national religious indoctrination into summer camps for adolescent boys, under the auspices of the al-Qasam Brigades. The camps were designated to prepare and train a new generation to be soldiers of the future.

Hamas supplied the campers with clothing, a hot meal and cash gifts.⁵⁴ In 2012 the camps were run under the slogan, "Jerusalem Is Closer." One of the campers said, "The Islamic faith has been planted in our hearts, we were given military training, and today we

⁵⁴ https://paltoday.ps/ar/post/111870_viewed_6.3.2024

are stronger and we will be able to continue pursuing our enemy until we expel the Jews, the oppressors, from our lands. *Jihad* is victory or death.”⁵⁵

In 2013, the camps were run under the slogan, “The Generation of Return.”⁵⁶ In 2017, Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas’ Political Bureau, took part in the opening ceremony of the summer camps under the slogan “Marching to Jerusalem.” In 2018, around 40,000 youth participated in camps under the slogan “I am returning to my homeland.”

In 2021, after a round of war, tens of thousands of children attended summer camps under the slogan “The Sword of Jerusalem.” Hamas stressed that the camps are designated to prepare the generation of liberation. In 2022, 100,000 youths attended summer camps. In July 2023, the camps were attended by around 100,000 youths who were called the “Shield of Jerusalem.”⁵⁷

Since 2011 and up until the summer of 2023, hundreds of thousands of children and adolescents have undergone training and indoctrination in the Hamas camps. The camps that provide adolescents with military training serve as a source of manpower for Hamas in general, and for the Nukhba forces particularly. The large number of young people exposed to national Islamic indoctrination have led to a cultural change in the population⁵⁸ and to increased support of Hamas.

The Marches of Return

The “Marches of Return” began on 30 March 2018 as a private initiative by a group of youngsters from Rafiah. Their aim was to carry out demonstrations at the border fence in protest of the siege. Sinwar embraced the idea, and used it to further inculcate the myth of return.⁵⁹ Sinwar noted that “the marches are a wonderful idea that has achieved many goals, especially the revival of the right of return amongst the young generation, creating

⁵⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=6W2-OLXfGn>

⁵⁶ <https://palinfo.com/news/2013/06/06/165214> viewed 6.3.2024

⁵⁷ <https://palinfo.com/news/2023/07/08/842850> viewed 4.3.2024

⁵⁸ The median age of the Gaza population is 18.

⁵⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HDBa98zblTE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=AYZRFH2kx0>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbHKmf7h2_U

a state of constant confrontation that has preserved the spirit of confrontation and the struggle against the occupation.”⁶⁰

Hamas exploited the organizational framework of *dawah* to promote the Marches of Return: tents were set up in five focal demonstration sites, and on each tent was written a name of a village or town where Palestinians had lived prior to 1948. Elderly people sat at the entrance of each tent and related stories about Palestine before the Nakba to young audiences. A free internet network as well as transportation, food and drink were provided; and cash money that was donated by Iran was distributed to the demonstrators. Ceremonies were conducted, speeches were delivered, new songs were written reflecting the national spirit.⁶¹ Demonstrations were held every Friday and attracted tens of thousands of people from the Gaza Strip. As instructed by Hamas, violent elements were introduced as well, such as incendiary kites, some of which carried the map of Palestine or the swastika, or balloon bombs that ignited fires, causing damage to Israeli agricultural fields.⁶²

Rounds of Fighting

Since Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005, Hamas has not ceased firing rockets towards Israel and launching terrorist activities. It would be difficult to find a single day in the yearly calendar in which no act of violence or terrorism by Hamas was recorded.

Since Hamas’ control over Gaza in 2007, it has led four rounds of high-intensity fighting and another eight rounds of fighting of lower intensity.

On 24 September 2007, Israel’s Cabinet designated the Gaza Strip as “hostile territory.”⁶³ Following a siege and sanctions by Israel, Hamas increased its terrorist attacks, especially rocket attacks. On 24 December, in a single day, Hamas fired more than 60 rockets into Israel, including genuine Grad missiles. In response, on 27 December, Israel launched an offensive, Operation Cast Lead, which lasted 21 days and ended with a

⁶⁰ al-Aqsa television 4 November 2019

⁶¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-aDW1e-w1c>

⁶² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jZoseZa42cM&t=76s>

⁶³ <https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/General/behind-the-headlines-israel-designates-gaza-a-hostile-territory> viewed 1.2.2024

ceasefire negotiated through Egypt. In this round of fighting, more than 750 Palestinians were killed and extensive damage to property was incurred. During this conflict, Hamas fired around 650 rockets into Israel. From Hamas' perspective, this round of fighting ended with their victory and served as a milestone in the history of *jihad* against Israel.⁶⁴

On 14 November 2012, following a Hamas rocket attack on Israel, an Israeli offensive, Operation Pillar of Defense, was launched and continued for seven days. During this operation, which began with the assassination of Ahmad Jabri, commander of the al-Qasam Brigades, Israel executed air strikes, causing massive damage to the Gaza Strip. In this round of fighting, Hamas fired 1500 missiles into Israel that included, for the first time, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Hamas saw in this round the creation of a new balance of power vis-à-vis Israel. One month after the conflict ended, in December 2012, Khaled Mashaal spoke at a large public rally in Gaza and declared that “nothing will remain of the State of Israel, not in Gaza, not in the West Bank, not in Jerusalem and not throughout historic Palestine.”⁶⁵

A Palestinian opinion poll, conducted after the round of fighting ended, found that 87% of Palestinians thought Hamas had won, whereas only 3% claimed that Israel had won.⁶⁶

Following this round, Hamas put all its efforts into reinforcing and building up its military power and weapon arsenal. This was manifested in intensive smuggling of arms, especially Iranian weaponry, that made its way from Iran to Sudan then to Egypt and through the Sinai Peninsula into Gaza. At the same time, Hamas started to develop local weaponry production industries, led by Iranian guidance and training.⁶⁷ Encouraged by its success, and under Sinwar's leadership, Hamas continued developing plans for a new round of combat, with increased fighting skills and an attack inside Israeli territory carried out by the Nukhba commando.

In October 2013, Israel exposed several offensive tunnels that Hamas had built that would facilitate its attack inside Israel. One of these tunnels led to Kibbutz Ein

⁶⁴ Hamas website, 27 December 2022 viewed 17/1/2024

⁶⁵ Al-Aqsa television station, 8 December 2012

⁶⁶ <https://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/p46e.pdf> viewed 5.3.2024

⁶⁷ <https://www.shabak.gov.il/moreshet/study/skira090714> viewed 16.2.2024

HaShlosha. It was 1.7 km long and 20 meters deep and penetrated about 300 meters into Israeli sovereign territory.⁶⁸

On 8 July 2014, Israel initiated a round of fighting, Operation Protective Edge, in order to thwart Hamas' plan for a large-scale offensive inside Israel similar to the October 7th attack.⁶⁹ Israel operated on Gaza soil, destroyed tunnels and weapons industries, leaving extensive destruction behind. During 51 days of warfare, Hamas fired 4200 rockets of various types that also targeted Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Ben Gurion Airport. At the time, the Nukhba Force made several attempts to penetrate Israeli settlements. Yahya Sinwar played a key role in this combat, including its planning stages and administration. In 2015, owing to its terrorist activities, the United States added Sinwar to the list of "International Terrorists." Israel added his name to the list of those marked for assassination.⁷⁰

A Palestinian opinion poll, conducted after the round of fighting had ended, found that 79% of the population claimed Hamas had won, whereas only 3% said that Israel had won. The results of this poll reflected Hamas' increased popularity and its victory. 86% of the poll respondents supported continued rocket attacks on Israel from Gaza.⁷¹

In July 2018, alongside the Marches of Return, Hamas established a Joint Operations Room together with eleven resistance factions active in Gaza, to administer the conflict with Israel. The war room united the military forces in the Gaza Strip under one command and coordinated their activities. This cooperation led to three large-scale military maneuvers in preparation for war. The last maneuver took place on 12 September 2023.⁷²

In May 2021 the most significant of the rounds of war began. The alleged cause for initiating this round was the al-Aqsa Mosque. The conflict lasted for eleven days, during which time Hamas fired 4400 rockets and Israeli air strikes caused massive damage to Gaza. When ceasefire commenced, victory festivals and celebrations erupted

⁶⁸ <https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4440134,00.html>

⁶⁹ Haaretz Newspaper, 25.1.2024

⁷⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.net/encyclopedia/2017/2/13> viewed 31.1.2024

⁷¹ https://www.pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/Special%20Gaza%20War%20Poll%20english%20_0.pdf Viewed 7.3.2024

⁷² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DN1ehfR4TxU>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jy4x_qeuTEY

throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with crowds flooding the streets, Hamas flags flying, and candies and sweets showered upon the celebrants.⁷³ The Hamas leaders, headed by Sinwar, adhered to the version that the campaign was not for Gaza, but for Jerusalem. Sinwar expressed satisfaction with the unification of the various Palestinian factions in the fighting against Israel: “We fired 3000 rockets at Tel Aviv... We will continue until the liberation and return to Palestine. Netanyahu will curse the day he was born.”⁷⁴

In an opinion poll taken in June 2022, 77% of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank perceived Hamas as victorious. 65% of Palestinians responded that Hamas had achieved its goals. 72% of the respondents believed that Hamas had operated to protect Jerusalem and al-Aqsa. 53% said that Hamas is worthy of representing the Palestinian people. 94% said they were proud of Gaza’s war performance. Only one percent of the respondents thought that Israel had won the round of fighting.⁷⁵

The Goals of Hamas in the Attack

Sinwar did not seek just another round of war in the “Flood of Jerusalem,” similar to the rounds of fighting that had occurred since 2007, but rather sought to transform the October 7th attack into a strategic turning-point⁷⁶ that would change Arab and international attitudes towards Hamas⁷⁷ and tip the regional balance of power in favor of the Palestinians.

Hamas is characterized as a value-oriented movement (Smelser 1963), with radical and utopian traits, whose deep commitment to its principles and ideology is mandatory to fulfill its mission. The Gaza Strip’s socio-economic and political state serves as a greenhouse for a value-oriented movement. These conditions precipitate a collective organization that turns to national religious ideology. A value-oriented movement takes

⁷³ The Palestinian News Agency WAFA, 21.5.2022

⁷⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GccfGKsSZjs&t=205s>

⁷⁵ <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/845> viewed 6.3.2024

⁷⁶ See Sinwar’s speech of 4.11.2017

<https://www.facebook.com/AJA.Palestine/videos/2401958423266571> viewed 24.2.2024

⁷⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc7F4S61VEM> last viewed 18.2.2024

radical steps, including war, when it is blocked from realizing its ideological and political goals (Smelser 1963).

The goals of the attack:

Regional war – Sinwar and the Hamas leadership sought to transform a local event — war in Gaza, into a regional event—an all-out war against Israel.⁷⁸ On the morning of the attack, Mohammad Dief, operating as Chief of Staff of Hamas, called for “a general recruitment of Palestinians in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Israel, and of our brothers in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, to join the war of Hamas.”⁷⁹ Documents seized by the Israeli army in Khan Yunis revealed that Sinwar’s starting assumption was that Hezbollah would join the war. In these documents Sinwar claimed that he held a commitment by which the Iranian axis would participate in the war, and that the war in the south would trigger a parallel war from the north, which Hezbollah had been practicing under the banner of “conquering the Galilee.”⁸⁰

Bringing the Palestinian question back into the Arab and international discourse – In the past decade, the Palestinians felt isolated, shoved to the margins of the international and Arab agendas. The American-Saudi-Israeli initiative to establish a political-strategic-Sunni axis against Iran targeted Hamas as well.⁸¹ Sinwar was angry that “the Islamic nation has abandoned us”⁸² and that the United States seeks to erase the Palestinian problem.⁸³

The al-Aqsa Mosque – Israel’s conquest of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque in 1967 has since remained an insult and humiliation for the Palestinians, and for Muslims in general. Jews’ entry into the al-Aqsa Mosque is seen by Hamas as a desecration of its sanctity,⁸⁴ and Hamas feared that Israel’s right-wing government wants to divide the

⁷⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqiLF_pQDhw, Sinwar’s speech of 29 May 2021.

⁷⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/2023/10/7/%D8%B1%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%B5%D9%88%D8%AA%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D9%84%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%AF-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85-%D9%84%D8%A5%D8%B7%D9%84%D8%A7%D9%82-%D8%B9%D9%85%D9%84%D9%8A%D8%A9>, viewed .4.2024

⁸⁰ https://www.ynet.co.il/yedioth/article/yokra13809762_viewed_4.3.2024

⁸¹ Sinwar’s speech, 4.11.2017 <https://www.facebook.com/AJA.Palestine/videos/2401958423266571>

⁸² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GRZlPFpKGf8_viewed_24.2.2024

⁸³ Al-Quds television 21.12.2017

⁸⁴ Reuters News Agency 10.10.2023

Hamas telegram channel, 9 October 2023

control of the mosques between Muslims and Jews. For Hamas, the al-Aqsa Mosque is taboo, it is inviolable, it is a struggle to the death. Sinwar threatened Israel many times that “the al-Aqsa Mosque is a red line.”⁸⁵ Hamas chose to name the October 7th attack the “Flood of Jerusalem” in order to create an emotional, religious motivation to encourage Muslim support of the war.

Releasing Palestinian prisoners from Israeli prisons – By taking Israeli soldiers and civilians hostage, Hamas sought to reach a deal wherein all the Palestinian prisoners would be released from Israeli prisons, as well as releasing Palestinians imprisoned in the United States charged with financing the Hamas movement.⁸⁶

Removing the siege from Gaza – The siege on Gaza, declared by Israel in 2007, isolated the Gaza Strip, harmed free movement and prevented economic development. “The situation is unbearable; our people can no longer live under the siege...”⁸⁷

Damage to Israel’s image – to humiliate Israel and end its aspiration to be a natural element in the Arab region at the expense of the Palestinian people.⁸⁸

Undermining Israel’s sense of security – by transferring the war into Israeli territory and breaking the spirit of Israeli society.

Undermining Israel’s deterrence – by creating a mindset of victory and of the Palestinians’ ability to fight Israel and win, and changing the regional balance of power.

Damage to the hegemony of the United States in the Middle East – by claiming that the United States’ hegemony in the world order has harmed the Palestinian issue, and changing the world order into a multi-polar or bi-polar order based on justifiable principles will benefit the Palestinians’ cause.⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

⁸⁵ <https://www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/defense/276936>

⁸⁶ The Guardian, 10.10.2023

⁸⁷ Al-Aqsa television, 4.11.2019

⁸⁸ <https://masdardiplomacy.com> 7.11.2023

⁸⁹ <https://www.memri.org.il/cgi-webaxy/item?5687>

Ever since Hamas gained control of Gaza, it is difficult to find a date on the calendar when no terrorist incident was recorded. Terrorism, or for Hamas, *jihad*, has become a central component of its culture of conflict. As a result, the permanent and inherent reality of a continuous and violent struggle was created, which every few months erupted and flared up into a wave of violence and high-intensity warfare.

The rounds of fighting were initiated, planned and orchestrated as part of the methodical plan of the Hamas leadership, headed by Sinwar, to gradually raise the level of terrorism to that of a strategic war.

Without the support of the population, attained through the *dawah* system, Sinwar would not have achieved his goal. Popular support for Hamas is based on communal solidarity rather than religious piety. The political Islam of Hamas has been transformed into a form of populist nationalism that has augmented feelings of communal solidarity.

The *dawah* created socio-psychological changes that created the resistance culture of *muqawama*. Societal beliefs in the de-legitimization of Israel, in the justness of the goals and patriotism, accelerated the rounds of fighting. The orientation of collective emotions, especially hatred and revenge alongside intensified religious feelings, provided the motivation for fighting and causing affliction, often cruel and brutal in nature, and neutralized any sense of guilt or shame that may stem from especially violent acts (Bandura 1999).

The myth of return became a central motif in public life and in national patriotic feelings. It served as a platform to recruit and mobilize the Gaza population to terrorism, particularly amongst the refugees who constitute 75% of Gaza's residents. The demand to implement the right of return won consensus, and the word "Return" became a codename that ignites national sentiments.

In the eyes of Hamas, Israel is the embodiment of a cruel, oppressive, murderous people who are fascists, Nazis, satanic. Hamas utilized de-legitimization to justify its terrorist acts and grant moral justification to its actions. Social beliefs concerning victim mentality fostered hatred, anger, irritation and a desire for revenge.

Sinwar operated within this socio-psychological maelstrom and harnessed it to his goals. His leadership was consistent and target-oriented, and he believed in his ability to change the

circumstances of Gaza's society. His top priority was to empower and build up the military force, in which he invested his efforts and energies. He upgraded the power of al-Qasam, tripling its number of fighters. For him, the end justified all the means, including the Gaza population having to pay a heavy price in lives and property. The force of his determination and faith empowered him to repeatedly attempt reaching a strategic war. His experience and knowledge of Israel's society and leadership, acquired in prison, helped him determine the time for the attack and achieve such horrendous results, whose impact on the conflict will be felt for many years to come.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which has continued for over 130 years, is a prototype that meets the criteria of "an intractable conflict" between ethnic, national, cultural and religious conflicts of interest, and at its center lies the claim of each side to recognize the same territory as its birthplace and homeland. An intractable conflict is characterized by ongoing violence and causes the parties involved repeated exposure to negative experiences, including traumas, which create societal beliefs, attitudes and emotions which fuel the socio-psychological infrastructure that mobilizes the conflict.

Therefore, I was not surprised by the results of the public opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Institute, PCPSR, showing that the war is increasing Hamas' popularity. Hamas won overwhelming support. 72% of the public believe that Hamas' decision to launch the October 7 attack was correct. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians condemn the positions taken by the US and the main European powers during the war, and express the belief that they have lost their moral compass.⁹⁰

I have no illusions—in the current psychological and social conditions and given the mindset of both sides, it is impossible to reach an agreement to end the conflict. It will be very difficult to reach a de facto coexistence agreement after the trauma of October 7th and after a war that, while this chapter was written, has already continued for five months. If before the war hatred was rampant, after the war that hatred will grow sevenfold.

⁹⁰ <https://pcpsr.org/en/node/963> Viewed 14.3.2024

Nonetheless, we must not give in to the dictates of the reality that has emerged. It is incumbent upon both societies to find the way, even if strewn with landmines, to a political solution and disengagement between the two peoples, in order to leave an opening for hope.

I take a hard look at the emerging reality with concern, and pray for peace.

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