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WEST POINT CTC SUMMARIES

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA:

Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad

PREFACE

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For the first time in years, the authority of the secular nationalist movement led by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was challenged by the emergence of Islamic fundamentalist groups in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (the author centers his discussion on Islamic Jihad and Hamas, alternately referred to as the Muslim Brotherhood). There is an underlying struggle between the two trends that focuses on defining the orientation of Palestinian society and its leadership. The book attempts to assess the prospects for both fundamentalists and nationalists.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic movement in the Occupied Territories is an integral part of the world Islamic movement. Despite their different methods, the goal of Islamic groups is to transform society into an Islamic one that is modeled after the first Islamic society established by the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Establishing an Islamic state, they believe, will

bring resolution to all political, economic and social conflicts engulfing the world. The Islamic movement in the West Bank and Gaza was initially supported by the Israelis and the PLO, as both groups hoped to control it. The Israelis wanted to undermine the influence of the PLO, whereas the PLO hoped to neutralize a challenge to its own authority.

CHAPTER ONE: THE EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD SOCIETY

The relationship of the original Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood (MB) with Palestine began in 1935. In 1936, the MB sent a small group of members to take part in armed attacks on Jewish installations in Palestine during the Arab revolt against the British Mandate. In the aftermath of WWII, the MB sent representatives to Palestine to incite opposition to Zionism and to assist in the military training of Palestinian groups. MB volunteers participated in the 1948 war against the newly created

Jewish state. Following the 1948 war and prior to 1967, the MB developed differently in the West Bank and Gaza. The West Bank came under Jordanian control, and the Jordanians were relatively tolerant of the organization. In Gaza, under Egypt-

tian control, the MB was treated harshly and was banned in 1949. Support came from the mother organization in Egypt, the Saudi royal family and sympathizers working in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. The Free Officers revolution in Egypt in 1952 marked a turning point in MB relations with the masses. For two years, the organization enjoyed the support of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir's government; in 1954, however, Nasir signed the Evacuation Treaty with Britain. The MB opposed the treaty and attempted to assassinate Nasir. From that point forward, the MB was banned entirely and its activities were forced underground. In 1965, after the MB tried to seize power in Egypt, members were subjected to widespread arrests. Many emigrated to the Gulf and Saudi Arabia. One of the members arrested was Ahmad Yasin, who later became the leader of Hamas. The wars of 1967 and 1973 against Israel were used by Islamic groups to raise Islamic consciousness in the region.

TIMELINE

1954

MB Assassination attempt on Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir

1965

MB attempted coup in Egypt. MB member and future founder of Hamas, Ahmad Yasin, arrested

1967

Arab defeat in Six-Day War against Israel

1973

Al-Mujamma' al-Islami (Islamic Center), a front organization for the MB in Gaza, established

Oct—war against Israel (a.k.a. Yom Kippur war, "Badr," "Egyptian victory")

1979

Iranian Islamic Revolution

1980

Anwar al-Sadat assassinated

The founding of Islamic Jihad in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

1982

Israel invades Lebanon

Failed Fez Peace Plan calling for Arab recognition of Israel.

OT INSIGHTS

- In MB literature Israeli occupation is described as a curse from God because the Palestinians have left the true path of Islam. The United States, the West and Arab governments are also targets for attacks.

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The oil revolution also helped these groups enhance their influence because states with new wealth, power and an Islamic orientation—such as Saudi Arabia—became major players in the geopolitics of the region.

Beginning in 1967, the MB started establishing mechanisms to spread its ideas and increase its influence. The MB founded charities, schools, libraries, medical clinics and sports clubs. In 1973, the leader of the MB in Gaza, Ahmad

Yasin, founded *al-Mujamma` al-Islami* (Islamic Center), which provided an umbrella for MB activities and served myriad social, educational and medical needs of the community. The period between 1975 and 1985 saw a steady increase in the MB's influence. The PLO, however, made a gradual recovery from the setback it suffered in Lebanon in 1982, causing the political balance to tip in its favor temporarily.

TIMELINE

1983

Violent clashes between the PLO and the MB on the campus of the Islamic University in Gaza. More than 200 students were injured.

1985

Feb—Palestinian-Jordanian Accord regarding Palestinian self-determination within the framework of a confederation.

1987

Nov-Dec—Successful escape of Islamic Jihad members from Gaza prison, several operations against Israeli targets, mass demonstrations and a traffic accident were the final straws that helped set the *intifada* into motion.

Dec—the eruption of the Palestinian *intifada* (uprising). Establishment of Hamas

1988

Aug—Hamas issues a charter in which it outlines its philosophy.

Nov—The Palestinian National Council declared the establishment of the state of Palestine.

1989

Apr—Hamas rejects Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's proposal for elections in the territories.

1991

Oct—Madrid Peace Conference and subsequent Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Washington.

CHAPTER TWO: THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THE PALESTINE QUESTION

The MB considers all of Palestine to be Muslim land and holds that Israel has no right to exist. This ideological position has not changed since Israel's inception in 1948. Unlike national-

ist groups (such as the PLO), the MB does not make its claim to Palestine based on geography and nationalism alone. Rather, the MB considers Palestine a religious matter, and it views Israel as a spearhead of Western influence and a tool that spreads Western corruption and plots against Is-

lam. The MB argues that the failure to make Palestine part and parcel of the broader Muslim agenda amounts to treason because such a failure excludes millions of Muslims from the struggle against the Jewish state and its allies. The catastrophe (*al-Nakba*) that was the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and its continued survival is seen as the responsibility of the Arab governments because they handed Palestine over to Israel in a "theatrical battle which lacked planning, military training, and the amassing of arms." The only way to realize the holy struggle for Palestine, they argue, is to return to Islamic principles and contain the non-Islamic reality in order to liberate all the land and return it to Islam. The MB makes no distinction between Jews, Zionists and Israelis.

The MB's strategy toward Palestine/Israel involves the establishment of an Islamic state in a neighboring country—such as Syria, Egypt, or Jordan—that will serve as a base for the Islamic

movement in Palestine and as a basic prerequisite to realizing the general goal embodied in the victory of the Islamic call.

Therefore, the MB opposes the PLO's once held strategic goal of establishing a secular democratic state in Palestine. The MB also opposes the PLO because it believes that the latter is the product of the Arab regimes, and it is an organization that does not serve God. The MB argues that this is a direct result of the PLO's composition, which brings together leftist factions that serve the interests of communism and Israel. The MB projects itself as the alternative to the PLO, the latter of which refuses to become Islamic. PLO factions, for their part, criticized what they saw as a refusal by the MB to engage in armed resistance against Israel, at least until the eruption of the *intifada* (uprising) in 1987. In fact, PLO groups argued openly that the Israeli authorities opened the door for the Palestinian MB so that it would compete with and undermine the PLO. Under severe criticism from the PLO, the MB's position toward a more militant role gradually evolved from its traditional stance of "education before active engagement." To participate in the *intifada*, MB established the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas). Hamas' pragmatism became more evident as its strength vis-à-vis the PLO grew. Five years after the eruption of the *intifada*, Hamas leaders expressed preparedness to join the PLO if the organization was willing to conduct elections to select a new Palestinian National Council, the Palestinian parliament in exile. Hamas even voiced the view that they would be willing to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state on part of Palestine as a first step toward total liberation.

OT INSIGHTS

- **Insistence on using the term "Jews" reflects the underlying religious nature of the conflict as defined by the MB.**
- **The MB and PLO positions were so far apart that relations deteriorated to the point of violent clashes between the two sides.**

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CHAPTER THREE: THE INTIFADA

When Israel's occupation policies entered a collision course with a heightened state of national consciousness among the Palestinians, 20 years of seething discontent turned into an uprising. The uprising did not happen in a vacuum. It was subtle and muffled, awaiting the appropriate historical moment to explode. Individuals who were monitoring the situation in the territories and viewed events in a continuum foresaw the explosion. The PLO and its leadership had not been able to deliver on their promises, and

the armed struggle was reduced to an empty slogan. Throughout the Arab world, the Palestinian problem sank in importance and there was a palpable Arab negligence of issues "Palestinian." In the Israeli arena, the settlement of the territories continued full swing and there were voices calling for a "resettlement" solution, which was basically a population transfer to create an alternative homeland for Palestinians in the already Palestinian-dominated Kingdom of Jordan.

THE CATALYSTS

Immediately before the uprising, six members of Islamic Jihad escaped from the Gaza central prison.

CT INSIGHTS

- Although the MB and PLO each claim that it was behind the eruption of the *intifada*, the *intifada* erupted without any political decision by any organized group.
- The Hamas charter that was issued nearly eight months after its establishment is considered a fundamental indication of the establishment of Hamas as the resistance wing of the MB.
- Hamas receives funding through local donations, Islamic movements abroad, informal donations from diaspora communities, state sponsors, the PLO and investments.
- Hamas sees itself as "a world movement...and it must be considered and evaluated, and its role recognized on this basis."

The escape aroused nationalist sentiments and created a sense of mobilization in the population. Shortly after, some of the escapees were involved in the assassination of Ron 'Tal, head of the Israeli military police in Gaza. Just prior to the uprising there was a bloody confrontation between the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and a group of Islamic Jihad members. Demonstrators took to the streets, and admiration of Islamic Jihad reached an all time high. One day before the uprising, an Israeli was stabbed to death in Gaza, and the next day there was a collision between an Israeli truck and two vehicles carrying workers from the Jabaliyya refugee camp in Gaza. When the news reached the camp, demonstrations erupted, marking the beginning of the *intifada*.

The *intifada* marked the start of a new phase in the evolution of the Palestinian MB, characterized by actual jihad. To deal with this new and sudden development, a meeting was held at the house of Ahmad Yasin on December 9, 1987. Attending the meeting were most of the prominent leaders of the MB Islamic Center in Gaza, and this group comprised the first Hamas leadership.

Like the other PLO factions, Hamas participated in the various activities of the *intifada*. For the specific purpose of violent tac-

tics against Israeli targets (as well as real and perceived Palestinian collaborators), Hamas established a militant body called Kata'ib 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam. Hamas became the MB's parallel to the PLO's newly established Unified National Leadership of the Intifada (UNL). The UNL repeatedly urged Hamas to stop opposing PLO decisions.

Even with visions of a new Middle East following the end of the Gulf War and the fall of the Soviet Union, the UNL's appeals fell on deaf ears. The prospects for direct clashes between Hamas and Fatah—the largest PLO faction—loomed on the horizon. As far as Hamas was concerned, and reflected in its charter, "only jihad can solve the Palestinian issue" and "initiatives, so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences to solve the Palestinian issue are at variance with the doctrine of the Islamic Resistance Movement." In its charter, however, Hamas states that it looks at other movements, both nationalist and Islamic, as being covered by the principle of *ijtihad* (the process of formulating a Shari'a-based opinion). The conduct of Hamas following the issuance of the charter has not exactly reflected what was articulated in the charter, especially with regard to the PLO.

Through Hamas, the MB emerged as a major challenger to the PLO and was able to achieve in a few short years the kind of credibility, popularity and legitimacy that took the PLO more than 20 years to establish. Together with Islamic Jihad, the MB achieved a record of Islamic resistance that continues to be claimed and drawn upon in their struggle against Israel. Moreover, the MB/Hamas influence and the change in the balance of power between the Islamists and PLO nationalists has also been evident in the changing nationalist discourse. Mindful of the growing effectiveness of mass mobilization, the nationalists too have resorted to the frequent use of Islamic references (e.g. Qur'anic verses and other religious indications).

CHAPTER FOUR: ISLAMIC JIHAD

Islamic Jihad (IJ) began as a splinter group of the MB. The 1967 war against Israel was a pivotal point in the evolution of the MB. In the period between 1967 and 1970, questions arose within the MB about society's position toward Israel and how

the country should be combated. The issue of armed struggle was also debated. The year 1980 is considered the official date of the founding of the Palestinian IJ. The founders of the movement were two men from the Gaza Strip, Fathi al-Shaqqi and

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CT INSIGHTS

- From the point of view of Islamic Jihad, the defeat of 1967 was tantamount to a second catastrophe (the first one is the 1948 war and the establishment of the state of Israel). This war caused a severe shake-up within the MB.
- Israeli jails have been a good place for recruiting new members for the IJ.
- Because of the direct link made between religion and politics by the IJ leadership, the movement constituted a challenge to the MB as well as to the other Palestinian nationalist factions inside the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- The IJ's solution to the Palestinian problem: destruction of the state of Israel and the creation of an Islamic state in Palestine. As the IJ regards the Arab governments as an "actual security belt for Israel," it believes it cannot coexist with these regimes.
- Getting the message out: IJ's use of pamphlets, graffiti, publications, issuance of statements.

'Abd al-'Aziz 'Awda. Al-Shaqiqi, who graduated with a degree in mathematics from Birzeit University and a degree in medicine from Zaqaziq University in Egypt, is one of the organization's most important thinkers. 'Awda, the organization's spiritual leader, earned a degree in Arab and Islamic studies from Dar al-Ulum in Egypt, as well as a diploma in Islamic Shari'a.

The leaders of the IJ came from a new Islamic generation—the ranks of the MB and the PLO—and were recruited by the IJ inside Israeli prisons. Followers continue to be recruited in mosques, university campuses and at social activities. From the outset, the IJ provided a new formulation in which religion and politics were directly linked. The IJ derives its ideology from the Islamic tradition in general, but there are three historical figures who enjoy special status and are considered worthy of emulation: Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb and 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam. To these, the IJ adds Ayatollah Khomeini. The organization considers *al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah* by Muhammad 'Abd al-Salam Farraj the most important of the jihadist literature. Farraj was the leader of Egyptian Tanzim al-Jihad and was responsible for issuing the order to assassinate President Anwar al-Sadat.

Unlike the MB, the IJ is not a transnational movement; it considers Palestine its central issue. Also contrary to the MB, the IJ does not insist on the transformation of society as a prerequisite to the liberation of Palestine and the establishment of an Islamic state. In the words of a prominent Islamic writer, Fathi Yakin, to whom the IJ adheres: "the Islamic movement ought to be the academy that produces the mujahidin and heroes, before being an intellectual academy propagating culture and pure Islamic concepts among the people..."

Like the MB, however, the IJ considers the Palestinian problem religious in nature and not a national or pan-Arab nationalist issue. To the MB, the issue of Palestine should concern the entire Islamic nation. Moreover, from its inception, the IJ has stated its belief—based on Fathi Yakin—that there is a need to establish the Islamic movement as unified and international. This is necessary since the challenges facing Islam come from international movements, such as masonry, communism, Christian missionary movements and Zionism.

The IJ has drawn sharp criticism from the MB for its favorable position of unqualified support for Iran, and has even been accused by the MB of being a Shi'a organization, an accusation it flatly rejects. Differences between the IJ and the MB narrowed considerably, however, when the MB began actively participating in the struggle against Israel via Hamas and its application of violent tactics.

As for the IJ's position toward the PLO/Fatah faction, it can generally be described as ambiguous. On the one hand, Fatah's ideological view of the Palestinian issue is closer to the IJ's than it is to the MB's. On the other hand, the IJ criticizes Fatah for not being committed to Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunna. Like the MB, the IJ calls upon Fatah to return to Islam before it is too late. Also like the MB, while it does not object to cooperation with Fatah, it refuses to join the PLO.

CONCLUSION

The Islamic movement in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has made tangible gains by becoming a major political force in Palestinian society. Despite the fact that Palestinian society has a strong secular, nationalist tradition, the Islamic movement has

been able to rekindle religious sentiments and beliefs, and Palestinians have clearly shown their willingness to take an Islamic identity and give it priority over a nationalist one.

Moreover, the Islamic movement is not a homogeneous whole. The major groups comprising the movement have varying views and positions, and within each group homogeneity is far from total.

In Hamas, for example, there are fundamentalists, politicians and opportunists. Smaller factions have also split from the Islamic Jihad movement, which occur primarily as a result of personal differences or by competition (e.g., the splinter group headed by Ahmad Mahanna called Hizb Allah Palestine).

The Islamists dismiss the concept of democracy and claim that Islamic doctrine provides more just and comprehensive principles. When Islamic rule and society are not in place, however, the Islamists favor democracy as a system of government that will enable Islam to thrive and eventually take over. At that point, Islamic rule will determine whether or not it is more useful for the spread of the Islamic idea to allow the circulation of different visions.

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