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The Internal War between Hamas vs. Fatah

A Guerra Interna entre o Hamas e o Fatah

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RESUMO

Com a vitória do Hamas nas eleições de 2007, os palestinianos sofreram uma cisão, evidenciada pela disputa entre o Hamas e o Fatah. O Fatah é visto como uma organização mais progressista, que colabora com o Ocidente para promover a solução dos dois Estados. Israel, a União Europeia e os Estados Unidos, entre outros, por outro lado, definem o Hamas como uma organização terrorista. Este artigo examinará a evolução da crise interna entre as duas organizações que moldam a política palestiniana, dando ênfase à divisão em expansão desde 2007, quando o Hamas assumiu o controlo da Faixa de Gaza até 2022.

Palavras-chave: Política palestiniana; organização terrorista; Hamas; Fatah; Organização para a Libertação da Palestina

ABSTRACT

With the victory of Hamas in the 2007 elections, the Palestinians suffered a split, evidenced by the dispute between Hamas and Fatah. Fatah is viewed as a more progressive organization, working together with the West to promote the two-state solution. Israel, the European Union, and the United States, among others, on the other hand, define Hamas, as a terrorist organization. This article will examine the development of the internal crisis between the two organizations that shape Palestinian politics, with an emphasis on the expanding split since 2007, when Hamas took over the Gaza Strip until 2022.

Keywords: Palestinian politics; terrorist organization; Hamas; Fatah; Palestine Liberation Organization

1. Introduction

The Palestinian National Liberation Movement – Fatah, (*Ḥarakāt al-Taḥrīr al-Waṭanī al-Filasṭīnī*), an Arabic acronym for “Palestine would be free,” is the dominant organization within the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization). Fatah was founded in the early 1950s by activists, most of whom were supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Gaza Strip, and was headed by Yasser Arafat (*Abū Ammār*), Khalil al-Wazir (*Abū Jihad*), Salah Khalaf (*Abu Iyad*), Yusuf ‘Umairah, and more (Saleh 2017, 28-30; Abu ‘Izzah 1986, 71-96). Fatah identified itself, since its establishment, as a national liberation movement. Although it does not define the organization as religious, to this day Fatah also uses religious symbols as symbols of the liberation of Palestine, such as the use of Al-Aqsa and Jihad in the speeches of Arafat and other senior members of the organization, and using the symbols of As-Haram as-Sharif in al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades symbols. (Zelikovitz 2012, 66-71, Al-Faluji 2005, 39-55). The name Fatah itself also has a Quranic meaning of “imminent victory” (Quran 61:13). We can see the grenade and the shape of the rifles so familiar from the original Fatah symbol (ECFR 2023).

Hamas (*Ḥarakat al-Muqāwamah al-’Islāmiyyah*) was established during the start of the First Intifada in December 1987. It was founded by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin and other members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, who eventually turned Hamas into an autonomous organization with its charter and strategies. Hamas is described as a nationalist Islamist movement with political, military, and social branches. The party became Fatah’s main rival and a strong opponent of the policies of the Palestinian Authority (PA). (Bartal 2016, 44-83; Bartal 2021, 379-398).

This article will examine the development of the internal crisis between the two organizations that shape Palestinian politics, with an emphasis on the expanding split since 2007, when the Hamas took over the Gaza Strip until 2022.

2. The Beginning of Hamas vs. Fatah Crises

The reasons for the establishment of Hamas on December 14, 1987, were varied, but one of the primary ones was the sense among senior Hamas officials, including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Salah Shahada, Ibrahim Makadama, and others, that the time had come for the Muslim Brotherhood – that had left the stage open to the secular currents in Palestinian society, including Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and more – to take their rightful place in the leadership of the Palestinian population. This was in addition to the challenge posed to them by the Islamic Jihad activists led by Dr. Fathi Shakaki. The Islamic Jihad is an organization that was founded several years earlier and has already carried out acts of terrorism against Israel. (Bartal 2022)

From the onset, it seemed clear that the two sides did not disagree about the ultimate goal, which was the liberation of all of Palestine from the River Jordan to the sea, and the dispute between Hamas and Fatah focused on the way to attain this goal. Back in 1989, one of Fatah's senior officials, Rafiq al-Natsha, expressed the difference between the two organizations:

Hamas says all of Palestine is ours, and we want to liberate all of it from the sea to the river in one stroke. But Fatah, who leads the PLO, believes that we must act according to a phased plan. Both sides agree on the final goal. The disagreement is only about the path leading to this goal. (Al-Qabas, December 26, 1989)

Natsha is referring to the PLO's phased plan, which was approved in 1974 at the meeting of the Palestinian National Council. This plan also called the 10-point plan, stated that the PLO would strive to establish a state in every part of Palestine that would be liberated. However, the plan emphasizes that this agreement does not and will not constitute recognition of Israel and that an obstructive phase should be avoided. That is a stage from which it is not possible to move on to the liberation of Palestine as a whole, which remains the Palestinian end goal.

The PLO, and Arafat as its leader, spoke out more than once in the 1990s and made it clear that the Oslo Accords were part of the implementation of a new way to solve the conflict. Right-wing elements in Israel today believe that the PLO's refusal to agree to the Camp David peace initiatives in 2000 with

Ehud Barak, and the Annapolis initiative in 2008 with Ehud Olmert are due to the Palestinian approach aimed at avoiding the ending of the conflict and the signing of a document that constitutes the end of the demands of the parties. According to a PLO publication, Fatah already led the PLO to agree to a historic compromise of a two-state solution that includes the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. This compromise already includes 22 percent of the territory of historic Palestine, so any compromise beyond that is impossible. The two-state solution, as far as Fatah is concerned, is supposed to lead to a full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with minor border corrections and land swaps. All Israeli proposals, even the most generous ones, did not meet the Palestinian's minimum requirements. (Negotiations Primer 2016; Bishara 2022,).

Hamas' attitude towards the PLO, and Fatah at its head, was initially an attitude of brotherhood. In the Hamas Charter of 1988, Hamas pays tribute to the PLO for its historic contribution to the Palestinian problem and emphasizes that if the PLO continues on the path of struggle, they will be their willing soldiers. But much water has passed under the bridge since then, and since 2005, when Abu Mazen assumed the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority, and to today, the relationship between Hamas and Fatah is one of extreme rivalry, which also includes harsh accusations of treason against Fatah.

The Palestinian Liberation Organization is the closest to the heart of the Islamic Resistance Movement. It contains the father and the brother, the next of kin and the friend. The Muslim does not estrange himself from his father, brother, next of kin or friend. Our homeland is one, our situation is one, our fate is one and the enemy is a joint enemy to all of us. Because of the situations surrounding the formation of the Organization, of the ideological confusion prevailing in the Arab world as a result of the ideological invasion under whose influence the Arab world has fallen since the defeat of the Crusaders and which was, and still is, intensified through orientalists, missionaries and imperialists, the Organization adopted the idea of the secular state. And that is how Hamas views it. **Secularism completely contradicts religious ideology. Attitudes, conduct and decisions stem from ideologies.** (Hamas Charter, article 27. Emphasis by the author)

In other words, even though the Fatah organization carries out acts of terrorism and attacks Israel — and this is a fundamental difference — Fatah has a secular ideology and therefore, the conflict between Fatah, the leading organization in the PLO, and Israel can seemingly be resolved politically. The only solution to the conflict between Fatah and Hamas is not founded on rec-

conciliation agreements of one kind or another, but rather in Fatah members adopting Islam as a way of life and merging with Hamas.

Arafat and Abu Mazen wanted to integrate Hamas into the Palestinian Authority and PLO institutions. Hamas wants the PLO and Fatah at its head to become part of the Islamic bloc that opposes Israel. Each of the reconciliation agreements between Fatah and Hamas refers to elections to be held in the Palestinian National Council and in the PLO institutions. However, the main point of contention between the sides usually involved the division of political power in the PLO at the expense of Fatah's dominance and control. (Kear 2020).

The day the Palestinian Liberation Organization adopts Islam as its way of life, we will become its soldiers, and fuel for its fire that will burn the enemies. Until such a day, and we pray to Allah that it will be soon, the Islamic Resistance Movement's stand towards the PLO is that of the son towards his father, the brother towards his brother, and the relative to relative, suffers his pain and supports him in confronting the enemies, wishing him to be wise and well-guided. (Hamas Charter, article 27)

In 1993, Fatah, and its leader Yasser Arafat, chose the path of peace and reconciliation with Israel. Yasser Arafat recognized Israel as an existing fact in an exchange of letters between the PLO and the Government of Israel. On September 13, 1993, an agreement of principles was signed between Israel and the PLO, and negotiations began regarding the establishment of self-government for the Palestinian population, based on which the Palestinian National Authority was established in the territories of the West Bank and Gaza (Abu Mazen, 1995, 143-183). The PLO and Israel even agreed that following a 5-year transition period, a permanent agreement would be signed between Israel and the PLO dealing with the five main issues remaining in dispute between Israel and the Palestinians. We cannot understand the Palestine-Israel Conflict without understanding the meaning of this agreement that deeply split Palestinian society into two marked camps.

- a) The issue of the final borders between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA);
- b) The issue of the settlements;
- c) The Palestinian refugees and the issue of responsibility;
- d) Jerusalem;
- e) Security arrangements.

It was also agreed that after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, a Palestinian police force would be established that would operate in coordination with the Israeli security forces, including the IDF and the police, to ensure the safety of Israelis passing through Palestinian cities in territories designated as Area A, and the security of Palestinian citizens living in the area (Abu Mazen 1995, 225-244). The West Bank as a whole was split into three administrative areas — areas A, B and C, each accorded different status. Area A, approx. 18 percent of the total territory of the West Bank, would be exclusively administrated by the PA. Area B, approx. 22 percent of the total territory, would be jointly administrated by the PA and Israel, whereby the PA governs civilian life, but Israel controls security. Area C, approx. 60 percent of the total territory, both civil and security affairs are administered by Israel. Azmi Bishara, an Israel-Arab that served in the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) between 1996-2006 and is now the General Director of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies in Doha, described this map of Area A, B and C, in the interim agreement as representing the status quo in the West Bank to this day (Bishara 2022, 168-181).

In July 2000, at Camp David, Ehud Barak attempted to reach a permanent agreement with Yasser Arafat according to which a small Palestinian state would be established alongside Israel. This attempt failed. Even the intervention of Bill Clinton and the parameters he set did not help convince the parties to be more flexible. (Moris 2009, 133-150).

Hamas opposed everything related to the Oslo Accords and regarded this agreement from the outset as a betrayal of the Palestinian people. The territories of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem are still under occupation and the situation in these areas became even worse. (Hroub 2010, 58-61) On the day the PLO signed the agreement of principles in Washington, D.C., on September 13, 1993, a senior Hamas figure, Abd al-Aziz Rantisi, declared that it was “a black day for the Palestinian people and betrayal of the blood of the martyrs who shed their blood on the pure homeland.” (Hikāyāt al-Thawrā, 2008). During the period of the Oslo Accords, 1993-2000, Hamas operated and carried out many terrorist attacks that claimed the lives of many Israelis. Hamas used suicide bombers and bombs in Israeli streets (Bartal, 2021, 388-391). Yasser Arafat’s policy was to try to contain Hamas within the Palestinian Authority and integrate Hamas within the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. That is the reason that Arafat refrained from taking harsh measures against Hamas despite the heavy international pressure exerted on him by Israel and the United States. Arafat tried to find a way of sharing the political power between the two movements in the PLO, but maintained Fatah’s dominance.

Arafat tried to create a Palestinian consensus of all political streams in Palestinian society, including Hamas. (Al-Faluji 2005, 283-300).

The Al-Aqsa intifada, also known as the Second Intifada, that erupted in September 2000, put an end to the security cooperation between Israel and the Palestinians. Arafat was besieged and confined in the al-muqāṭaah (his headquarters in Ramallah) and passed away in November 2004. In the Camp David Summit, Arafat insisted on not capitulating on two essential issues, and paying a heavy price and even sacrificing lives. The first issue was the status of al-Aqsa and the second was the right of return for the Palestinian refugees and their descendants. (Al-Faluji 2005, 292-295). This article does not purport to deal with the subject of the Camp David Summit, about which many books and articles have been written.

During the Second Intifada, the Hamas suicide bombers were soon emulated by a growing number of Fatah suicide bombers (PSIC 2020). The Fatah members were as religious as their Hamas counterparts, and the Fatah leadership feared that the Palestinian masses, enamored with the fundamentalists' success, would cross over into the Hamas camp. (Moris 2009, 151).

The period of the joint struggle against Israel during the Second Intifada (2000-2004) led to an increase in the legitimacy of Fatah and Hamas, and conveyed Palestinian unity and a united Palestinian position. Only after Arafat's death and the election of his replacement, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), who advocated a peaceful solution, did the conflict between Hamas and Fatah become more pronounced, to the point of a large-scale military confrontation between the two organizations. It is no coincidence that Marwan Barghouti, who headed the Tanzim Fatah during the joint struggle of the Second Intifada, is the only Fatah figure capable of winning the presidency of the Palestinian Authority in the post-Abbas era in every election poll (PCPSR polls from 2007-2022).

According to Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar, Hamas received arms from Fatah and the Palestinian Authority for the attacks — further proof of the Authority's responsibility for the outbreak of the Second Intifada. Arafat decided that the negotiations at the Camp David Summit in July 2000 were going nowhere. He sent a security representative to Sheikh Salah Shehade, head of the Hamas military wing at the time, with the message: "I have no objection to Hamas taking action" (Halevi 2015).

However, after Arafat's death, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was chosen to be his successor. His approach was more committed to peace. Apparently, Abu Mazen was also the candidate acceptable to Israel since he repeatedly expressed opposition to acts of terrorism and even supported security coordination with Israel. An analysis of the trends in Palestinian presidential elec-

tions in January 9, 2005, found that 35 percent boycotted the elections and if we included voters who didn't vote for him, it means that only 36 percent voted for Abu Mazen in 2005. (Bartal 2016, 267). The mainstream in the Palestinian society since 2006 is the Islamic stream of Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, Hizb at-Tahrir and other small Salafi organizations. (Bartal 2016, 266-267).

Since 2010, Abu Mazen has postponed elections by presidential decree and continues to rule the Palestinian Authority by those elections, even though his popularity in Palestinian public opinion is at an all-time low. Abu Mazen legitimacy stems from the fact that he is considered one of the founders of Fatah who follows in the footsteps of Yasser Arafat. In August 2009, Fatah held its sixth general conference since its founding. The conference commemorated the status of Fatah's founder, Yasser Arafat, alongside pictures of Mahmoud Abbas with Arafat and the promise: "In the way of freedom, a promise is a promise, and an oath is an oath" (Fatah 2009). But Arafat was described even by Hamas as a warrior and a Palestinian symbol of resistance, which cannot be said for Abu Mazen.

His platform included the slogan: "one authority, one law, one weapon", and opposition to the armed struggle. In other words, choosing the path of compromise and political actions, in contrast to Hamas' position. Hamas, as an organization, did not present a candidate on its behalf to run against Abu Mazen, which enabled him to win the elections with a majority of 62 percent. His opponent, Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, who won only 20% of the vote, was the head of the Palestinian National Initiative (PNI) – al-Mubadara, a body composed primarily of members that split from the PLO. (Bartal 2016, 267; ECFR 2023).

The relationship between Fatah and Hamas is often seen as a relationship between two opposing extremes. From the very beginning, Hamas has never accepted the Oslo Accords as binding and regarded them as a national disaster. This is the reason Hamas boycotted the 1996 general elections – held for the first time under the Oslo Accords that were rejected by Hamas – in which Arafat was elected, and the 2005 elections which saw Abu Mazen elected President.

However, in the 2006 elections, Hamas made a strategic decision to participate in the elections and in the Palestinian political arena. The decision to participate in the 2006 election was coupled with two other decisions: the suspension of Hamas suicide attacks against Israel and the agreement in principle to join the PLO (Hroub, 2010, 137-138). According to the Hamas leadership, headed by Khaled Mashaal and Ismail Haniyeh, they had to do this to deal with Fatah's corruption and their security coordination policy with Israel.

When in 2006, we decided to participate in the general elections and participate in the institutions of the PA, the goal was to help reform the Authority and change its function and role in the service of our Palestinian people, and overcome the restrictions — especially the security restrictions — imposed by the Oslo Accords. (Saleh 2017, 445)

In January 2006, Hamas won a majority of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council (74 seats of the 132 seats). However, the rivalry between Fatah and Hamas continued even after the elections, finally leading to the disintegration of the Palestinian government and Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. Over the 18 years that have elapsed since the appointment of Abu Mazen, and especially since Abu Mazen dismissed the government of Ismail Haniyeh in June 2007 following Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip, which Abu Mazen termed an illegal takeover, the security coordination between the PA and Israeli security forces has grown even stronger (Kear, 2020, 220-233; Schanzer, 2008, 107-119). The photos of senior Fatah officials being thrown off the roofs of Gaza during Hamas' takeover of the Strip in June 2007, made it clear to Abu Mazen that if he wished to avoid similar photos in the West Bank, he must rely even more on Israel (Urquhart, Black & Tran, 2007).

The dismissed Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh from the Hamas during a press conference in Gaza City, early Friday, June 15, 2007, did not accept Abu Mazen' decision. At a news conference in Gaza City early Friday, Haniyeh rejected President Mahmoud Abbas' declaration, calling it "hasty" and saying he would maintain a unity government. Haniyeh said the situation was "not suitable for unilateral decisions". He said the Hamas militia would impose law and order "firmly, decisively and legally." He also rejected the idea of a Palestinian state in Gaza only, run by Hamas. But this is what happened since the Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip. (Kalmen, 2007; AP Newsroom, 2007). On June 14, 2007, Abu Mazen dismissed Ismail Haniyeh and declared a state of emergency. On June 15, 2007, Salam Fayyad was appointed as the new Prime Minister of the new emergency government. Fayyad was a Palestinian with US citizenship and a professional banker. He was charged with restoring security, reviving the economy, and rebuilding institutions in the West Bank. (Kear 2020, 221, 235).

Since June 2007, we have been dealing with two Palestinian entities clashing with one another, Fatah in the West Bank and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Gaza functions as a mini-independent state. Some 1000 people, almost all members of Fatah and the PA, were illegally arrested in the first month of Hamas rule by the executive Force and the Izz' ad-Din al Qassam Brigades.

(Schanzer 2008, 112-119). Hamas operatives continue to persecute Fatah activists who remained in the Gaza Strip and make their lives unbearable, as we could see in the project of *Whispered in Gaza*, an animated series by the Center for Peace Communications that was published in 2023.

For example, Othman's story, describes Hamas' sense of victory after Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip. "Back in the days of the first and second intifadas, we used to believe in something called resistance," says "Othman. "But today, the 'resistance' has become a business." Every tobacco stand and coffee shop is forced to pay Hamas protection money, he says, and when war breaks out, "[Hamas] sit in their bunkers while we have to bear the brunt. And at the end they tell us it's a victory". (*Whispered in Gaza* 2023). Basma, a licensed pharmacist in Gaza, was repeatedly harassed by Hamas over her affiliation with Fatah. After she opened her pharmacy, Hamas priced her out of the market, forcing her to shut it down. (*Whispered in Gaza* 2023).

3. Serving the enemy – the security coordination with Israel

The main issue that is the focus of deep-seated dispute between Fatah and Hamas is the security coordination between the Israeli security forces and the Palestinian Authority. Hamas' position on this matter remains unchanged, as already reflected in the Hamas party's platform for the elections for the Palestinian Legislative Authority, in the section dealing with internal policy. (The election manifesto of the Change and Reform Party that represented Hamas, January 2006).

We consider the security collaboration known as the Security Coordination with the occupation an immense national and religious crime which should lead to penalties and sanctions. (Change and Reform Manifesto, 2006, 7)

What should be done concerning internal policy is exactly the opposite. The following section of the Hamas election platform from 2006 explains this:

To maintain the resistance and perform its role in opposing the occupation and attaining full liberation. (Change and Reform Manifesto, 2006,7)

On the other hand, Abu Mazen connected the security issue to the political split between the PA and Hamas. In general, he has made few references to the issue in his speeches over the years. When he did, in a speech to the US State Department in 2010, he stressed that the security forces of the PA were working professionally to thwart terrorism and maintain public order. We may assume that he chose to do so on the international stage to emphasize

that he was acting according to the values accepted by the West and the international community. (Hitman 2022, 53)

In their black books, published from 2007 to 2011, Hamas poses the weighty question of whether cooperation with the Israeli occupation does not stand in complete contradiction to the struggle and opposition against that occupation itself to establish a Palestinian state. The books included detailed documentation from the point of view of Hamas regarding the crimes of the Palestinian Authority. At the top of the list was the security cooperation and the persecution of the activists of the opposition forces (Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad). In the second chapter of the first black book, Hamas describes the division of functions between the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian security forces. Using the title: Resistance in the West Bank between the Palestinian anvil and the Israeli hammer (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad, 2008, 111-147).

Hamas describes the Palestinian Authority as the Oslo Group in the PA. Also in Black Book III and IV, Hamas refers to the government of Salam Fayyad, appointed by Mahmoud Abbas, as an illegal government (*ghair al-shar'aiā*). If the Fayyad government is an illegal government without legitimacy, citizens of the Palestinian Authority under its control have the right to resist and rebel. The legal government is Ismail Haniyeh's government operated from the Gaza Strip under Hamas control. (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 3, 2011a; Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 4, 2011b). According to Hamas leadership, Abu Mazen is not worthy of the office and is betraying and selling Palestinian land. (Halevi, 2015).

The sequence of photos, that were published in the Hamas Black Book printed in 2008, document all the national crimes of Fatah and PLO against Hamas and the Palestinian people. The book documents the violations over the course of a year, starting on 6/14/2007, and constitutes Hamas' case against the PLO (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad, 2008). This book, and the books following it, available on Hamas websites, actually serve to justify Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip and the murder of Fatah members who were pushed off the roof (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 349):

- a) Kidnapping of Hamas members, their torture to death (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 351-354);
- b) Searching Hamas charitable organizations and confiscating property (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 355-363);
- c) The security coordination (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 364-366).

One of the prominent motifs in all of Hamas's Black Books is the Palestinian Authority's crimes, which include the kidnapping of Hamas operatives,

torture in prisons and their release only after undergoing continued torture and suffering. In response to Fatah's accusations of Hamas' mistreatment of Fatah members and causing their deaths, Hamas published similar incidents with photos depicting the torture by Fatah members of Hamas members. Thus, for example, is the case of the abuse of Amjad Barghouti who died in a Palestinian Authority prison in 2007. The prisoner Jamal al-Shatha suffered similar abuse, as shown in the Hamas Black Book, in photos of the horrific torture he underwent before his death. The Hamas held parades held in his memory. The prisons where Hamas prisoners are held are called Dayton prisons, referring to General Keith Dayton who assisted in the training and establishment of the Palestinian security forces after the Al-Aqsa intifada. Dayton was appointed to his position by President George Bush Jr., and held it from 2005 to 2010 (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 123-135).

Over the years, the Palestinian Authority has also tried to cause harm to key activists of *al-Kutla al-Islamiyah* (Islamic Bloc) – Hamas' student cell that is active in universities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Elections at Bir Zeit University have often been perceived as a microcosm reflecting the competition between Fatah and Hamas. In recent years, Hamas' student cells have won the leadership of the student union of Bir Zeit University, A-Najah University and Al-Quds University several times, the three most important universities in the West Bank. In Gaza, Hamas' control over the universities in the Strip is absolute. (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 11-78).

For example, in the 2007-2008 Black Book, Hamas described the case of the students Muhammad Redad from Bir Zeit and Samer Awad from *al-Kutla al-Islamiyah* in al-Najah University, who were killed by the Palestinian security forces. (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 308-315, 352). Seen in one of the shocking photos in the book is a group of female A-Najah students praying while they are under a siege imposed on them by the security forces. The harassment of Hamas students by the Palestinian security forces is also reflected in raids and searches inside the university. (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 356-366). Hamas does indeed protest against the significant violations of the individual human rights of their activists, as can be seen in all the Hamas communiqués at the end of the book. (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 288-348).

Arrests of Hamas activists are described as kidnappings. Everything is accompanied by shocking images depicting the wounds and the brutal behavior of the Palestinian police forces known as Abbas forces, Dayton forces, and prisons are described in the same manner. Sometimes, the name of Salam Fayyad (former Palestinian Prime Minister) is added to them. Of course, according to Hamas' accounts, these arrests are made based on orders from above, that

is, under the direction of Israel, the occupying power. Public demonstrations on behalf of Hamas detainees are shown in the photos as brutally crushed, as in the case in 2007 of protests against the arrest of Maher al-Ahras. Sometimes they describe the arrests as “kidnapping in the Zionist way” (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 354). Demonstrations by families of detainees in front of Janid Prison in Nablus are widely reported, and are violently dispersed by the Palestinian security forces. The photos document mostly women, a sensitive issue from a public Palestinian perspective.

The activity of the Palestinian security forces is also reflected in acts of vandalism perpetrated against properties belonging to Hamas associations. Another indication of the depth of the hatred between the organizations is the fact that Hamas publishes photos of vandalized ambulances in Tulkarm, buses belonging to their various charitable and cultural associations, such as the Salafit Revival Association, the Jador Association, and others, which were burned, as well as doors and places of study that were vandalized (Al-Kitāb al-Aswad 2008, 357).

These activities, documented in the photos, are carried out not only by the men associated with the regime, but also by Tanzim Fatah or al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades. The Tanzim, which was headed during the Al-Aqsa Intifada by Marwan Barghouti and was responsible for a series of acts of terrorism against Israel, also operates internally. The examples here are from the first book, but we can see such examples in all four books. The books published by Hamas describe the violent actions of Tanzim members against innocent protesters, who demonstrated, as is their right, in peaceful marches in the West Bank, as well as against Hamas activists and institutions affiliated with Hamas, including educational institutions. Hamas places the blame and responsibility for all the crimes against Hamas activists and the Palestinian people on the security cooperation between Israel and the PA.

4. The loss of legitimacy of Abu Mazen and the Palestinian Authority

Each time that Israel and Hamas were engaged in a military confrontation, the percentage of support for the Palestinian president dropped, and sympathy for Hamas and the armed resistance against Israel increased. Hamas succeeded in turning the wars with Israel in 2008, 2012, 2014, and I can say 2021 into a show of victory. Hamas’ ability to continue fighting and launching missiles against the IDF, which is equipped with modern weapons, has created a balance of deterrence (Kear 2020, 178-202; Bishara 2022, 284). In late 2011, Abu Mazen enjoyed a slight increase in his popularity due to his unilateral attempt to obtain for Palestine the status of a Member State in the UN —

Fatah's most important achievement is in the diplomatic arena. From then on, in its publications, Fatah emphasized the Palestinian success in the UN, and especially the recognition of the State of Palestine as a non-member state (Fatah publication 2012). However, in subsequent years, support for Abu Mazen once again declined due to his inability to bring about significant progress in two areas on the agenda of Palestinian society: An agreement with Israel and an end to the internal crisis with Hamas. The figures for 2017–2020 indicate that the US's political moves against the Palestinians — relocating the US Embassy to Jerusalem, cutting support to UNRWA, and closing the PLO's office in Washington — caused considerable damage to Abu Mazen's popularity in Palestinian society. (Hitman 2022). In every presidential election poll in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 2012, Ismail Haniyeh defeated Abu Mazen. In the last poll that was published, Abu Mazen received 36 % of the popular vote and Haniyeh 52 % (PCPSR 2023, poll 87).

TABLE 1

Public surveys in Palestinian society, 2005–2021

Year	Satisfied with Abu Mazen's performance
2005	62%
2006	52%
2007	46%
2008	44%
2009	47%
2010	49%
2011	52.5%
2012	51%
2013	50%
2014	42.5%
2015	39%
2016	35%
2017	33%
2018	34.5%
2019	36%
2020	34%
2021	22%

Source: PCPSR, 2022.

5. PLO's stance aimed at challenging Hamas and the internal division

From the moment that he was elected, Abu Mazen was aware that he would face opposition, and that some of his opponents would not hesitate to resort to violence to undermine his rule. Indeed, as early as 2005, he found himself having to give a televised speech on the subject. After violent armed clashes broke out between his supporters and their opponents from various organizations, he warned Gaza residents of anarchy and of the danger of taking the law into their own hands. A month later, in a speech before the PLC, he stressed that “perhaps the Palestinians’ resistance needed many subgroups, but once there is a PA, there will be no room for the dispersal of sovereignty, which is also expressed in the control and use of power.” (Abu Mazen Speech July 16, 2005 and August 9, 2005).

In response to Hamas’s victory in the PLC elections of 2006, Abu Mazen implored Palestinian political forces to refrain from violent acts, calling them to unite under the national flag and focus on the fulfillment of the national vision. It was not only a question of violence between Palestinian factions. Abu Mazen’s political stance was not, and still is not, the consensus among Palestinians. (Hitman 2022, 50-51). The leadership of the PA was linked to the failure of the Peace process. Gradually public opinion shifted from supporting the Fatah and the agreements to supporting Hamas and the resistance, particularly after the Second Intifada. (Kahtib 2010, 173).

In his speech before the UN General Council in September 2006, Abu Mazen referred to his efforts to form a unity government with Hamas according to the Mecca agreement in March 2006. He also committed to the international community that every Palestinian government would accept and respect the Oslo Accords. Both sides agreed to reforms according to which the PLO should be altered to reflect the balance of power in Palestinian society. (Schanzer 2008, 102-105). In other words, Hamas was willing to recognize that the PLO as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people but demanded reforms.

Abu Mazen’s first speech after Hamas’s takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 was held on July 20. He devoted his remarks to the prisoners’ contributions to the national struggle as part of the legacy he sought to leave his successor, making no mention of the geopolitical split that had taken place in the Palestinian political system following the bloody events that had brought Hamas to power in the Gaza Strip. (Hitman 2022, 50).

It is “geopolitical” because, for the first time in the history of the Palestinian community, two different ideologies had become more than abstract ideas. Two political powers had begun to rule in two separate territories. Later

in 2007, Abu Mazen accused Hamas of carrying out a coup against the PA and committing crimes against Fatah members in the Gaza Strip. However, in 2008, he rarely mentioned the internal rupture. In doing so, he contented himself with a general call for negotiations with Hamas, without presenting specific avenues for flexibility that would enable an end to the geopolitical conflict. This has remained the case since Hamas assumed control of the Gaza Strip. (Schanzer 2008, 121-129). In the summer of 2020, Abu Mazen summoned representatives of all Palestinian factions to discuss the consequences of then-US President Donald Trump's Deal of the Century plan; even though Hamas and other factions sent representatives to the meeting, he refrained from discussing the internal geopolitical crisis. (Hitman 2022, 50)

The PA and Hamas conducted continuous negotiations from 2007 to 2017 to find an end to the internal political crisis. These were direct negotiations, which included eight rounds of talks in various Arab capital cities such as Cairo, Sana'a, and Doha. There were also indirect negotiations, in which the parties communicated with each other through public messages, trying to break the deadlock and elicit concessions from the other party. The hope was that such concessions would lead to national reconciliation based on the ethos of a shared history (Kear, 2020, 210-233).

In countless speeches, Abu Mazen described Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip as a "revolution"; he saw Palestinian reconciliation as a precondition for a political settlement with Israel. As he wrote on May 2011:

Negotiations remain our first option, but due to their failure we are now compelled to turn to the international community to assist us in preserving the opportunity for a peaceful and just end to the conflict. Palestinian national unity is a key step in this regard. (Abu Mazen, May 16, 2011)

Since Hamas' takeover of Gaza in 2006, Hamas and Fatah have entered into unity agreements in 2007, 2011, 2014 and 2017. Unfortunately, these agreements have not resulted in the sort of societal cohesion of a unified political voice envisaged by the Palestinian public. They resulted in the opposite. There appear to be oscillating centripetal and centrifugal forces between incentives and disincentives that inhibit any agreements from working, creating several problems that need to be accounted for. The deep mistrust between the sides has time and time again, led to the cancellation of the power-sharing agreements. (Kear 2020, 212-213).

Abu Mazen has never agreed to give Hamas a foothold in PLO institutions, insisting that the management of the political process should remain in the hands of the PLO. This uncompromising stance on the part of the Palestin-

ian president stemmed in part from his distrust of Hamas. This was one of the main reasons that the reconciliation agreements signed between Fatah and Hamas failed. (Kear 2020, 214-233). Also, he did not hide his hostility and political apprehension toward Hamas, to which he occasionally gave public expression, as in 2015 when he told the French foreign minister on his visit to Ramallah that “there is no place for Hamas in his government.” (The Time of Israel, 2015).

Despite the successes of the Palestinian Authority on the international political stage, such as the decision of the United Nations Assembly to request an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice regarding the legality of the Israeli occupation, support for Abu Mazen is currently at an unprecedented low. (UN press 2023) Therefore, there is a noticeable change among Fatah members in the perception of the armed struggle, and especially among Tanzim members. The way to achieve governmental legitimacy among the Palestinians is by strengthening the narrative of sacrifice and armed struggle against Israel. Therefore, Fatah and the PA continue to praise shaheeds and perpetrators of attacks against Israel.

In 2022, Fatah asserted that it had carried out 7200 attacks on Israelis:

The number is 7,200, stated by the [Palestinian] Authority, the West Bank is burning and is not calming down and not [even] a faint voice or anything new has been heard from Hamas. More than 7,200 acts of resistance (i.e., terror incidents) since the start of 2022 in the West Bank. (PMW 2022)

Elsewhere, Fatah boasts that many of the Israeli deaths in the West Bank in 2022, a record year in terms of attacks against Israelis – 32 deaths and hundreds of injuries – were due to the actions of Fatah members. In the Fatah-run Awdah TV, in December 27, 2022 Fatah presented its success in the field of resistance.

The secret of this movement and the source of its strength historically lies in its patriotism that was expressed in 225 Martyrs since the start of this year [2022], with 123 of them being affiliated with Fatah. The number of prisoners in the prisons is 4,700 prisoners, with 2,800 of them, constituting 60 %, being affiliated with Fatah. Among them, 552 prisoners were sentenced to life, with 350 of them, constituting 65 %, being affiliated with Fatah. As His Honor [PA] President Mahmoud Abbas said, we will not prevent or cut off the money designated for the Martyrs’ families, the prisoners, and the released prisoners, as some are attempting to do – even if we are only left with one penny, we will spend it on the Martyrs’ families and the prisoners. (Zilberdik 2023)

6. Conclusion

Hamas and the PLO, and especially Fatah, are often seen as two opposing organizations. Fatah is viewed as a more progressive organization, working together with the West to promote the two-state solution. Abu Mazen, who since 2010 has repeatedly postponed elections for the presidency and the Palestinian PLC, is seen as a figure who represents the Palestinian people on world stages and who represents a “state-in-the-making” with a special status in the UN. Hamas, on the other hand, is defined as a terrorist organization by Israel, the European Union, the United States, and many other countries. Hamas does not conceal its intention to destroy the State of Israel and establish a Palestinian Islamic state in its place. Hamas’ Document of General Principles of May 2017 could be the basis for a Palestinian consensus for a Palestinian state alongside Israel in the 1967 borders, without a peaceful and permanent agreement with Israel.

Palestinian society’s greatest calamity over the past twenty years was the inter-Palestinian split between Fatah and Hamas. Fatah, which controls the West Bank under Israeli backing, and the Hamas organization, which holds complete control of Gaza. Both Hamas and Fatah rely, to a large extent, on Israeli assistance in the fields of medicine, water, and electricity. The existing split between the two largest and most influential political organizations does not allow them to present a united front against Israel, and leads to the perpetuation of the current status quo that serves Israel. Both organizations are engaged in criticizing each other and bragging about who contributing more to the interests of Palestinians and who is better at fighting the Israeli occupation. Finally, we should keep in mind that Hamas is fighting outwards, from within the Gaza Strip. While Fatah is fighting inside the West Bank and East Jerusalem against Israeli targets. Hamas is fighting Israel within the context of Arab and Islamic domestic policy. The PA and the PLO are fighting Israel in the international diplomatic arena and have achieved many successes, including the recognition of Palestine as a non-member observer state by the UN General Assembly in 2012.

As the struggle between the two continues, it seems that Fatah’s prestige is declining. This is despite the many efforts made by Abu Mazen in building the “Palestinian state-in-the-making”, and his significant achievements on the international scene. According to every election survey held in Palestinian society, it appears that Fatah and Abu Mazen will be defeated by Hamas in the elections. What does the future hold for Palestinian society after the death of Abu Mazen? Will this be the end of the era of the autonomous Palestinian Authority operating under Israeli auspices in the West Bank? Will the two rivals, Hamas

and Fatah, be capable of cooperating despite the power-sharing agreements (the last one in 2017), that have already been signed between them but have not been implemented. Palestinian unity is a pre-condition of any agreement with Israel on the future of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and this seems to be the most important challenge for the Palestinian leadership over the coming decade. The inability of Hamas and Fatah to reach reconciliation between themselves postpones the solution of the Palestinian state to an unknown time in the future, and perpetuates the status quo between them and Israel.

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