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THE ORIGINS OF HAMAS: AN OFFSHOOT OF MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, OR A RESULT OF THE PLO'S MORAL CORRUPTION?

Ecaterina CEPOI

PhD Candidate

The Joint Operations, Strategic Studies, and Security Department

"Carol I" National Defense University, Bucharest, Romania

Abstract: *Since its creation in 1987, Hamas has been at the forefront of armed resistance in the occupied Palestinian territories and is considered a terrorist group by U.S. and Israel, and seen as a militant fundamentalist Islamic organization which is operating in the West Bank and Gaza, by others. Despite of that, Hamas has an annual budget of \$70 million, according to its Council on Foreign Relations, funds that are coming from expatriate Palestinians, or private donors, from Middle East, and states, such as Iran. Its name is an acronym for "Harakat Al-Muquwama Al-Islamyya," or Islamic Resistance Movement in English. The word "Hamas" means Zeal, or Enthusiasm, in Arabic. As an organization, it has sections dedicated to religious, military, political as well as for security activities. In addition, it runs a social welfare program, and operates a number of schools, hospitals and religious institutions, following the Muslim Brotherhood's model. But not the data provided above is the concern of this paper, but the origins and reasons which led to the emergence of Hamas on a territory, where, were already acting PLO and its favourite group Al-Fatah, or Muslim Brotherhood for charity activities, and because the origins and purpose of this organization are questioned by different scholars. For example, Israel accuses Hamas, of using civilians in Gaza, as a "human shield," and the territory's schools and hospitals as a cover for military hardware, while, on the other hand, there are voices, which are accusing Mossad of funding Hamas in order to use it as a Casus Belli at a certain point, while it enjoys widespread backing from the general population in Gaza, due to its charity program.*

Keywords: *Intifada, PLO, Hamas, Palestinian national identity's crisis, Muslim Brotherhood;*

• **Historical Background**

The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was one of the events that marked the decisive system of post-war regional relations in the Middle East. Sustained by political and diplomatic actions of Zionism, for more than a half of a century, finally, it was managed to establish after nearly two thousand years, a new State for the Jewish people. The problem was, however, that the territory of Eretz Israel had meanwhile a different history than the destiny of the Jewish Diaspora spread around the world. Once, part of the Roman and Byzantine Empire, Palestine was conquered in 636, following the famous battle of Yarmouk, by

the army of Caliph Omar. From now on, it will be a part of the territory of Islam, which was governed by different political entities within the expanding Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid Caliphates, or those, which have followed them: the Mongol Empire, the Egyptian Mamluk State, and starting with 1516, it, become a part of the Ottoman Empire. Throughout this long period, the Jewish population from Palestine was insignificant, rather contained groups of scholars in the holy centres of Judaism. Only at the end of the 19th century, with the emergence in Europe of the Zionist movement of Theodor Herzl, was initiated, in particular, the problem of the "Jewish question" by the formation of a State to gather the Jewish nation. WWI

accelerated this problem. On the one hand, the well-known „Statement," of British Foreign Minister Balfour, in 1917 gave the Zionists leaders the idea, that after the war, England would accept the formation of a Jewish "national home" in Palestine, though, such a term didn't exist before in the international law. On the other hand, however, as early as 1916, Britain and France had decided, through the secret Sykes-Picot agreement, the division of the territory in the Middle East, after the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. Work accomplished otherwise by the Conference of San Remo (1920), when there were plotted, rather artificial, boundaries of new states, subject to a system of government by mandate, meaning by the effective exercise of power by the victorious powers.

The implementation of the Balfour Declaration in the first years after the war, allowed a strong Jewish population exodus from Palestine, first from Russia and after 1933, from Germany and Central Europe. They meet, however, more and more opposition and revolt of the Arab population, thus, in 1939, the British authorities restricted the Jewish immigration drastically just at the peak of anti-Jewish Nazi policies. The conclusion of the war, the revelations about the Holocaust, is enhancing the Jewish activism in Palestine and fight against the British power. Eventually, England waives its mandate, transferring the problem to the United Nations, which, by its resolution 181 in 1947 proposed dividing Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab State, with Jerusalem under an international regime. In 1948, in the very moment of the British withdrawal and without waiting for the U.N. authorities, David ben Gurion proclaims in Tel Aviv, the new State of Israel, which was quickly, recognized by the United States and the Soviet Union. Instead, the major Arab States, does not support the U.N. Partition Plan, and declares war on Israel. This first Arab-Israeli War ended in 1949 with a clear victory of the Jews. Moreover, the territory of Israel will increase from 55% to 78% of Palestine. Instead, the Palestinian State does not exist: the Palestinian authorities, together with the Arab States continue to not support the Partition Plan, therefore, by default do not recognize neither the legality of Israel. Until the destruction of the "Zionist entity", however, the Palestinian

territory remained under double administration: Gaza Strip by Egypt and the West Bank and East Jerusalem by Transjordan, which became now the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. In addition, appears the problem of the Palestinian refugees: almost half of the Arab population is forced to leave their native places; grouped in the following decades in overcrowded and unsanitary refugee camps in neighbouring Arab countries, they will be the main melting pot from which will be recruited the future militants, nationalists and Islamists [11, pp. 161-258].

Until the 1967's defeat, the Arab countries will continue to consider themselves as responsible for the Palestinian problem, by coordinating insurgency warfare against Israeli domination. The leader is now, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, who became the hero of the Arab world after the failure of the British-French-Israeli Alliance. Is the golden age of the Arab socialist ideologies. Thus, the Nasserites, the Ba'athists, and the nationalists conquered power in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Algeria, and Tunisia, but the struggles for hegemony between the various leaders make it impossible the fulfilment of the Declaration of a major Pan-Arab State. In 1964, the Arab League – in particular, Nasser, put the Palestine Liberation Organization bases, but Syria will support the Al-Fatah organization, while King Hussein of Jordan wants him to be recognized as the ruler of all the Palestinians. Iraq, in turn, under Qassem and then Aref brothers, has its own scenarios on Palestine.

In the following decades, the Palestinian groups' actions, will mostly fulfil and represent the policies of the States behind them; hence, the endless kaleidoscope and almost impossible to understand the different and often antithetical positions of Palestinian options. But, the Six-Day War will eliminate the egos and the Arab excessive rhetoric: Israel doesn't occupy just Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, but especially important Arab territories, such as Sinai and the Golan Heights. It is a key moment of the entire history of the Middle East: from now on, the completely Palestinian territory enters into a system of military occupied area with all rigors arising from this type of regime; in addition, Egypt and Syria are directly involved from the geopolitical point of view. The major change is that the Palestinian people will transfer the confidence



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from the Arab States to the Palestinian resistance groups, that decided in July 1967 to continue alone hostilities against Israel by guerrilla warfare backed by „a people's war for long term”. In the same year, the head of Fatah, Yasser Arafat, becomes President of the Executive Committee of the PLO. The following years, are marked by struggles at the borders with Israel, and in particular, of the numerous terrorist attacks made by Palestinian groups [13, pp. 24-42].

The end of the 1960s and especially, next decade are marked by a growing influence of the Gulf monarchies, especially that of Saudi Arabia. The oil boom and the rising price of a barrel will bring important funds in the region, of which a large part begin to be used as a geopolitical activism. The policy agenda of King Faisal extends also, over the Palestinian issue; in addition to financing groups, Saudi Arabia will be the one who proposes the oil embargo in 1973, following the Yom Kippur war, even though it had more a psychological impact, marks the ascension of Saudi Arabia hegemonic stage in international relations. However, the oil tool is increasingly, conditioned by leaving the leftist model, and by assuming the size of Islamic Liberation struggle: hence, the fluctuations of Saudi attitude towards PLO or other grouping of Marxist orientation. Nevertheless, after 1973, the PLO is recognised by the Arab countries as the "sole representative of the Palestinian people", and even though, Arafat seeks gradually, to entry into legality and bring about a solution, even partial, at the Palestinian diplomatic problem. The Camp David Treaty in 1978 between Egypt and Israel, except the fact that marks a victory for Israel, which is the first serious flaw in the otherwise nonexistent, "Arab unity," and put Egypt in the international Arab and Islamic organizations, does not resolve the Palestinian problem.

The end of the eight decade brings two great events. The first is the outbreak of protest

movements in the occupied territories in December 1987, called the "Revolt" (The Intifada). It is a reaction of the population, particularly young people, born after 1967, which saw every year blocked future prospects and hopes of a State of their own, while Palestinian militant groups from outside was powerless and mostly engaged in endless fratricidal struggle. The actions try to be as less violent: general strikes, street protests daily, etc. The violent reaction of the Israeli authorities, however, is: arrests of armed repression, destruction of buildings. The movement just ask the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories and the formation of a Palestinian State. Syria is trying to hijack the movement in their own interest but the PLO will take the leadership [11, pp. 561-610].

In addition to accelerating a diplomatic solution, Intifada also marked the emergence of Islam in the Palestinian issue. It appears, precisely at the time of a spreading jihad in Afghanistan, which, otherwise, seized a few years' attention and resources of the Islamist movements, by leaving in a shadow, the Palestinian cause. However, the youth movement in the occupied territories began to find the messages of a revived Islam as a substitution to the national identity. The Afghan mujahedeen, throughout the Muslim world already had acquired the status of heroes and models: a connection between their struggle for the cause of Islam when attacked by unbelievers and the Palestinian territory's case was made especially by classical writings of Abdullah Azzam. Actually, the Intifada was just the opportunity expected for the emergence of a Palestinian Islamist movement, which require that new leader for a new battle – and this movement will be Hamas.

- **The origins of Harakat Al-Muqāwama Al-Islāmiyya**

The Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat the Mouqawama of Islamiyya*) actually represents a militant extension of the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood. The Palestinian brothers' history is connected to the very beginning of the movement: since 1929 Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Brotherhood in Egypt, had come to Jerusalem and gained the support of a significant group of followers: one of the movement's leaders, who had died in the battle against the Jews in 1936, will give his name to the military wing of Hamas: *Azzeddine el-Qassem*. However, the branch itself will only be founded in 1945; at first related to Egypt, during Nasser's crackdown it will become closer to the Jordanian brothers. In the 50s - 60s, the Palestinian Brotherhood will be surpassed by the nationalist movement, whose members will come mainly from its own ranks. During this entire period, and particularly after the defeat in 1967, the main activity of the movement was focused on the primacy of the re-Islamization of the society, of moral reform, of creating social, educational, health infrastructure in the occupied territories which could make up for the lack of authority [3]. Israel had thus tacitly accepted the Brothers' action, as an outlet that could fulfill some of the population's needs, and which could have led to trouble, but also because the Brothers rejected the idea of a Palestinian state which was restricted only to Gaza and the West Bank. In 1973, they created the *Islamic Society*, an organization that coordinated social solidarity actions, hospitals, mosques, Koranic schools, sports clubs etc., very active in the Islamic University of Gaza, led since its inception by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, a charismatic figure and a very successful preacher among young people [2]

But, starting with the 80s, this prudent policy will be subject to an increasingly strong challenge coming from a new generation, among whom were many graduates of Middle East universities, especially in Egypt, where they had been enthused with a militant Islamism, or who had been imprisoned in Israeli jails. Grouped around Ahmed Yassine, they wanted a more active involvement, even violent, against the Israeli presence in Gaza and the West Bank. The outbreak of the Intifada

took by surprise the Brotherhood, which kept a reserved attitude at first, leaving Yassine's faction to take the lead: on December 14, 1987 the first statement is released, announcing the birth of Hamas and calling for resistance against the occupation. Only in February 1988 did the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood effectively assume authorship of Hamas: it now had an opportunity to reconcile Islam with patriotism and even provide their own response to the Unified National Command of the Intifada, the old Palestinian movements group gathered around Yasser Arafat. Its role was from the very beginning to participate in the resistance against the Israeli occupation on the one hand, and to ensure the "re-Islamization" of the Palestinian society on the other hand. The competition between Arafat-Hamas stems from the very beginning of the movement and Hamas will continually take advantage of PLO's compromises, failures or corruption in order to propose its own program as the true solution to the Palestinian cause: to them, "Israeli occupation has only been possible by forcing Palestinians away from their faith, only the re-Islamization of the social capital and the establishment of an Islamic state are likely to lead to the restoration of full sovereignty" [8, p. 2]

The emergence of an Islamist option in Palestine is therefore a reaction to an external alignment, as well as to local realities. First, it is a result of increased re-Islamization of the Muslim political discourse of the '80s and especially of the Afghan *jihad*. Withdrawal of the Soviet troops created the euphoria that it was due to the Islamic fight's effectiveness; in addition, a few of the Arab mujahidin will return to their homeland, including the Palestinian territories, convinced of the Islamic Revolution solution. Internally, the movement takes advantage of the positive impact of the infrastructure built by the Brothers and of the fact that, unlike the leaders of traditional groups, who were outside the Palestinian territory, those of Hamas are present amongst the population. Even if P.L.O. will soon come to take the lead and organize Intifada's actions, Hamas will have its own partisans who will take parallel action. Then, differentiation will occur in terms of social and professional components. Members of the Islamist groups are recruited rather among urban youth, often



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with high rate of education but with poor prospects for a fulfilled future to measure up to their education, or poor youth raised in refugee camps, but also new traders and what is called "the pious bourgeoisie". Raised in an environment of political, social and economic alienation, constantly subject to the Israeli occupant's whims, they will resonate positively to the message of an integral Islam, which would offer the means to retrieve their nationality, but even more importantly, their identity and spirituality.

On August 18, 1988, Hamas broadcasts its Charter, which defines the statute of the movement and its ideological and action principles. Here are some of its key points: „The Islamic Resistance Movement: Islam is its system” (art. 1), „The Islamic Resistance Movement is a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood chapter in Palestine... It professes a comprehensive understanding and precise conceptualization of the Islamic precepts in all aspects of life: concept and belief, politics and economics, education and social service, jurisdiction and law, exhortation and training...” (art. 2), the Hamas slogan: „Allah is its Goal. The Messenger is its Leader. The Quran is its Constitution. Jihad is its methodology, and Death for the sake of Allah is its most coveted desire” (art. 8), „The Islamic Resistance Movement [firmly] believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf [Trust] upon all Muslim generations till the day of Resurrection...” (art. 11), „Nationalism, from the point of view of the Islamic Resistance Movement, is part and parcel of religious ideology...” (art. 12), „The problem of liberating Palestine is related to three spheres: the Palestinian sphere, the Arab sphere, and the Islamic sphere. Every one of them has a role to play in the struggle against Zionism” (art. 14), „When an enemy occupies some of the Muslim lands, Jihad becomes obligatory for every Muslim. In the struggle against the Jewish occupation of Palestine, the banner of Jihad must be raised” (art. 15). At this stage, still, the

state can afford to also say that „The Palestine Liberation Organization is closest of the close to the Islamic Resistance Movement” (art. 27) [1].

However, at the beginning, Hamas acted in the social and political field, deriving its strength from the important educational, charitable and religious network which had been set up by the Muslim Brotherhood along the years. In addition, the first year of the movement is characterized, despite its program, by far more radical, by a peaceful relationship with Israel, which even saw in the Islamist option a way to weaken the nationalist block within the PLO [6]. Only in 1989, after Yithak Shamir's rightist government came to power in Israel, amid refusal to negotiate with the PLO and the continuing repression of Intifada, the Palestinian action in the territories becomes more radical and the authority of Hamas increases: it is the moment when the first violent actions of its military wing start: the Azzeddine el-Qassem Brigades - a result of the merger between the intelligence machine and the militarized branch of the movement. As a consequence, Sheikh Yassine and most of the activists were arrested, but repression only serves to increase the legitimacy of the movement, in addition, the arrested leaders are replaced by a new generation, without much political experience but more and more violent, according to the slogan attributed to Azzeddine: „The Book of God in one hand, the rifle in the other”. Since 1990, Hamas increasingly shares its authority within territories with CNU, in addition, the subsidies received from the Gulf countries get to be even higher than those of P.L.O. The actual influence exerted by the movement over the population movement is visible through the results of the elections in professional organizations (lawyers, engineers, doctors, chambers of commerce, etc.), starting with 1990, when its representatives appear to have won 30% of the seats. However, in April 1990 Arafat proposes them to enter the Unified Direction of Intifada, hoping to bring under control a movement that was an increasingly

strong competitor of P.L.O. and was refractory to its directives. But Sheikh Yassine asked for 40% of the seats in the Palestinian National Council and also the acceptance of the movement's principles: eliminating Israel and proclaiming jihad as the only way to solve the Palestinian problem [6, p. 5]. Obviously, these conditions which undermined Arafat's long fought for authority and which, moreover, cancelled the decisions made in Algiers in 1988 were not accepted. Although relations between the Palestinian central and Hamas were not completely broken, they have cooled significantly and were manifested in an increase of clashes between the two militant camps in the territories, especially between 1990-1992, when Arafat's authority declined.

The Gulf War, although it had weakened PLO, has eventually made possible the dialogue between the Organization and Israel, following pressure from the USA. But Hamas rejects any agreement that would limit the territory of a Palestinian state and, criticizing PLO for being „subjected to imperialism-Zionism”, aligns itself, at the start of the Madrid Conference, to the „Front of refusal”, which became afterwards „The Alliance of Palestinian Forces” made of nine other Palestinian groups which opposed to the peace process. Likewise, the Oslo agreements are rejected, being seen as a betrayal of the Palestinian struggle and sacrifices, especially because the discussions on sensitive issues such as the refugees' right to return, the status of Jerusalem and the implants of Jewish colonies in the territories were reported at the end of the first three years' autonomy. However, the peace agreement brought excitement to the Palestinians for the moment, so that a very severe opposition from Hamas towards a PLO which had become legitimate not only nationally but also internationally was now inoperative. Therefore, it was decided to increase political involvement and participation in elections, decision which was stated by Yassine himself, from prison, in November 1993, so that Hamas could „oppose (PLO) from within the legislative institution” and confront the Israeli-Palestinian agreement „by any civilized means”.

This has led, however, just as in the case of Hezbollah or the PLO, to a real rethinking of Hamas strategy and it especially caused internal disputes on the necessity to accept the

compromises of taking part in the political game – so, implicitly to the tacit recognition of the Oslo results, or to continue fighting against Israel. This dilemma actually reflects the strategies of the two main command centers of the group: the leaders in Amman were followers of the maximalist principle of liberating the entire Palestine, while the rulers of the territories, even Yassine, wanted to create a legal Islamist party to take part in the elections. And this even more so as, according to the Cairo agreements in 1994, Arafat had to coerce the Islamist opposition to give up armed opposition to Israel, - an obligation not at all convenient, which will also contribute to undermining the leader of the Palestinian Authority. At this point, however, the 1995 elections showed clearly the domination of PLO. Continuation of anti-Israeli operations by Hamas leads to arrests of Islamist leaders, to mutual accusations of being Israel allies, so that eventually the political headquarters of the movement and even the armed wing decide to recognize Arafat's authority and cease any anti-Israeli attacks, which offers Israel a pretext to delay even further the full withdrawal from territories.

Indeed, *The Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II)*, signed at Washington on September 28, 1995, provided, in addition to the expansion of Palestinian autonomy to the West Bank and organizing presidential and legislative elections, a series of directives regarding security measures to prevent terrorism and violence: Palestinian police is the only Palestinian authority in terms of security, it must intervene systematically against any expression of violence or terror, it is allowed to arrest and detain any individual suspected of preparing acts of terrorism, the Israeli and Palestinian parties will exchange information and will coordinate policies and actions in order to fight violence and terrorism. Ever since his arrival in Gaza, in July 1994, Arafat had instated an administrative as well as police system; his popular support was based here on traditional Arab clans, on those returned from exile, PLO member or not, as well as on some famous families and personalities. From the very beginning, he tried to prevent any internal opposition, either by making use of the new repressive system, or by enrolling opponents in the administrative and security system - often assimilating former



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district leaders or anti-Israeli opposition leaders. This led to the decrease of violent actions from Hamas in Gaza, for they were followed by arrests, blocking interventions in the social and political field [8].

In exchange, the situation in the West Bank was somewhat different. According to the *Oslo II* agreement, withdrawal of the Israeli army and deployment of the new Palestinian Authority was supposed to take place gradually, and in terms of internal security, the territory was divided into three zones: Zone A included six major cities: Djenine, Naplouse, Toulkarem, Qalqilya, Ramallah, Bethlehem - they came fully under the control of the Palestinian Authority, regarding administration, security and public order; Zone B contained small towns and villages which concentrated 68% of the Palestinian population - here the Palestinian Authority would be responsible for administration and maintaining order but Israeli forces are solely responsible for the fight against terrorism and for Israeli citizens' security, in addition, Palestinian police could only move in coordination with the Israel defense forces; Zone C comprised Hebrew colonies and uninhabited territories which lacked strategic interest - Israeli forces are solely responsible for security and public order while the Palestinian Council has only economic, health and education prerogatives [11, p. 628]. It was so therefore an overly complicated system, which favored the Israeli side: firstly, effective Palestinian autonomy was restricted to big cities, leaving in suspension such issues as Jerusalem, dismantlement of colonies and the refugees' right to return - all these depended on how the new Palestinian Authority fulfilled its conditions, especially those related to maintaining security. As soon as the *Oslo II* agreement was signed, Israel began to retreat from the six cities in Zone A.

In early 1996, legislative and presidential elections take place; even though Hamas calls for boycott, the movement refrained from violent actions. Thus, on January 20, Arafat was elected president of the Palestinian Authority

and his partisans win two-thirds of the 88-seat Palestinian Council of Autonomy, which now becomes the new Legislative Council. Arafat's obvious victory strengthened for the time being the political marginalization of Hamas and at the same time the internal disputes regarding the fate of the movement and its adopted strategy [10, pp. 113-146]. At this point, the diplomatic solution of agreements with Israel proved to be effective, despite all the conditions which favored the Israeli side and all ambiguities related to the Palestinian requirements, gradually phased over five years. As such, Hamas stops its series of attacks, in order to prevent repression from Palestinian security or from the Israeli army in the West Bank, as well as to avoid losing part of its sympathy capital among the population, at this time full of optimism to the prospect of a Palestinian state. „Hamas has made mistakes. But we must not forget that Hamas is a religious group. Religious groups are not flexible. They follow their slogans (...) Hamas has failed to understand the situation (...) It failed to clarify its vision and objectives. Hamas should have changed its strategy and to distinguish between the two sides, ie between Israelis and Palestinians” said one of the political leaders of the movement in late 1996 [8]. In December 1995, in Cairo, a series of negotiations between Arafat and Hamas take place, and a decision is made to waiver any mutual pressures. Meanwhile, *Fatah* attempts to increase religious legitimacy by promoting members connected to Islamist groups in important positions; among other things, this strategy pursued an increase of financial support from the Gulf monarchies. The strengthening of ties with the Muslim Brotherhood leads to "nationalization" of the Islamist discourse, „even though they still consider that <<the Zionist entity is a defiance of the Muslim world >>, Hamas now want to see the emergence of a Palestinian state in part of Palestine as a first step to the liberation of all the territories occupied by Israel” [9, p. 115]

This period of relative calm lasted from summer of 1995 until January 1996, when the

Shin Beth kills in Cyprus the „engineer” of Hamas, Yahya 'Ayyāsh, the main artificer responsible for the most terrorist attacks. It is the moment where a dissident group of the military wing, *Shahid martyr Yahya Ayyāsh Cells*, breaks the „truce” with the Palestinian Authority and a series of spectacular suicide bombings begin: it seems actually an external action of the foreign branch of Hamas (Amman, Damascus, Beirut), politically hostile to the rapprochement between Hamas and PLO - which made the anti-Israeli ripostes illegitimate [10, p. 75]. However, the attacks appeared to be the work of a faction of the military wing which does not obey the central leadership of territories; although political leaders have assured Arafat on the compliance with the „truce” concluded in Cairo, the media impact of bloody attacks against Israeli civilians gave the Tel Aviv government a pretext to once again criticize the anti-terrorist effectiveness of the Palestinian Authority. Killing 'Ayyāsh just when the two Palestinian camps had fallen to an agreement, is itself a challenge, known being the Palestinian side and its predictable consequences. Forced by the international community to take action against „terrorism”, Arafat was thus caught between the „hammer and anvil” [7, p. 317]: the killing of the Hamas artificer caused a huge wave of indignation among the Palestinian population, which made it difficult to attempt to block the violent anti-Palestinians. On the other hand, U.S. reproached to Palestinian leader the lack of response against the authors of the wave of suicide attacks in the spring of 1996.

Finally, in March, at the indications of the political leadership, the *Azzeddine el-Qassem Brigades* gave up their weapons to the Palestinian authorities and declare the cease of operations against Israel. However, the impact of the February-March attacks on Israeli population (25 February in Jerusalem and Ashkelon - 27 dead and 80 wounded, 3 March in Jerusalem - 19 dead, 4 March in Tel Aviv - an explosion with 13 dead and 125 injured) was huge and had serious consequences for the further development of the peace process. Although Hamas denied bombings and Arafat arrested over five hundred members of the movement, public opinion in Israel is increasingly distancing peace process. Israeli repressive strategy was also another factor undermining the authority of the Palestinian

and increasingly caused in both camps, the decrease enthusiasm for normalization.

Israeli elections of May 29, 1996 mark the defeat of the parties who made the peace agreements and the coming to power of a right-wing government led by Likoud, with Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister, said opponent of the formula „land for peace”. It was a sign of voter attitudes in the Hebrew sense of insecurity caused by the wave of attacks in early and increased aversion to what is considered unable or, worse, Arafat's duplicity in ensuring stability in the territories. On June 18, the exposal of government's program traces the essential lines of the new policy towards the Palestinian problem: the recognition of an autonomous regime in the territories, but not an actual Palestinian state, too, sharing Jerusalem was out of the question. In addition, Netanyahu said the decision to increase the Hebrew settlements in the West Bank, resuming talks with Syria to establish a peace agreement but in no case by removing the Golan. It was then, in principle, a policy that made futile the previous agreements, it shocked the Arab states and the U.S., which although reacted quickly for providing the flexibility to the new government's attitude has not softened its rigidity [11, pp. 640-645].

Netanyahu's arrival hardened too the situation of Arafat, a part of the population begins to lose confidence in his ability to achieve the aspirations of the Palestinian people. Sharing between the supporters of the resumption of armed struggle by Hamas and the followers of continuous restoring of the internal order and awaiting deployment to the peace process becomes greater. Fatah supporters will criticize the Islamist movement policy, considering that it leads to the weakening of national cohesion and especially to the radicalization of the Israeli electorate and thus Likoud reaching power. However, by March 1997 the armed wing of Hamas will not claim any new attack. Only in March 1997, the Israeli government's decision to build a colony on the Arab side of Jerusalem, at Har Homa, reactivated the military wing of Hamas actions, especially in the context of support and collusion of the population, provoked by the breach of the peace and especially U.S. opposition to vote on the resolutions in the Security Council to compel Israel to stop building the colony. On 21 March 1997 an



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attack takes place in Tel Aviv, but already the attitude of the Palestinian Authority has no vehemence of yore, it is seen as a reaction to the „challenges” of Netanyahu government

In addition, through an amazing return, Israel agrees to release Sheikh Yassine for few Mossad agents imprisoned in Jordan; on September 6, 1997 the spiritual leader of Hamas is received triumphantly in Gaza. Many saw in this action a „Machiavellian” strategy of Netanyahu to enhance the Palestinian Islamist movement, whose new shares would be offered as many excuses to block the implementation of *Oslo II* agreements. Indeed, the coming of Sheikh raised the popularity of Hamas share, especially because of his tour in Gulf countries and Iran in the spring of 1998, the organization brought hundreds of millions of dollars, which are used for social purposes and relief, increasing population and more responsiveness to the Islamist message [10, pp. 111-112].

As Netanyahu government is showing less and less willing to follow the program of *Oslo II* agreements, the Palestinian Authority was set in a delicate situation. Its authoritarianism against Islamists, socio-economic degradation of lands, blocking negotiations led to its unpopularity and increased the support to Hamas. The group continued to be caught between the two options (moderate - in the Palestinian territories, radical - the leaders of Amman and Damascus), but it will put less emphasis on the desire of state Islamisation and especially on the issue of Palestinian territory. Violence is repudiated even by some leaders, aware that it gives justification to block the peace agreements Israel and to make more difficult the Arab population's fate.

- **Hamas: A product of Muslim Brotherhood, or a result of the PLO's moral corruption?**

The beginning of the second Intifada in September 2000, simultaneous with the failure of implementation of peace plans and then with

the installing of Sharon regime has radicalized relations between Palestinian and Israeli forces. The Arafat's inability to establish itself as a legitimate and desirable partner for further negotiated solutions, the non-availability of Likoud to accept the words "territories for peace" led to the blocking perspective to accept the formation of a Palestinian state on the borders in 1967. The political failure of Hamas opportunity to lend the validity of its option and the second Intifada militant revival coincides with violence and anti-Israeli attacks, in competition with Islamic Jihad. Israel's response is predictable, and every action of the Islamist movement is succeeded by a systematic policy of repression against both leaders and civilians, further increasing the climate of aggression and the rift between the two parties. As a result, the Israeli services initiate a plan to eliminate the leaders of Hamas in the Palestinian territories: on March 22, 2004, was killed Ahmed Yassine, and not long after that, his successor as the head of the movement, Aziz al-Rantissi to have the same fate [4].

The disappearance of historical leaders lead to a new strategy of rethinking Hamas: Israel's continued attacks on the movement will determine the organization to participate in new elections in January 2006. The electoral success of Hamas (56%) in front of the Fatah rivals, produced a huge surprise, especially at the international level [16]. In fact, it quite clearly illustrate the adherence that the popular movement was enjoying, especially in Gaza, and decreased confidence in historic Palestinian parties such as Fatah, which was torn by internal rivalries, corruption, lack of a credible and charismatic leadership, as Arafat, was [12]. At the same time, the option to integrate the Palestinian political field show and availability of Hamas to become flexible and adaptable to new local and regional realities [17].

In reality, the political success of Hamas blocked more chances of resolving the Palestinian issue. Marked by its negative past, the movement (which the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas, will delegate the task of the new government, with Ismail Haniyeh as prime minister) fails to be recognized as a legitimate interlocutor at the international level; Israel refuses any dialogue with the new Palestinian government authority, much less the idea of a geopolitical compromise. Blocking the foreign aid, further riots and anti-Israeli Jew state lines, and especially the increasing disputes and rivalries between Hamas and Fatah have increased political and economic crises in the occupied territories. Following the violent clashes in June 2007, Hamas banishes Fatah forces in Gaza, which is a stronghold of the Islamist movement only. In response, Abbas dismiss the Prime Minister Haniyah, but now President of the Palestinian Authority and Fatah is restricted to the West Bank [14]. This inter-Palestinian fragmentation deep freezes, then the chances of real options to solve the Palestinian problem and from that, the main beneficiary was Israel, for lack of a Palestinian partner for dialogue is taken univocally as a pretext for Israel to initiate low availability negotiated resumption of talks. In addition, successive violent crisis marked relations between Gaza and Israel, and Israeli military offensives in December 2008 - January 2009, or the November 2012 - initiated in response to Hamas rocket attacks.

Again, as, indeed, throughout the period after the formation of the Islamist movement, it can see that any violent option against Israel has, in fact, a pretext consistent political and military elites in Tel Aviv rather need to validate a security strategy against the search options leading to a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian problem by accepting concrete formation of a Palestinian state. This is what has caused countless interrogations on actual status and whether Hamas continues to hypostasis as aggressor and threat to Israel's destiny is, in fact, just a pretext goal (and maintain, even by Israeli services) to block any diplomatic project. These perspectives are obviously trying to decipher interpretative scenarios infinite nuances and multiple meanings and interests games they produce intricate interactions between actors involved

in the Palestinian issue. What is remarkable, however, clearly, is that Hamas has a real mass support, especially in Gaza, where it has become almost the only effective agent to structure social order, safeguards, political and especially offering an ideal identity and mobilizing new Palestinian generations. This success resulted from the existence of very foundations made previously by the Muslim Brotherhood movement and constant support by the other branches of the Brotherhood, especially in Jordan. At the same time, Hamas was able to shape their own paths, breaking part of traditionalism and pietism Brotherhood and assuming specific new movements rather radical Islamist militancy after the model of the Egyptian or Lebanese Hezbollah. It remains to be seen what will be his destiny in a changing regional context after the Arab revolutions, where political Islam is rising. What is found is a visible reallocation of a Sunni identity matrix, cooling relations with Iran, close in recent years, a sign of connection to the new Hamas-controlled regional front Gulf monarchies [15]. Nevertheless, as always, the Palestinian movement strategies are in close dependence (as opposed or contrary, already traditional in strange collusion) with those of Israel. Resolving the Palestinian issue remains uncertain designed in a horizon or even unlikely, however, Hamas will remain, certainly, one of the actors of the inextricable problems.

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"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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