

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS

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General Studies

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS, by Lieutenant Colonel Ido Mizrachi, 108 pages.

Since 1947, a variety of changes have taken place in the Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East. Israel faced Arab state enemies until 1982 and since then it has been dealing with non-state Organizations. The new period created a variety of threats for Israel. Those threats are no longer considered an existential threat but continue to erode the peace process and the regional stability instead. After a long-standing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, an opportunity for peace was created. The Oslo I Accord was signed and created a diplomatic dialogue between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) (Fatah), as well as a new entity, the Palestinian Authority (PA). Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) on the other hand, was able to disrupt the peace process and become more relevant in Palestinian politics. The struggle between Fatah and Hamas created a two-headed leadership for the Palestinian people, Fatah in the West Bank, and the Hamas in Gaza Strip. In order to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, Israel now has to deal with two separate entities. The purpose of this thesis is to explore the options available to Israel in dealing with Hamas while trying to assess each alternative's effectiveness.

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ACRONYMS

IDF	Israel Defense Forces
PA	Palestinian Authority
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
U.S.	United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is the conflict between Israel and Hamas: the roots of the conflict, its effects and the chances of a solution.

The purpose of this thesis is to:

1. Understand the Hamas movement and its aspirations;
2. Explore the roots of the conflict between Israel and Hamas;
3. Understand the strategy of Hamas against Israel;
4. Understand the strategy of Israel against Hamas; and
5. Offer several recommendations to overcome obstacles and resolve the conflict.

Background to the Israeli-Arab Conflict

The Israeli-Arab Conflict has played a significant role in the environment of the Middle East. Since 1947, a variety of changes have taken place in this conflict. The Israeli-Arab relationship can be split into two periods since 1947: the first between 1947 and 1982, known as the wars between states (Israel-Egypt-Jordan-Syria-Iraq). The second from 1982 and thereafter, known as the confrontation between Israel and non-states Organizations—Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Hezbollah, Hamas, Global Jihad.¹ Israel's end state since the 1948 declaration of independence is to establish and

¹ Yehoshafat Harchabi, *War and Strategy* (IDF-Maa'rahot, 1990). In his book Harchabi describes at length the reasons behind the rise of non-state actors against Israel in the 1980s.

maintain the State of Israel.² The transition from one period to another created new challenges for Israel to protect its land and population. Those non-states, using means of terror, created new threats for the State of Israel. Those threats are no longer considered an existential threat, but continue to erode the peace, stability, and well-being of the people of Israel instead.³ Throughout the years, based on territorial and ideological disputes, those non-state actors used the weakness of the state actors (Israel, in this instance) and converted that weakness into their own strength. They put strong pressure on the Israeli Government and population using terror. These terrorist activities included attacks against civilians, using suicide bombers, shooting rockets into Israeli cities, and maintaining low-intensity conflict against the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

The purpose of this behavior was to achieve power and diplomatic position, to force Israel to withdraw from the occupation areas back to the 1967 borders, and finally to destroy the State of Israel. Defeat of those non-state actors was complicated. Israel had been used to defeating its enemies in the first period (1947 to 1982) but in the second period Israel found defeating its enemies to be difficult. The current situation presents a standstill with no prospect for favorable resolution in the foreseeable future (1982 to 2014).

² Gabriel Siboni, "War and Win," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 1, no. 3 (December 2009): 39-49.

³ Zaki Shalom and Yoaz Hendel, "The Unique Features of the Second Intifada," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 3, no. 1 (May 2011): 17-27.



Figure 1. Israel and the 1967 Borders

Source: Wikipedia, “Borders of Israel,” accessed May 28, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borders_of_Israel.

Background to the Israel-Hamas Conflict

Hamas, both an acronym for “Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya” (the Islamic Resistance Movement) and an Arabic word meaning “zeal,” is a Palestinian Islamic

group that emerged in 1987 as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood.⁴ Sheik Ahmed Yassin, Hamas' spiritual leader, decided to establish a movement in Gaza to work against Israel settlement policy, resist the occupation, and encourage Palestinians to take part in the resistance effort against Israel.⁵

During the First Intifada (popular uprising, or in its contemporary meaning, repudiation),⁶ the movement gained momentum and began to take over many Palestinian institutions. Parallel to this, the movement began to perform many terrorist activities against the Zionist enemy, in connection with political activities among the Arab states and the PLO.

Hamas' military wing, the "Izz al Din al Qassam" Brigades, developed from a small band of guerrillas into a more sophisticated organization with access to greater resources and territorial control.⁷ Its goals were to fight against Israel and its occupation. Hamas used methods of attack that ranged from small-scale kidnappings and killings of Israeli military personnel, to suicide bombings and rocket attacks against Israeli civilians.

⁴ Matthew Levitt, *Hamas- Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press in cooperation with Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2006), 8.

⁵ Zaki Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement* (New York, I. B. Tauris, 2007), 23.

⁶ It was a Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories, which lasted from December 1987 until the Madrid Conference in 1991. Ze'ev Schieff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Intifada* (Tel-Aviv: Schocken Publishing 1990), 21.

⁷ Izz Al Din al Qassam was a Muslim Brotherhood member, preacher, and leader of an anti-Zionist and anti-colonialist resistance movement in historic Palestine during the British Mandate period. He was killed by British forces on November 19, 1935. Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 37.

Hamas emerged as the main domestic opposition force to Palestinian nationalist leader Yasser Arafat and his secular nationalist Fatah movement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the 1980s and 1990s, largely by using violence against Israeli civilian and military targets, just as Arafat's PLO began negotiating with Israel.⁸

The Oslo I Accord was signed on September 13, 1993 and changed the situation in the Middle East.⁹ The accord created a diplomatic dialogue between Israel and the PLO, as well as a new entity, the Palestinian Authority (PA), insulting the leaders of Hamas. Hamas tried desperately to stop the peace process and began to use terrorist activities, along with political and social activities. During this period, Hamas managed a complex and often uneven PA relationship. The political process that led to the signing of additional agreements ("Gaza-Jericho first,"¹⁰ "Oslo II"¹¹ and "Wye"¹² accords) influenced the Hamas movement in general and in particular, its mode of action.

⁸ Jim Zanotti, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 2010).

⁹ Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*, 39.

¹⁰ The Gaza-Jericho Agreement, officially called Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, of 4 May 1994 was a follow-up treaty to the Oslo I Accord in which details of Palestinian autonomy were concluded.

¹¹ The Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was a key and complex agreement in the Israeli-Palestinian Peace process. The Oslo Accords envisioned the establishment of a Palestinian interim self-government in the Palestinian territories, but fell short of the promise of an independent Palestinian state. Oslo II created the Areas A, B and C in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority was given some limited powers and responsibilities in the Areas A and B and a prospect of negotiations on a final settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The Accord was officially signed on 28 September 1995. Yair Hirshfeld, *Oslo: Formula for Peace* (Tel-Aviv, Am-Oved, 2000).

¹² The Wye River Memorandum was an agreement negotiated between Israel and the Palestinian Authority at a summit in Wye River (US) held from 15-23 October 1998.

The ideological profile of Hamas is the dominant factor in shaping worldview and outlining the way of Hamas and also affects the movement's ability to maneuver. Hamas demands government partnerships and in the strategic level, seeks to replace secular PLO representation of the Palestinians and their leadership, in order to establish an Islamic state in Palestine—under Hamas' direction. Hamas' ideology consists of a combination of Islamic religious principles of pan-Arab and Palestinian national aspirations.¹³ The unequivocal solution of Hamas in the political process is through Jihad: this principle is central to this understanding, as described in Hamas' charter,¹⁴ article 15: "In light of robbery of Palestine by the Jews, it is inevitable raising of the flag of Jihad . . . There is no escape spreading Jihad in the nation, fighting the enemy and joining the ranks of the fighters." The charter imposes the obligation of Jihad on the individual: "Jihad becomes an individual duty for every Muslim" and the entire Arab world: "It is to spread Islamic awareness among the public here, in Arab countries and in Muslim countries." In addition Hamas' leaders argued: "continue the path of Jihad until the release of all the blessed soil of our country from the river to the sea."

Throughout the agreements period, Hamas made every effort to disrupt the relationship between the PA and Israel. Its leaders clarified Arafat that they would

The Memorandum aimed to resume the implementation of the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II Accord). It was signed on the final day, 23 October 1998.

¹³ Boaz Ganor, "The Islamic Resistance Movement-Hamas," *Matara* (1991).

¹⁴ The Charter, in Arabic Al-Mithaq (the covenant), was Hamas' first attempt to produce a written document in order to explain what Hamas stood for. It was published on 18 August 1988. Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within* (Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press, 2007), 147.

challenge his authority.¹⁵ They used deadly terror activities against the citizens of Israel to undermine the relationship and to shape public opinion in Israel against the Palestinians (some of Israel's population did not distinguish between the PA and Hamas). While the PA has made efforts to be perceived as a legitimate government and to gain international recognition, Hamas did everything in its power to disrupt these processes. Although Hamas could not prevent the PLO from reaching an agreement with Israel, Hamas surely could hamper and disrupt these processes. Both Israel and the PLO have realized that there is a new player in the equation that cannot be ignored.¹⁶

The PLO leadership made the policy decisions regarding the conflict with Israel about five years before the Oslo process, during the 19th meeting of the Palestine National Council (Palestinian People's Parliament) of the PLO in November 1988 in Algiers. At that meeting the PLO accepted resolution 242 of the United Nations Security Council, which paved the way for a political accord with Israel. The PA's strategy objectives were negotiation and security cooperation with Israel, development of economy and infrastructure, unilateral push for United Nations recognition, and a reconciliation agreement. Its end state is establishment of a Palestinian state.¹⁷ On the

¹⁵ Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*, 43.

¹⁶ Schieff and Ya'ari, *Intifada*, 245.

¹⁷ Efraim Lavy and Henry Fishman, "Strategic Decisions in the Political Process between Israel and the Palestinians as Barriers to Conflict Resolution," in *Barriers to Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, ed. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2010).

other hand, Hamas' strategy objectives were refusal to recognize Israel, incitement, force buildup, and sporadic terrorism. Its end state is the destruction of Israel.¹⁸

Hamas used suicide bombers as the main tool to hurt the Israeli civilians. These attacks were designed to undermine and halt what extremist groups viewed as the humiliating and misguided Palestinian–Israeli peace process. Hamas continued armed resistance against Israel until the collapse of the peace process negotiations in 2000. In a certain way, Hamas achieved its goal.

In the years following the Oslo agreements (1994 to 2000), both sides (Israel and PA) failed to take advantage of the political opportunity. Basic lack of trust along with other significant events (Cave of the Patriarchs massacre,¹⁹ murder of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin,²⁰ suicide attacks led by Hamas and backed by Fatah etc.) led to the deterioration of the situation. In September 2000, the Palestinians were, from their

¹⁸ Ganor, "The Islamic Resistance Movement-Hamas.

¹⁹ The Cave of the Patriarchs massacre was a shooting attack carried out by American-born Israeli Baruch Goldstein, a member of the far-right Israeli Kach movement, who opened fire on unarmed Palestinian Muslims praying inside the Ibrahimi Mosque at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, West Bank. It took place on February 25, 1994, during the overlapping religious holidays of Purim and Ramadan. The attack left 29 male worshippers dead and 125 wounded.

²⁰ The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin took place on November 4, 1995 at the end of a rally in support of the Oslo Accords at the Kings of Israel Square in Tel Aviv. The assassin, an Israeli ultranationalist terrorist named Yigal Amir, strenuously opposed Rabin's peace initiative and particularly the signing of the Oslo Accords.

point of view, in a political and a psychological situation of losing all hope.²¹ On September 29, 2000, the al-Aqsa Intifada began and changed the reality.²²

At that point the Hamas and the PA began collaborating in the violent struggle against Israel. The PA, led by Yasser Arafat, used the weapons they had received from Israel against the IDF. Hamas, led by Ahmed Yassin, favored suicide bombings against Israeli civilians. The wave of deadly violence forced Israel to initiate operation “Defensive Shield” (March 2002) in the West Bank. This was a comprehensive action against terrorists in the Palestinian cities in the West Bank.²³

During the Second Intifada, the popularity of Hamas began to increase as Fatah’s standing fell. At the same time, the IDF effectively dismantled the security organizations and infrastructure of the Fatah-dominated PA (during operation “Defensive Shield”), which had the unintended consequence of leaving Fatah more vulnerable to domestic security threats.²⁴

²¹ Shalom and Hendel, 17-27.

²² In July 2000, months before the outbreak, there were talks at Camp David between Israeli delegation headed by Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian delegation headed by Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat, in an attempt to reach a permanent agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Failure of the talks was the trigger for the outbreak of violent riots. Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*, 49.

²³ Operation “Defensive Shield” was a large-scale military operation conducted by the Israel Defense Forces in 2002 during the course of the Second Intifada. It was the largest military operation in the West Bank since the 1967 Six-Day War. The operation was an attempt by the Israeli army to stop the increasing deaths from terrorist attacks, especially in suicide bombings.

²⁴ Zanotti, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*.

During the Israeli operation in the West Bank, Hamas began to gain power in the Gaza Strip. It reinforced the violent opposition against IDF forces operating in the Gaza Strip and at the same time began to develop the ability to fire rockets into Israel. Internal and external pressure on Israel, along with the desire of the Israeli leaders to disengage from the Gaza Strip, led to the withdrawal in 2005. Two IDF brigades and about 8,000 settlers left the Gaza Strip without agreement.²⁵ In 2006, a little more than a year after Arafat's death and the election of Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas to replace him as the PA president, Hamas became the first Islamist group in the Arab world to gain power democratically, after a stunning electoral upset of Fatah gave it control of the Palestinian Legislative Council and of PA Government ministries. In 2007, after an armed clash with PA (Fatah forces), Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip. Abbas dismissed Hamas ministers from the PA Government and appointed a non-Hamas Government headed by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The result was two governments, one Hamas-run in Gaza, and the other under Abbas in the West Bank.²⁶

Since then, relations between Hamas and the PA have remained tense, which affects Israel's ability to negotiate with the Palestinians. For Israel, there is no single Palestinian partner with whom to communicate.

The State of Israel recognizes the Palestinian people and their right to a normal life in parts of the Israeli territory. Hamas does not recognize the State of Israel in any

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Sherifa Zuhur, *Hamas and Israel: Conflicting Strategies of Group-Based Politics* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008).

respect.²⁷ The 1988 charter commits Hamas to the destruction of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine. The charter calls for the elimination of Israel and Jews from the Islamic holy land and portrays Jews in decidedly negative terms, citing anti-Semitic texts and conspiracies.²⁸

Since its establishment, Israel has set a strategic goal to end the conflict with its neighbors, including the Palestinians. Hamas considers the armed resistance against Israel as part of the essence of its own existence.²⁹

Scope

This work will deal with the conflict between Israel and Hamas. In a certain way it will engage the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but with only relevant contexts, which relates to the relationship between Israel and Hamas. This work will deal with the effects of the larger Middle East on the conflict only in the periphery. It will not discuss armed clashes over the years, but rather the implications of those conflicts to the policy. There is no intention to offer a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East but to offer a solution to the ongoing armed conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (Hamas in this case).

²⁷ This is a western point of view. Later in this paper, I will present the Arab point of view.

²⁸ Matthew Levitt, "Score One for 'Hamaswood'," Middle East Strategy at Harvard, August 11, 2009, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/score-one-for-hamaswood>.

²⁹ Zanoliti, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*.

Importance

As an IDF officer, I see great importance in the study and understanding of the conflict. It is important to understand Hamas and its components, and consider Hamas' way of thinking in comparison with other terror organizations. It is necessary to think broadly in order to suggest more options to solve this conflict. The ongoing conflict adversely affects both Israel's ability to reach a decision and to defeat Hamas.

The process of finding a solution can strengthen the strategic ties between Israel and its neighbors. A solution to the conflict between Israel and Hamas can serve as a bridge to resolve other long standing conflicts in the area.

This is one of several long-term problems with a non-state actor. Solving this problem may give possible advice for solving other problems like it.

Primary Question

The primary question to be answered by this thesis is: what can Israel and the IDF do to neutralize Hamas? This thesis will have to answer several separate but related questions. First, why was Hamas established? What is the Hamas strategy against Israel? What were the Israelis strategic objectives against Hamas over the years?

Underlying Assumption

The conflict between Israel and Hamas is one element in the larger Israeli-Arab conflict in the Middle East, which is based on decades of armed struggle to achieve political aims. In recent years, along with the Hamas conflict, many changes occurred in the Middle East. The Arab Spring, revolutions in Egypt, the Syrian Civil War, increased presence of radical Islamic elements in the Middle East Arab countries, outbreak of

Russian influence, enhanced Iranian ability to exert power through its agents in the region, and the potential aggressive conflicts over control of the gas fields. Israel must adjust itself in the new geopolitical situation and consider these elements when designing policy against Hamas.³⁰

Hamas is totally committed ideologically to the destruction of Israel. Radical ideologists, highly motivated people like Hamas, cannot be defeated on the battlefield. A war of attrition against Hamas is probably Israel's fate for the long-term. As past experience teaches, it will not solve the problem but will allow temporary security arrangements.

Egypt played a key role in the previous conflicts between Israel and Hamas. It would be correct to assume that Egypt will be part of any future solution to the conflict.

The United States of America (U.S.)-Israel relations have always been a significant factor in any agreements in the Middle East. Again, it would be correct to assume that a future agreement will necessarily include American involvement.³¹

“Protective Edge” left Gaza, again, in Hamas hands.³² It is beyond Israel's abilities to impose its preferred leaders on its Arab neighbors. But it is not easy to come to terms with the thought that there is no resolution to the conflict in sight and with the

³⁰ Efraim Inbar, Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 109, *The New Strategic Equation in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Israel: The BEAS Center, August, 2014).

³¹ Ibid.

³² Just like after the IDF withdrawal (2005), Operation “Cast Land” (2009) and Operation “Pillar of Defense” (2012).

realization that another round of violence is around the corner. Indeed, routinization of protracted conflict remains a main challenge for Israeli society.³³

Many studies indicate that Israel is working correctly in dealing with the threat posed by Hamas. Why, then, can Israel not decide and defeat Hamas, and what hinders the resolution of the conflict?

³³ Efraim Inbar, "Hamas was Defeated until the Next Time," Middle East Forum, September 2014, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.meforum.org/4789/hamas-was-defeated-until-the-next-time>.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1947, the United Nations put forth a plan that afforded the Palestinian people half of what is today Israel, with significantly more land than what is called the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. When the Palestinians rejected this plan, war erupted, leading to the free-for-all Arab land grab. The Egyptians usurped Gaza. The Jordanians occupied the West Bank. Then Israel took everything else in victorious military campaign. The Palestinians were left with nothing.

— Jonathan Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*

Introduction

Israeli-Palestinian relations are at the center of the political map in Israel in recent decades. This is an issue that affects almost all aspects of life of Israeli and Palestinian citizens. This modern conflict in the Middle East between the Palestinians and Israelis has generated volumes of literature that discuss the roots, the reasons, and the solutions to the ever-changing crisis.

Much has been written about this conflict, its roots and its main actors. This thesis focuses on the relationship between Israelis and the Palestinians in general and between Israel and Hamas in particular. To address this topic properly, it was necessary to explore the subject from a wide to a narrow angle. First, there was a need to understand the Israeli-Arab conflict within the context of the Middle East in association with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Second, I had to explore Hamas completely: reasons for its establishment, its strategic intentions, and the difference between the organization's ultimate long-term vision and its realistic short-term objectives. In addition, I learned about the relationship between Hamas and Fatah and its consequences on the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict. Third, was the obligation to study about Israel and its strategies and objectives versus Hamas, in order to complete the picture.

Finally, this base of knowledge allowed me to analyze the options available to Israel in dealing with Hamas, together with recommendations for further research in this area.

A wide variety of literature deals with issues relating to this thesis. Topics such as global changes and their impact on the Middle East, war and strategy, non-state organizations and their role in the late history, and how to fight terror etc., provide a broad knowledge about the current situation in the Middle East. I looked for the specific materials which provided me the understanding of the effect of the Middle East environment over the Israel-Arab conflict. It is not possible to explore the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without having this broad information and knowledge.

This research starts with the Israeli-Arab conflict in general, continues through the Israel-Palestinian conflict, and finally addresses the Israel-Hamas conflict in particular. Many books and articles describe and analyze the relations between Israelis and Palestinians from 1947 until today. The literature deals with many areas such as the First and Second Intifada, the Israeli military control of the West Bank, the Palestinian refugee issue and more, some relate indirectly to this thesis. I used those which provided me a better comprehension of the Palestinians' leaders' approach to Israel, in association with the reasons for the establishment of Hamas.

Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement, appears in Israeli, Palestinian, and American literature with extensive detail. Hamas is a unique phenomenon, since it was democratically elected to the Palestinian Parliament in less than two decades after the

establishment of the movement. The literature deals with many areas such as Hamas' structure and external relations and sponsors, social roles, and military branch etc. This study looks at the areas that provide the impact on the attitude of Hamas towards Israel and which explain Hamas' role in the Palestinians leadership (versus Fatah).

Finally, many studies and articles address the options available to both sides (Israel and Hamas) to deal with this conflict. This thesis explores the options available to Israel and to the IDF in dealing with Hamas, while presenting the advantages and the disadvantages according to the following criteria; feasible, acceptable, and suitable.

The Place of the Israeli-Arab Conflict and the Overall Picture in the Middle East in Association with the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The Israeli (or the Jewish community before 1948)–Arab Conflict has played a significant role in the environment of the Middle East for centuries. Arguably, since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 the conflict is characterized by a struggle for the existence of the Jewish state (between Israel and its Arab neighbors), and for the right to live under national sovereignty around Israel-Palestine between the State of Israel and the Palestinian. Yehoshafat Harchabi, the author of *War and Strategy*, used two periods of time to describe the recent conflict: the first between 1947 and 1982, known as the wars between states and the second from 1982 and thereafter, known as the confrontation between Israel and non-states.³⁴ This is important to understand because since 1982 Israel has been dealing with a different kind of conflict with its enemies. The new conflict's

³⁴ Yehoshafat Harchabi, *War and Strategy* (IDF-Maa'rahot, 1990).

characteristics along with Israel's strategy profoundly influence the environment in this region.

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas is a result of several variables, internal and external. It is an expression of the political stagnation prevailing in the region since 2000 and the internal Palestinian's rift between Hamas and Fatah. In addition, it is the result of far reaching changes which have occurred in the Middle East, with an emphasis on the Arab Spring and the rise of extreme Islamic organizations.³⁵

Efraim Inbar, the author of *The New Strategic Equation in the Eastern Mediterranean*, describes the complex relationship between the states and the non-state actors, and clarifies the influence of the strongest states in the region. The Arab Spring, the revolutions in Egypt, the Syrian Civil War, the increased presence of radical Islamic elements in the Middle East Arab countries, the outbreak of Russian influence, and the enhanced Iranian ability to exert power through its agents in the region, are examples of the those transformations. Inbar clarifies that the recent changes in the Middle East have an impact on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and argues that Israel must adjust itself in the new environment and consider these elements when designing policy against Hamas. In addition, those changes will have an impact on the options available to Israel in dealing with Hamas.

³⁵ Inbar, Mideast Security and Policy Studies No. 109, *The New Strategic Equation in the Eastern Mediterranean*.

Hamas-Roots, Background for the Establishment and Strategic Direction

Much of the literature reviewed clarifies that Hamas, both an acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya (the Islamic Resistance Movement) and an Arabic word meaning zeal, is a Palestinian Islamic group that emerged in 1987 as an outgrowth of the Palestinian branch of the Egypt-based Muslim Brotherhood.

Azzam Tamimi, the author of *Hamas: A History from Within*, provides the historical background for the founding of Hamas. He presents a Palestinian perspective and describes Hamas as an Islamic struggle movement whose supreme frame of reference is Islam and whose goal is the liberation of Palestine. Hamas' founder, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, is described as a spiritual leader, characterized by patience and visionary thinking. Yassin set up Hamas' *dawa* (proselytizing of Islam) and transmitted his message of armed resistance through an expanding network of mosques, student bodies, and professional organizations. Yassin saw the establishment of Hamas as the end of a long preparation process and as the beginning of a new period for the Palestinian people. For Yassin, Hamas was created to fight the Israeli presence in Palestine, as well as to fight Fatah's secular behavior which put at risk Hamas' end state: the establishment of an Islamic state throughout Palestine.³⁶

Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, the authors of *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement*, also describe Hamas' path of Islam. The book emphasizes Hamas' affinity to Islam and its ideological origins. The chapters "We deal with Allah Directly" and "In the Path of al-Assam" are examples of Hamas' Islamic way of thinking. In

³⁶ Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within*.

addition, the authors describe the strengthening of Hamas since its establishment (1987) through the Second Intifada (2000) and up to Hamas' victory in the elections to the Palestinian parliament (2006).³⁷ This provided the necessary base of knowledge to understand the reality in which Hamas is.

Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement by Zaki Chehab is an important piece of literature since it provides an authentic wealth of information based on personal interviews with Hamas' leaders. Chehab shows the essence of the movement and the mindset of its people. Sheik Ahmed Yassin, Hamas' spiritual leader, decided to establish a movement in Gaza to work against Israel's settlement policy, to resist the occupation and encourage Palestinians to take part in the resistance effort against Israel.

Many authors argue that Hamas' ideology consists of a combination of Islamic religious principles of pan-Arab and Palestinian national aspirations. However, Chehab explain that Hamas sees everything through the eyes of Islam. Even when Hamas' action is seen through pragmatic measures (usually by western eyes), it is still under the overall Islamic essence. As Hamas' senior leader told Chehab once: "You will never find anyone in Hamas who will recognize Israel's right to exist. If you do, he is a liar."³⁸ The importance of this issue will be reflected in an attempt to find common ground between Israel and Hamas.

³⁷ Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2010).

³⁸ Chehab, *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement*.

According to Matthew Levitt, the author of *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, Hamas grows and gains strength, while returning Islam into the Palestinian mindset. Levitt describe *dawa* as the preaching of Islam. It is an invitation to understand Islam through dialogue. Providing essential needs for the population was a part of the long range strategy of Sheik Yassin, in order to gain support among the Palestinians. Levitt also describes the wide gaps between Israel and Hamas and the reasons for rejecting any contact with Israel by Hamas, as written in Hamas's Charter: "The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic *Waqf* (a staple in Islamic law) endowment consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgment Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up."³⁹

My attempts to understand Hamas through the distinction between national pragmatism and Islamic religious extremism failed. The related literature makes it almost clear that Hamas sees no such separation. For Hamas, Islam is the solution to the problems of the Palestinian people, and all the measures serve Islam. This is a significant point that affects the entire thesis.

Hamas vs. Fatah—Who Represents the Palestinian People?

The establishment of Hamas and its active presence have deeply affected the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel and the PLO (Fatah), which conducted the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for years, received a third and dominant actor (Hamas). The reason for the establishment of Hamas lies in the desire to fight the Jewish

³⁹ Levitt, *Hamas- Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*.

state over Palestine. However, the additional (and not less important) purpose of Hamas was to present an alternative to the Fatah's secular authority. The way in which Hamas considers the solution of the Palestinian problem is relevant not only to explore the Israel-Hamas conflict, but also to understand the relations between Hamas and Fatah in the context of the representation of the Palestinian people.

According to Jim Zanotti, the author of *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*, the struggle began immediately after the establishment of Hamas (1987) on the question of who owns the credit for the founding of the First Intifada. Hamas expressed intense opposition to the relationship between Israel and Fatah from the very beginning using violent messages. Hamas emerged as the main domestic opposition force to Palestinian nationalist leader Yasser Arafat and his secular nationalist Fatah movement, largely by using violence against Israeli civilian and military targets, just as Arafat's PLO began negotiating with Israel. The conflict continued until the Oslo Accords (1993) and later on until the collapse of the peace process and the Second Intifada (2000). It was actually the first victory of Hamas over Fatah when Hamas' violent policy overcame Fatah's diplomatic approach.⁴⁰

Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine by Jonathan Schanzer is a significant piece of literature since it provides the background of each party and its consequences on the relations between Hamas and Fatah. The Oslo I Accord (1993) led the conflict between Hamas and Fatah to a new peak. This agreement created a diplomatic dialogue between Israel and the PLO, as well as a new entity, the Palestinian Authority, insulting

⁴⁰ Zanotti, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*.

the leaders of Hamas. At this stage, Hamas has radicalized its violent acts against Israel with the aim of disrupting the diplomatic relations between Fatah and Israel.

Some articles show the gap between Hamas and Fatah on a geographical basis. In contrast, Schanzer argues that the struggle between Fatah and Hamas was not based on territorial conflict. It was a fight between two rival Palestinian factions, known to hold two diametrically different ideological positions with regard to the role of religion and politics, in what is commonly referred to as the struggle for Palestine.⁴¹ This background is important in order to understand the events and the continuous struggle between Hamas and Fatah during those days.

Sherifa D. Zuhur, the author of *Hamas and Israel: Conflicting Strategies of Group-Based Politics* posits that the argument between Hamas and Fatah is based on the question of what is the way to represent the Palestinian people in their fight against Israel. Unlike Arafat, who believed that the Palestinians should stay independent of outside disturbances, Hamas' leaders thought that the Palestinian goal should also be a pan-Arab and pan-Islamic cause. Arafat sought the support of the international community and moderate Arab countries, while Hamas believed that it must have radical Islamist patrons. Zuhur claims that over the years, these different approaches influenced the functional capacity of the PA.⁴² Using this approach along with *dawa* allowed Hamas to gain power among the Palestinian population and slowly erode Fatah's role.

As described in the literature, the peak of the conflict was the Hamas victory in the elections to the Palestinian Parliament, in 2006. Despite the attempts to appease

⁴¹ Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*.

⁴² Zuhur, *Hamas and Israel: Conflicting Strategies of Group-Based Politics*.

between Fatah and Hamas, the schism grew deeper. The Gaza-West Bank split, led by two different governments, was the main cause for the deepening of the tear. Each side tried to establish its control, over the area under its control. This created a two-headed leadership for the Palestinian people: the Fatah Government in the West Bank, and the Hamas Government in the Gaza Strip. Israel reached a point where there was no single Palestinian partner to negotiate with.

The Options Available to Israel in Dealing with Hamas

There are many possible solutions to this conflict, which are described in many books and periodicals. The literature produces a wide range of solutions within two major categories; diplomatic and military.

Military Ways

At the military level the literature presents two major options for Israel and for the IDF:

1. Reoccupation of the Gaza Strip, breakdown Hamas' government, and destroy Hamas' military wing.
2. Continue the war of attrition with Hamas in order to create quiet periods from one clash to the next.

Efraim Inbar, the author of "Israel's Palestinian Challenge, claims that the Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip in 2006 means the continuation of violent conflict with Israel. Hamas uses its control over the Gaza Strip to gain political and military power in order to continue the armed struggle against Israel. In the recent decades and especially since 2006, Hamas operates systematically and consistently with violence

against Israeli civilians. Inbar believes that a long and comprehensive military operation is possible and should lead Israel into two important results; to stop the violence from Gaza and to strengthen the deterrence against other Islamic groups in the region.⁴³

An attack on the Hamas military leadership and military assets would be a difficult battle, almost certainly causing many Israeli casualties and many Palestinian civilian deaths. Max Singer, the author of “A Middle Way for the Gaza Fight,” argues that although the price may be very expensive, it is an alternative that should be considered. The war against Hamas was imposed on Israel and every result except for a decisive victory would be a disaster for Israel. Like Inbar, Singer attaches supreme importance to the renewal of Israel’s deterrent capability in the Middle East.⁴⁴

Yaacov Amidror, the author of “The Dilemma during Operation Protective Edge,” argues that Israel’s supreme commitment is to defend its citizens. In the current situation, there is no reasonable possibility to provide security for the Israelis other than to defeat Hamas in the Gaza Strip.⁴⁵

All the supporters of this approach argue that this option is very expensive and complex. They also claim that in order to prevent a return to the days of military rule in

⁴³ Efraim Inbar, “Israel’s Palestinian Challenge,” the BEAS Center, June 2007, accessed March 27, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/mideast-security-and-policy-studies/israels-palestinian-challenge-hebrew-2-2/>.

⁴⁴ Max Singer, “A Middle Way for the Gaza Fight,” the BESA Center, August 11, 2014, accessed January 24, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/middle-way-gaza-fight/>.

⁴⁵ Yaacov Amidror, “The Dilemma during Operation Protective Edge,” The BESA Center, July 24, 2014, accessed April 10 2015, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/>.

the Gaza Strip, Israel must plan for the day after the occupation of the Gaza Strip.

However, they all are convinced that this alternative should be considered.

The second option for military action is managing the violent conflict instead of resolving it. According to Orit Parlov, the author of “Is Hamas calculates its end? From the discussion on social networks of the Palestinian and Arab world Arena,” this approach intends to neutralize Hamas through a slow defeat. It is based on an Israeli strategy of Hamas’ erosion on two levels:

1. Continuous attacks on Hamas’s military capabilities.
2. Damage to the legitimacy of Hamas among the Arab countries and the Palestinian population.⁴⁶

“Mowing the Grass in Gaza,” by Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir is a significant article since it provides a description of the current situation. As a result of the understanding of the complicated political situation in the Middle East, the authors see the objectives for any military campaign against Hamas to focus on activities such as degrading its military capabilities and achieving a period of quiet.⁴⁷ Due to the fact that there is no final military solution to the conflict, these periods of quiet should enable Israel to weaken Hamas and to find other ways of influence.

⁴⁶ Orit Parlov, “Is Hamas Calculates Its End? From the Discussion on Social Networks of the Palestinian and Arab world Arena,” in *The Lessons of Operation “Protective Edge”*, eds. Anat Kurtz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014).

⁴⁷ Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, “Mowing the Grass in Gaza,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 22, 2014.

Diplomatic Ways

The spectrum of diplomatic options is broader than the military spectrum. The literature offers Israel a wide range of solutions from neutralization of Hamas, through the use of a third party to complete recognition, up to direct negotiations with Hamas.

Shmuel Sandler, the author of the *Israel's Dilemma in Gaza*, considers Egypt as the key player for the diplomatic solution between Israel and Hamas. The relationship between Egypt and Hamas has been through many changes in recent years as a result of political changes in Egypt. The Arab Spring and the rise of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi to power create an open conflict between the Egyptian leadership and Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Hamas' violence against Israel, supported by the Muslim Brotherhood (Sisi's opponents in Egypt) is in direct contrast to the Egyptian policy. It is a reality that Israel needs to exploit by finding a common ground with Egypt.⁴⁸

Kobi Michael and Udi Dekel, the authors of *Recalculating the Gaza Route: Reconstruction of an Autonomous Area with Protected Zones*, continues the Egyptian line, when they claim that reconstruction of the Gaza Strip is a definite Israeli interest. Such action can reduce the volume of Palestinian's support for Hamas and improve Israel's international image. To this end, Israel must cooperate with Egypt, which has become the main link between Israel and Hamas.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Shmuel Sandler, "Israel's Dilemma in Gaza," The BESA Center, December 6, 2012, accessed March 9, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/israels-dilemma-in-gaza/>.

⁴⁹ Kobi Michael and Udi Dekel, "Recalculating the Gaza Route: Reconstruction of an Autonomous Area with Protected Zones," *INSS Insight* No. 671, March 9, 2015, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=8924>.

Another diplomatic approach shows the neutralization of Hamas through strengthening of Fatah. *Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas* is a report which clarifies that Israel has an interest to bring reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah. Thus, Fatah will become the main representative of the Palestinian people and Hamas will be a secondary factor. Israel must convince the Palestinian people that the diplomatic process is important and put Hamas in a situation where there is no other alternative other than working peacefully with Fatah. In doing so, Israel will create a clear partner for the peace process and neutralize Hamas, through interior Palestinian pressure.⁵⁰

An entirely different diplomatic option is the three state solution. It eliminates the current idea of the two states solution (establishment of a Palestinian state alongside with the existing State of Israel) because the idea of establishing a sovereign state without a clear contiguous territory is destined to fail. Colin P. Clarke, the author of “Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two,” argues that the gap between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is not just a geographical separation, but also a religious and cultural divide. According to Clarke, Hamas’ control of the Gaza Strip is also its weak point, since Hamas is responsible for the lives of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. This fact should be utilized by Israel. In addition, Hamas’ presence in power prevents the entry of other Islamic groups into the Gaza Strip.⁵¹

⁵⁰ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 73: “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas,” March 19, 2008, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/072-ruling-palestine-i-gaza-under-hamas.aspx>.

⁵¹ Colin P. Clarke, “Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two,” *Journal of Public and International Affairs* 20 (Spring 2009).

Kobi Michael and Udi Dekel, the authors of “The Gaza Strip: What Can Israel Do to Postpone—or Even Prevent—the Next Round of Violence?” adds that Israel’s recognition of Hamas’ rule can promote the reconstruction efforts of Gaza and make the international community apply pressure on Hamas to stop its violence.⁵²

Summary

From the review of the literature, several common themes have been identified, which support the thesis. It is clear that, for the moment, Israel and the Palestinians are at an impasse in their relationship. This conflict is deeply affected by the Middle East environment and the rise of extreme Islamic non-state actors, along with Iran’s expansionist ambitions. Israel’s military campaigns are not a long-term solution to the issue and those only produce temporary quiet periods for both sides, until the next fight. Diplomatic solutions are a part of a long and complex process and some experts no longer believe peace is possible.

This review identified the following common threads:

1. Hamas is an Islamic organization and will continue the armed resistance against Israel as long as the conditions make this possible. Hamas will strive to continue to control Gaza and represent the Palestinian people.
2. The rift between Hamas and Fatah is deepening. This is due to geographical distance, as well as religious and ideological distancing.

⁵² Kobi Michael and Udi Dekel, “The Gaza Strip: What Can Israel Do to Postpone—or Even Prevent—the Next Round of Violence?,” *INSS Insight* No. 641, December 11, 2014, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=8325>.

3. From the Palestinian perspective, Fatah collaborates with Israel, while Hamas carries the resistance flag.
4. Egypt is a key player in the relations between Israel and Hamas. Israel needs to create common ground with Egypt in order to neutralize the violence of Hamas. Hamas will find it difficult to make direct concessions with Israel.
5. Israel can defeat Hamas militarily. However, Israel also can influence the violence of Hamas through the use of diplomatic channels.
6. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general, and Israel-Hamas conflict in particular, has no simple and immediate solution. The situation requires both sides to implement visionary thinking, changes in the environment, significant concessions, trust, and patience.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the research methodology used throughout this paper which supports the thesis. The purpose of this paper is to look into the options available to Israel and to the IDF in dealing with Hamas' aggression. My primary research question is "what can Israel and the IDF do to neutralize Hamas?" During the search for the research's answer, several more questions arose, which had to be answered.

Subordinate Questions

During the course of the research the following subordinate questions emerged:

1. Why was Hamas established?
2. What is Hamas and what are its strategies and objectives against Israel?
3. What prevents Hamas from achieving its goals?
4. How Israel sees Hamas and what are its strategies and objectives against Hamas?
5. What prevents Israel from achieving its goals?
6. What are the options for Israel to deal with Hamas?
7. What does the future hold for both sides?

Conceptual Design

The methodology for constructing this research project was used by identifying the problem, developing a theory, and collecting relevant facts and information. These

will help demonstrate the existing options to resolve the conflict while being grounded in the historical background and distilled from a strategic analysis of the reality.

Defining the Problem

When starting work on the project there was no defined problem. First I looked for an answer to the question, whether a terrorist organization can be defeated and by what means. I tried to understand the Hamas organization through its vulnerabilities and not by trying to understand the depth of the conflict and the movement's stated goals. The PLO was not a major factor in the research initially, and only after delving deep into the material did I realize the consequences of the relationship between Hamas and the PLO, on the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

Many consultation meetings and profound reading of the material led me to form a research question about Israel's possibilities in neutralizing Hamas' violence and not necessarily in destroying it or in bringing it to submission. Discussing various options in the military-diplomatic field became more appropriate and professional in this research process.

Developing a Thesis

As the researcher continued delving deeper, it became clear that Israel had to choose a course of action. The research showed that in recent years Israel had been dealing with the Hamas organization from conflict to conflict, with Hamas determining the level of violence. The assumption which developed was that Israel had a wide range of possible courses of action in the military and diplomatic fields, and so Israel would

have to choose which way to go, while taking into account the external circumstances affected by each of Israel's actions.

Collecting and Analyzing the Facts

The longest phase in the research was collecting the information in order to determine the possible courses of action. At this stage the researcher widened his available sources while focusing on neutral source material to show the most unbiased opinion possible. Strategic analyses by research institutes were used, which offer a wide range of solutions to the conflict. Different essays dealing with similar conflicts in different places and at different times were also used. For example, Colin P. Clarke, the author of "Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two," argues that the idea of establishing a sovereign state without a clear contiguous territory is destined to fail. Just as East and West Pakistan fought a bloody war in 1971 that resulted in the formation of Bangladesh and Pakistan, so too will any attempt to link Gaza and the West Bank as a united "Palestine" fail miserably while the distance between Gaza and the West grows.⁵³

Assembling the Material and Recommendations about Courses of Action

The collected material was organized in such a manner as to support a course of action by the relevant historical background and by looking into the options with a professional point of view. Every course of action received a different section and an

⁵³ Clarke, "Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two."

exhausting analysis of the background and of the consequences of every action Israel takes. That is the product of the profound research done so far.

The Research Process

The methodology I used during my research was to look into every possible course of action for Israel through a historical analysis of the opposing sides of the conflict. The first section presents the background for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over several decades. The goal is to provide the necessary information required to understand the strategic environment in which Israel finds itself and to understand the additional factors at work related to Hamas.

The second section presents the Hamas movement—the reason for its establishment, its strategic intentions, and an attempt to understand the difference between the organization’s ultimate long-term vision and its realistic short-term objectives. The long-term vision which is the annihilation of the State of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic state throughout Palestine, while the short-term objectives are: a long ceasefire; establishing Hamas’ rule in the Gaza Strip; improving the quality of life for the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip, and at the same time strengthening Hamas’ influence in the West Bank.

The third section presents the State of Israel and its stated goals toward the Hamas organization. The purpose of this section is to find out what Israel’s strategic approach to Hamas is, to facilitate a more focused exploration of its possibilities on the matter.

The fourth section is the core of the research. Based on the analysis of the historical findings it presents the options Israel has in dealing with Hamas. The choice of options is subjective and it is based on the writer’s stance, with each option including the

relevant background needed to fully demonstrate it. In addition, each option is examined by the standards of a possible course of action (plausible, applicable, and suitable).

The fifth and last section is conclusions and recommendations for the future. Based on the early information and on the presented options, the consequence of choosing each path is shown.

How the Information was collected

The main way to gather information on the conflict between Israel and Hamas was combining Israeli literature (in Hebrew), Palestinian literature (translated into English) and American literature on the subject. That was the right way to objectively show both sides of the conflict.

The Israeli and Palestinian stances are introduced by using the most authentic sources possible to keep a high level of objectivity. Israel's possible courses of action were examined using essays from Israeli and American strategic research institutes.

The literature review describes the various essays, books, and sources for this project.

Limitations

The primary importance of this research is the high death toll the conflict between Israel and Hamas exacts on both sides. On the Israeli side innocent civilians are hurt, as well as soldiers who take part in operations against Hamas. On the Palestinian side innocent civilians are also hurt, as well as Hamas militants. In the Gaza Strip the humanitarian condition is getting worse and the civilians are suffering from a severe lack of water, food, medicine and other basic products. This research is also important,

because Hamas has become a dominant player in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Hamas' victory in the 2006 Palestinian Authority elections created two separate Palestinian entities, Hamas in the Gaza Strip and the PLO in the West Bank, and so Israel has to face another Palestinian representative.

The first limitation for this research is language, since English is the writer's second language. The second limitation is the inability to access authentic Arab sources that tell Hamas' story from within. Thus, sources by Palestinian writers translated in English are used.

Summary

The researcher attempted to understand the depth of the conflict between Israel and Hamas together with the additional factors that influence both sides to look into Israel's options in dealing with Hamas' continued violence. Much was written in the past about Hamas' roots and about the movement's relationship with Israel. The latest texts are mainly focused on trying to analyze the current condition in Gaza Strip, in an attempt to understand where Hamas is headed. In addition, many essays try to examine Israel's intentions in this area. These can aid the researcher in shedding light on the current reality between the sides and in presenting possible solutions, based on historical background and on a strategic analysis of the sides participating in the conflict.

CHAPTER 4

BACKGROUND

This chapter provides the background for the relationship between Israel and Hamas and its effects on both sides. The purpose of this chapter is to allow a broad knowledge for the subject of this thesis which is to look into the options available to Israel and to the IDF in dealing with Hamas' aggression. The first area will examine Hamas' strategies and objectives against Israel from a Palestinian point of view. The next area explores the roots of Hamas and Fatah and the impact of their relationship on the subject. Last will be an examination of Israel's strategies and objectives against Hamas and what role Hamas plays in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians.

Hamas and its Strategies and Objectives against Israel

“Two months before the start of the Intifada in December 1987, I had decided to establish a movement in Gaza to work against the Israeli settlement policy, resist the occupation and to encourage Palestinians to take part in the resistance efforts against Israel” (Sheikh Ahmad Yassin).⁵⁴

A serious car accident in which four Palestinians died in the Gaza Strip on 9 December 1987 is viewed as the opening shot of the popular uprising of the Palestinians against the Israeli occupation. On that night the Muslim Brotherhood's leadership in Gaza met to discuss the issue, led by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, they decided to establish a resistance movement that was to be known as Harakat al-Muqawamah al-

⁵⁴ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 23.

Islamiyah (the Islamic Resistance Movement). For many years, the Hamas' leadership was looking for a way to strengthen the influence in the region. The changes in the reality of the Israeli-Palestinian relations created some opportunities for Hamas to achieve a breakthrough. In historical perspective, the night of December 9, 1987 was a turning point for Hamas' leaders. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin once said: "Our preparations continued, with our efforts and the efforts of our brothers, from years and years. Throughout that time we gathered, observed and waited until the moment to move arrived." A long period of planning came to fruition.⁵⁵

Hamas' roots are planted in the Muslim Brotherhood movement in Egypt, as described in the 1988 Charter: "The Islamic Resistance Movement is one of the wings of Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine."⁵⁶ Hamas' leaders continued to emphasize the historical value of the relationship between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in geographical and political contexts: "the mother of the movement to which Hamas belongs is the Muslim Brotherhood Society which has been digging its roots into Palestine soil for decades before the establishment of the occupying Zionist entity."⁵⁷

The Muslim Brotherhood is a religious and political organization founded in 1928 in Ismailiya, Egypt. According to Matthew Levitt, author of "Hamas- Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the service of Jihad", the movement deals with resistance to the Zionist idea and the British Mandate in Palestine territories. In 1948, when Israel declared independence, the Muslim Brotherhood fought against the new state. After the 1948 War,

⁵⁵ Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within*, 10-11.

⁵⁶ Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, 19.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Gaza fell under Egyptian and the West Bank under Jordanian authority. The Brotherhood branches were suppressed under the regimes' jurisdiction (Egypt and Jordan) and kept a low profile. The Israeli victory in the Six Day War (1967) and the occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank created an opportunity for the Muslim Brotherhood to increase its influence in the new borders of Israel. However, the most significant strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood came in 1973. Israel provided Ahmad Yassin (the eventual founder of Hamas) the license to establish al-Mujamma' al-Islami (the Islamic Center). It served as a cultural and political center for the Brotherhood's activities and allowed Yassin to reach out to all Palestinians. The center served the idea of *dawa* (literally "a call for God"),⁵⁸ a social welfare and administrative branch, responsible for recruitment, funding, and social services.⁵⁹ Hamas, as well as the Muslim Brotherhood, believed that social services institutions function as an ideal tool to convince and recruit young Muslims to join the path of Islam. They also believed that social justice is an inherent part of Islam and is necessary to be practiced by devout Muslims.

Levitt describes four steps in the short-history of Hamas between the years 1967 to 1987. The first stage was (1967 to 1976), Establishing the core of the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza. The second stage was (1976 to 1981), geographical expansion and the establishment of Islamic institutions such as al-Mujama al-Islamiya and the Islamic University in Gaza. The third stage was (1981 to 1987), political influence, the establishment of a committee of decision-making and ongoing preparation for future

⁵⁸ *dawa* means the preaching of Islam. It is an invitation to understand Islam through dialogue. Provide essential needs for the population was a part of long range strategy of Sheik Yassin in order to gain support among the Palestinians.

⁵⁹ Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*, 20.

violent struggle. Also known as the education and preparation stage. And the last stage was (1987), founding of Hamas as the combatant arm of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine.⁶⁰

Yassin, Hamas' founder and leader, has a significant role in the movement. Sheikh Ahmed Ismail Hasan Yassin was born in 1936 in the village of al-Jurah, near the modern Israeli city of Ashkelon. He was only three year old when he lost his father. At the age of twelve the Nakba (an Arabic interpretation of catastrophe) forced Yassin and his family to abandon their home as a part of the Arab immigration during the 1948 war. He lived with difficulties in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip without his father.

Poverty and hunger forced him to work at an early age to support his seven member family. At the age of sixteen he fell on his back in an accident and lost his ability to walk. However, his disability did not prevent him from developing a career in education and direct contact with the young Palestinian generation.⁶¹

The First Intifada (December 1987) was an important milestone in the formation of Hamas. The leaders of Hamas were waiting for the right moment to publish what they wanted. Everyone involved in Palestinian politics tried to take credit for starting that civil uprising, and Hamas' leaders did everything they could to be seen as leader of the resistance. Sheikh Yassin and his partners realized that the uprising was an excellent opportunity for them to grow stronger. The civil resistance allowed them to reach the population, which was an important element in building the power of Hamas.

⁶⁰ Levitt, *Hamas- Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, 22.

⁶¹ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 15-16.

Hamas' leaders saw a great importance in bringing Islam into the national struggle. In their view, the loss of Palestine and the creation of Israel were the result of the departure of Muslims from the true path of Islam.⁶² In the center of this criticism stood the Palestinian secular movement, the PA. Hamas spiritual and founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin set up the Hamas *dawa* (proselytizing of Islam) because he believed that focusing the education and preaching would recruit many supporters among the Palestinians and reduce the Israeli opposition to his actions. He used the fact that Israel supported non-violent Islamic-Palestinian functions in order to undermine the influence of the PLO.⁶³ Hamas' *dawa* activities became its most important tool for furthering the movement's goals of destroying Israel and undermining the PA. Hamas provided religious and social services and missionary activities in order to recruit grassroots and operational support. *Dawa* was the secret of Hamas' success.

The decision to declare the establishment of Hamas forced the leaders of the movement to publish its initial intentions. Alongside the struggle for freedom for the Palestinian people, Hamas saw the elimination of Israel as part of the strategic purpose of the movement. The presence of a Jewish Zionist entity would not allow, in their view, the establishment of an Islamic state throughout Palestine.⁶⁴ The zeal at that time reached its peak in August 1988, when Hamas published its Charter, in which it declared a jihad that would continue until Palestine was liberated and the State of Israel was eliminated. The

⁶² Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within*, 28.

⁶³ Levitt, *Hamas- Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, 24.

⁶⁴ Tamimi, *Hamas: A History from Within*, 52.

Charter included the basic concepts of Hamas, and parts will be described later on in this chapter.

According to Zaki Chehab, author of *Inside Hamas: the untold story of the Militant Islamic Movement*, Sheikh Yassin said that the first phase was to build Hamas' institutions, such as charities and social committees which would attract any Palestinian who could be a part of the resistance to the occupation. The second phase was to stabilize the political legitimacy by strengthening the roots of resistance in every home in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. The third phase was to develop the military capabilities from stone-throwing and launching Molotov cocktails, to use of firearms and explosives. "Anything which would give the Israelis sleepless nights" said Yassin. The final stage was to move Hamas beyond the Palestinian dimension and to create a peaceful relationship with its Arab and Islamic neighbors.⁶⁵

The leadership of Hamas rejected peace with Israel on religious, nationalist, and ideological grounds. As described in Hamas's Charter: "The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic *Waqf* (a staple in Islamic law) endowment consecrated for future Moslem generations until Judgment Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up."⁶⁶

Alongside political activity and the attempts to influence the Palestinian population, Hamas started to run military cells, in order to strengthen the organization's operational capabilities. In 1987, those cells began to carry out their first attacks against Israelis. Hamas created the Majd (Majmouath jihad u-Dawa, or the Holy War and

⁶⁵ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 22-23.

⁶⁶ Levitt, *Hamas- Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad*, 31.

Sermonizing Group) to deal with the Palestinians who collaborated with Israel and to serve as the strike force for the new organization. The al-Mujahideen al-Filastinun, which was founded in 1982, received the responsibility for the weapons trade and as of December 1987 was in charge of executing shooting and bombing attacks as well.

By 1991, both the Majd and the The al-Mujahideen al-Filastinun had regrouped as the military wing of Hamas, Izz Al Din al-Qassam Brigades, named for a Muslim Brotherhood member, preacher, and leader of an anti-Zionist and anti-colonialist resistance movement in historic Palestine during the British Mandate period. The role of the military wing was to implement the policy of Hamas' resistance. The policy started with sporadic attacks against individual Israelis, continued with firing light weapons and mortars against Israeli targets and reached a peak in operating suicide bombers against Israeli population centers.⁶⁷

Over the years, the military cells strengthened and enhanced the decision-making capability of Hamas' leaders. In the west Bank, the military wing continued to operate despite the PA's control. In the Gaza Strip, the military wing developed its capabilities and from 2005 had organized as a semi-army with territorial responsibility and total control of every military operation from and within Gaza.

January 2006 was the watershed for the Hamas movement. Winning the election was the end of a long process with two objectives. The first, to prevent any progress in the peace process between Israel and the PA. The second, to accumulate as much power among the Palestinian population as possible. It was clear that the failure of the relationship between Israel and the PA strengthen the position of Hamas. Hamas' victory

⁶⁷ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 42-43.

surprised many on both sides, who wondered how the Palestinians could vote for an armed extremist movement with the declared objective as the destruction of Israel. Probably, the answer lies in the great disparity between the perspectives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.⁶⁸

Currently, Hamas has the majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament and, as the government in Gaza; it shares responsibility for the welfare of the population. The transition from political wilderness to political power put Hamas in a complex situation. The movement from opposition to leadership created new difficulties in the perception of Hamas. The movement was committed to the population in the Gaza Strip, which was under international and Israeli pressure. Hamas had to make concessions in order to gain international recognition, and was responsible for every act of violence against Israel. Hamas' refusal to recognize Israel together with the PA's refusal to give up its institutions, led to political friction which culminated in June 2007. Hamas violently took control of the government institutions in the Gaza Strip and executed Fatah loyalists. Mahmoud Abbas, leader of Fatah,⁶⁹ dissolved the Hamas leadership in the West Bank, and swore one in its place. This created a two-headed leadership for the Palestinian people- the Fatah Government in the West Bank, and the Hamas Government in the Gaza Strip.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement*, 9.

⁶⁹ Fatah-a secular Palestinian terrorist organization founded in the late 1950s by Yassir Arafat. It is now a political faction led by Mahmoud Abbas.

⁷⁰ Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement*, 12.

It seems that Hamas' policy is a combination of religious extremism and political pragmatism. According to Chehab, Sheikh Yassin had no problem sending young men to their deaths, as long as it would result in the killing of Israelis. He likened himself to the Prophet and claimed that his vision is based on a *Sura* in the Qur'an which described the Jewish presence in Israel as a temporary period that would be completed within a few decades. However, Chehab maintained that Yassin was ready to sign a ceasefire for a period of 10 to 20 years, on the condition that Israel withdrew from the occupied area to the 1967 border.⁷¹

In addition to presenting Hamas' policy by a way of Jihad ("continue the path of Jihad until the release of all the blessed soil of our country from the river to the sea"), Chehab describes the political position of the Sheikh. Yassin opposed the agreements signed between Israel and the PA not because they recognized the State of Israel, but because they ignored the main issues for the Palestinian people: the future of Jerusalem, uprooting settlements, the right of return to the original homes and the future of the borders.⁷²

Hamas' first Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh, presented this dilemma by combining the bomb and the ballot (politics and resistance). He claimed that the violent resistance against Israel was based on the existence of Hamas, and yet Hamas had political ambitions and a strong desire to lead the Palestinian people. The questions about

⁷¹ Chehab, *Inside Hamas*, 105.

⁷² Ibid.

the Israeli occupation, refugees, Jerusalem and the Palestinian prisoners are still open. Therefore, resistance must continue.⁷³

According to Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, authors of *Hamas—The Islamic Resistance Movement*, Hamas has unique features that distinguish it from any Islamist movement. It was the first to be elected to power democratically. It is extremely religious, but nationalist; Sunni, yet supported by Iran (Shi'a regional power); democratic, but seated; populist, but cruel. Many see Hamas as the main obstacle to peace with Israel. Others believe that, until Hamas is recognized as a legitimate political force, there can never be peace in the region.⁷⁴

Milton-Edwards and Farrell also claimed that it will be a mistake to think that Hamas' main and only objective is the destruction of the State of Israel. Removal of the Zionist occupation is indeed a necessary condition for the realization of its ultimate goal, but the final goal is an independent state in Palestine governed in accordance with Islam. Hamas sees Israel as the aggressor which denies the Palestinians the right for an independent state, but it also sees the secular and leftist Palestinian movements (such as Fatah) as a threat to the realization of its goal. Whereas Israel is a military obstacle, the secular Palestinian movements are competing with Hamas for the support of the Palestinian population.

One of the key issues is that Israel, in order to find a way to address Hamas, is looking for the answer to the question whether Hamas is at its roots a nationalist movement (motivated by a calculation of Palestinian internal national interest), or a

⁷³ Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas; The Islamic Resistance Movement*, 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

religious movement (driven by wider Islamic agenda with external interests), while Hamas sees no such separation. For Hamas, Islam is the solution to the problems of the Palestinian people, and all the measures serve.

The main cause of the lack of understanding of Israel is the behaviors of the leaders of Hamas. The frequent transition back from extremism to pragmatism and forth, raises the question of the distinction within Hamas. However, this frequent transition serves the interest of Hamas' leaders to achieve their long-term objectives. For example, Hamas' aspiration for a long term truce is perceived by Israel as a pragmatic move, whereas for Hamas it serves as a way to gain strength for the next conflict against Israel. Those different perspectives between Israel and Hamas are at the core of this research.

Hamas vs Fatah

Hamas and Fatah have been locked in a power struggle since 1987. The conflict between the two most influential Palestinian parties is a key element in understanding the wider conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. The relationship between Hamas and Fatah has significant impact on the relations between Israel and Hamas. Exploring this topic can help understand whether the PA, led by Fatah, is able to become a future bridge between Israel and Hamas.

Fatah, formerly the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, is a leading secular Palestinian political party and the largest faction of the confederated multi-party PLO. Founded in the late 1950s by Yassir Arafat as a terror organization to fight against Israel. It is now a political faction led by Mahmoud Abbas. Fatah's ideology is based on the concept of Haj Amin al-Husseini, the mufti (religious authority) of Jerusalem from 1921 to 1948. During these years, he led a violent struggle against the British Mandate

and the Jewish community in Israel. In 1941, he also had an audience with Hitler, who agreed with the Mufti's program in Palestine, to include the eradication of Jews.⁷⁵ He led the opposition to the UN proposal to divide the land of Israel and to establish two states, one for the Jewish people and the other for the Palestinian people. The Palestinian leadership's vacuum was filled with limited success by Yassir Arafat. Wearing his uniform and *keffiyeh* (Arab traditional headscarf) he led the violent struggle against Israel in the 1960s and 1970s. The violent activity increased especially after the Six Day War in which Israel occupied Gaza Strip and the West Bank. In so doing, Arafat became the de facto leader of the Palestinian people and the military commander in the struggle for Palestine.⁷⁶

Israel has made many efforts to push Arafat's organization beyond its borders. Arafat's attempts to be based outside the territory of Israel had limited success and was temporary. In 1970, Fatah was violently suppressed by King Hussein in Jordan (events known as 'Black September') and in 1982 was expelled from southern Lebanon by the IDF during operation 'Peace for Galilee'. The Fatah headquarters then moved to Tunis and worked there to promote the interests of the Palestinians inside Israel. Despite the difficulty to stabilize his control outside of Israel permanently, Arafat managed to keep up the armed struggle against Israel. By 1974, the PLO was recognized as the unquestioned leader of the Palestinian people at the Arab summit.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ "Hajj Amin al-Husayni: Wartime Propagandist, Collaboration with the Axis," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

⁷⁶ Schanzer, *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*, 7-8.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 19.

The first Intifada in 1987 led to the return of Arafat to Israel. The desire to lead the popular uprising along with ambition to be the official leader of the Palestinian people, led Arafat to make crucial political decisions. Despite commanding a terrorist organization and expressing his opposition to Israel's existence, western countries including the U.S. and Israel, recognized him as the official leader of the Palestinian people. In 1988, Arafat declared the independence of Palestine in accord with the 1948 borders. Significantly, Arafat also recognized the State of Israel within the 1948 borders. Nationalist aspirations led Arafat to give up the idea of the destruction of Israel and to accept the possibility of an independent Palestinian state next to Israel. That is, at least, what he claimed. This led to international support of Arafat's moves, but strengthened the internal Palestinian resistance. Most of all, it was Hamas who exploited the intifada to gain power and to oppose Fatah. From this moment the struggle between Hamas and Fatah intensified.⁷⁸

Hamas is driving by radical Islamic ideology. This means a strict interpretation of the Qur'an (the holy book of Islam) and the Shari'a (Islamic law) which justified violence to achieve Islam's objective.⁷⁹ It endorses violent behavior against everything that they view as being against the principles of Islam (as capitalism, egalitarianism, individualism and democracy). Unlike Arafat, who believed that the Palestinians should stay independent of outside disturbances, Hamas' leaders thought that the Palestinian goal should be also pan-Arab and pan-Islamic cause. Arafat sought the support of the international community and moderate Arab countries, while Hamas believed that it must

⁷⁸ Ibid., 26-29.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 5.

have radical Islamist patrons. The republic of Iran, which adamantly opposed the negotiation between Fatah and Israel, became the main supporter of Hamas. Despite the significant differences between the two (Iran is a Shi'a society and Hamas is a Sunni organization), they both found common adversaries in Israel and Fatah.⁸⁰

According to Jonathan Schanzer, authors of *Hamas vs. Fatah the Struggle for Palestine*, the friction between Hamas and Fatah is based on religious and ideological grounds. It is about the role of religion and politics in the struggle for Palestine. Although the two movements share the same enemy (the State of Israel), and they both were established to fight the Jewish state, they are fundamentally different. Over the years, each demonstrated different course of action of representing the Palestinian and the struggle against Israel was based on different original ideologies. When Fatah chose to dialogue with Israel, Hamas intensified its opposition to Israel as well as to the PA. Hamas was foiling every positive step that the PA was making in the peace negotiation with Israel.

Hamas decided to oppose the Oslo Peace Accords,⁸¹ Arafat, the PLO, Fatah, and the newly formed PA in order to avoid the risk of being marginalized by the PA. That was Hamas' way to gain power as a reaction to the rising power of the PA, as well as maintain resistance for any Palestinian's relations with Israel.

⁸⁰ Zuhur, *Hamas and Israel*, 35-36.

⁸¹ The Oslo I Accord was signed on September 13, 1993 and created a diplomatic dialogue between Israel and the PLO, as well as a new entity, the Palestinian Authority (PA). Oslo II, officially signed on 28 September 1995, created the Areas A, B and C in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority was given some limited powers and responsibilities in the Areas A and B and a prospect of negotiations on a final settlement based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The Oslo Accords envisioned the establishment of a Palestinian interim self-government in the Palestinian territories, but fell short of the promise of an independent Palestinian state.

The struggle between Hamas and Fatah officially started with the establishment of Hamas, continued with the establishment of the PA and the Oslo Accords, and reached its peak in the Hamas' electoral victory (in 2006, a little more than a year after Arafat's death and the election of Fatah's Mahmoud Abbas to replace him as PA president). The success of Hamas' violent activities, along with the failure of the peace process led by Fatah, strengthened the position of Hamas in place of Fatah.

In June 2007, Hamas launched a military offensive operation to seize Gaza from Fatah. The two movements did not hesitate to use violence and there were many casualties on both sides. After less than a week, it was clear to all that Gaza was under Hamas' control. Abbas dismissed Hamas ministers from the PA Government and appointed a non-Hamas Government headed by Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The result was two governments; one Hamas-run in Gaza under Ismail Haniyeh, and the other under Mahmud Abbas in the West Bank.⁸²

Despite attempts at reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, the schism grew deeper. The Gaza-West Bank split, led by two different governments, was the main cause for the deepening of the tear. Each side tried to establish its control over the area under its control. The internal conflict between Hamas and Fatah had become worse, and highlights the political and geographical distance between the two sides. While Abbas has strengthened the security coordination with Israel in the West Bank (based on common interest to prevent the strengthening of Hamas in the West Bank), Haniyeh denied the existence of any relations with Israel in the Gaza Strip. This is in addition to

⁸² Zuhur, *Hamas and Israel*.

historical tribal and religious differences between the Gaza strip and the West Bank.⁸³

Israel is now facing a situation where there is no single Palestinian partner to negotiate with.

Israel and its Strategies and Objectives against Hamas

“On November 29, 1947, the United Nations General Assembly resolution called for the establishment of a Jewish state in Israel. This recognition by the United Nations for the right of the Jewish people to establish their State is irrevocable. It is the natural right of the Jewish people to be like all the nations, to stand on its own in its sovereign state. Therefore we gathered, the members of the People, with the end of the British Mandate in Israel, and by virtue of natural and historical rights, and on the basis of United Nations General Assembly Resolution, we hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in the land Israel, it is the State of Israel.”⁸⁴

Since its establishment in 1948, the State of Israel has been fighting for its existence against countries and organizations which oppose it. In the first chapter of this work, the Israeli-Arab conflict was presented in two periods since 1947. The first between 1947 and 1982, known as the wars between states (Israel-Egypt-Jordan-Syria-Iraq). The second from 1982 and thereafter, known as the confrontation between Israel and non-state organizations (PLO-Hezbollah-Hamas-Global Jihad). The first period is characterized by existential wars against Israel’s Arab neighbors. The second period is kind of an ongoing

⁸³ Ibid., 143.

⁸⁴ David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister, on the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel, May 14, 1948.

conflict against organizations with several political and nationalist ambitions. It is defined as low-intensity and is characterized primarily by asymmetry, difficulty in reaching resolution and victory, and involving both the civilian population and the international media. This part will discuss the way in which Israel interprets the political map in general, and the way in which Israel considers Hamas specifically.

The early stages of the Islamic Movement in Israel were characterized by civil activities (*dawa*) and did not include violence. Some of the steps were also backed by Israel as an attempt to deal with Fatah and weaken it. The outbreak of the First Intifada made it very clear to Israel that a new enemy entered the conflict. This forced Israel to analyze the role of Hamas in the environment. The Hamas' Charter, which was published a few months after the outbreak of the First Intifada, was the only written evidence of Hamas's strategic objectives at that time. The Charter which referred both to the Palestinians and the Israelis was highly radical. It proposed rejection of the Zionist idea and the destruction of Israel, preparation for an indefinite struggle with a usurper that seeks to displace the people of Palestine and take over the holy places of Muslims, rejection of any dialogue with the Zionist enemy and total negation of any kind of concession on a piece of land of Palestine: "The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic endowment for Muslim generations until the Day of Resurrection; no one can renounce it or part of it, or abandon it or any part thereof; no Arab state or all Arab states together have such right; nor does any king or president or

all kings and presidents together have such authority; nor does any organization or all organizations, whether Palestinian or Arab, is authorized to concede it.”⁸⁵

The publication of Hamas’ Charter was a warning sign for Israel. A religious Islamic organization, whose roots lie in Nasser’s Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, gaining momentum during the Palestinian popular uprising. Announcing the destruction of Israel as a central objective, Hamas become the enemy of Israel From its inception.

From the assumption that Hamas is a cruel enemy who will not abandon the path of violence, Israel rejected negotiation with Hamas as an official Palestinian faction. Although Hamas gained political position in official elections, Israel saw Hamas as a terrorist group. Mutual violence that existed between the sides gave rise to anger and resentment. Israel chose the isolationist approach which aims to the neutralization of Hamas.

The path chosen by Fatah and the PLO, to actively join the peace process, was not an option for Hamas. For Israel, the situation created a sharp separation between Fatah, a relevant Palestinian partner for peace, and Hamas, a terrorist organization that does everything to prevent peace.

Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu headlined the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies Center’s International Conference in 2014:⁸⁶ “In order for the process in which

⁸⁵ Mohamed Nimer, “Charting the Hamas Charter-Changes,” *Insight Turkey* 11, no. 4 (2009).

⁸⁶ The Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (also known by its acronym, the BESA Center) advances a realist, conservative, and Zionist agenda in the search for security and peace for Israel. The center conducts policy-relevant research on strategic subjects, particularly as they relate to the national security and foreign policy of Israel and Middle East regional affairs.

we find ourselves to be significant . . . in order for it to have a real chance of success, it's necessary to hear the Palestinian leadership finally say that it recognizes the right of the Jewish people to a state of its own, which is the State of Israel. I hope that it shall be so, so that we can advance a real solution to the conflict," concluded Netanyahu. He also called for Palestinians to give up on their demand for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to return to areas now inside Israel. "The Palestinians must abandon their [demand for a] right of return," he said.

In the same even at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Maj. Gen. (res.) Giora Eiland, former head of the National Security Council, said that Israel should reject the idea that it must fight against terrorist guerrilla organizations embedded in civilian areas, and return to the idea that it is fighting enemy states. "It's not right for us to accept the idea of fighting low-intensity counter-terrorism conflicts. We should move to an interstate conflict system," Eiland argued. "This model also applies to Gaza, which, since Hamas seized power there, has become a state in every way."

Israel's political system has differences of opinion. Some think that Hamas is a terrorist organization that must be aggressively defeated. Others argue that there is a need to open direct communication with Hamas, since it is the elected government of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

In any case, Israel must answer several fundamental questions. The first is whether Hamas, which was created by Muslim Brotherhood leaders as a militant organization arm to participate in the First Intifada, is now a political social movement or a terror organization. The second, does Hamas operate and respond based on changing

circumstances or constant ideology. The third is whether Hamas uses violence against Israel as an end or as a means to achieve its strategic goals.

The next chapter will discuss the possibilities open to Israel to deal with Hamas. To do this, Israel must understand the real motives of its opponent.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Instability and tension characterize the relationship between Israel and Hamas. Especially since 2005, the Gaza Strip has become a volcano which erupts every few years.

Efraim Inbar and Amir Rapaport pointed out in their article “The Gaza War, 2014–Initial Summary,” that Israel is in an unsolvable conflict with some of the Arab world, and especially with political organizations driven by religious extremism. Israel understands that in the short-term it is unable to change the desire of non-state actors to fight the Jewish state. Additionally, Israel understands that it is not possible to defeat extremist ideologies on the battlefield.⁸⁷

Inbar and Rapaport also claim that Israel’s use of military force is not intended to destroy Hamas in its entirety, although the IDF is capable of doing so, but to limit its operational capabilities and to deter Hamas from using those capabilities in the future. Israel has no pretext of resolving the conflict by military means. For now, they argue, its goals are to get a significant deterrent and a quiet period that would be as long as possible.

Accordingly, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the options available to Israel in dealing with Hamas. Each option presented with the appropriate background and

⁸⁷ Efrayim Inbar and Amir Rapaport, “The Gaza War, 2014–Initial Summary,” The BESA Center, December 2014, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/policy-memorandum/>.

considered according to the following criteria: feasible, acceptable, and suitable. As indicated in the diagram, this chapter will present four different alternatives:

1. Take control of the Gaza Strip and breakdown Hamas' government. It means long and complicated operations against Hamas' military leadership and military assets in order to destroy Hamas, stop the violent, to strengthen Israel's deterrence (against Hamas and other enemies), and finally to change the existing order of business in the Gaza Strip.

2. Return Gaza to Egyptian control. This means to neutralize Hamas' violence by using Egypt's role and influence in the region. The end state is to transfer the control of the Gaza Strip to Egypt.

3. Three states solution is an option in which Israel fully recognizes Hamas as a political entity in the region, separates Hamas from Fatah, and coordinates with Hamas to lead the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip.

4. Keep "mowing the grass" is to maintain the current state of affairs. This means a limited campaign every few years in order to degrade Hamas' military capabilities and achieve a period of quiet.

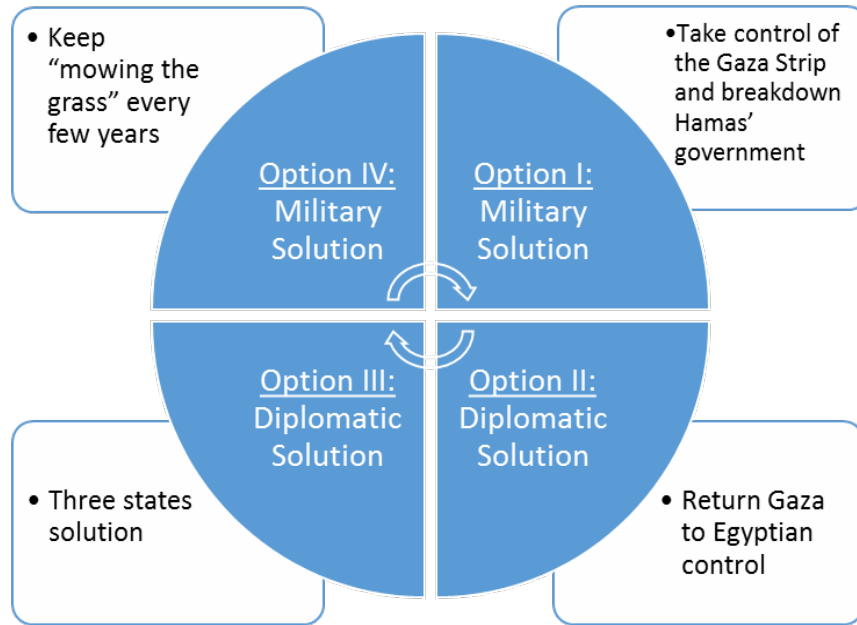


Figure 2. The Options Available to Israel in Dealing with Hamas

Source: Created by author.

Option I: Take Control over the Gaza Strip and Breakdown Hamas' Government

Military and civilian presence in the Gaza Strip until 2005 allowed Israel and the IDF to control the events in that area. The military operations within the Gaza Strip prevented the strengthening of Hamas and reduced Hamas' ability to attack Israel. Internal and external pressure on Israel, along with the desire of the Israeli leaders to disengage from the Gaza Strip, led to the withdrawal in 2005. Two IDF brigades and about 8,000 settlers left the Gaza Strip unilaterally.⁸⁸ Israeli leaders thought that giving up territory would satisfy the Palestinians, allow them to take control of the Gaza Strip, and stop the resistance. They were wrong. Since the withdrawal, Hamas has controlled

⁸⁸ Zanoliti, *Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress*.

the height of the flames and set fire to the area in accordance with its political interests. As time passes, Hamas is deepening its control, while Israel is losing its legitimacy to act against Hamas.

Efraim Inbar, the author of “Israel’s Palestinian Challenge” claims that Hamas’ taking over the Gaza Strip in 2006 means the continuation of the violent conflict with Israel. The Islamists’ increasing influence has made the Palestinian attitude more rigid and has made it difficult to reach an agreement. Ideologically, Hamas denies any recognition of the State of Israel and is committed to Israel’s annihilation. The ceasefires which Hamas tries to achieve are meant to fortify its rule of the Gaza Strip and to prevent the PA from destabilizing its hold there. Hamas strengthens its influence over the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip and educates future generations to see the Jews as those who stole their land.⁸⁹

Inbar sees Hamas’ rise to power as the end of the peace process. Under Hamas’ leadership, he claims, the Palestinians will keep exploiting the existing asymmetry and employ different levels of violence against Israel. Just as Hamas does not recognize Israel and its right to exist, so should Israel rule out any diplomatic contact with Hamas, which today represents the Palestinian people in Gaza. Since Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, Israel considers Hamas to be solely responsible for the developments there. Hamas’ military wing has transformed from a guerilla organization to a paramilitary one with the objective of providing internal and external protection for the people of the Gaza Strip. As a Westerner visitor to Gaza put it: “Hamas is building a Palestinian military

⁸⁹ Inbar, “Israel’s Palestinian Challenge.”

organization in Gaza unprecedented in the occupied territories both in size, training, arming, commando conditions and fight efficiency.”⁹⁰

The violence carried out by other militant groups is viewed by the IDF and the State of Israel as actions directed by Hamas. The responsibility put on Hamas by Israel is a main element in the problem created between Israel and the Gaza Strip. This inability to communicate with Hamas, which does not recognize Israel as an entity or as a state, forces Israel to entertain a serious military operation to topple Hamas. This option is examined in this part of the paper, which attempts to show the consequences of such action.⁹¹

Israel executed three military campaigns and dozens of operations against Hamas in the Gaza Strip since the former’s military withdrawal and evacuation of settlements (2005).⁹² As mentioned before, Israel’s conception is that Hamas, which has controlled Gaza since 2007, is responsible for any military act of violence from the Gaza Strip against the IDF and Israeli citizens. According to Efraim Inbar and Max Singer, the authors of “The Opportunity in Gaza,” the goals of the military actions were the return of peace and normalization of life to the Israeli residents, the strengthening of Israel’s

⁹⁰ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 73: “Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas.”

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Cast Land (2009), Pillar of Defense (2012), Protective Edge (2014).

deterrence (against Hamas and other enemies), and the degrading of Hamas' military capability over time.⁹³

The Gaza Strip is small enough for the IDF to be able to destroy Hamas' terrorist and leadership infrastructure and the Islamic Jihad's and other organizations' military capabilities. Organizations such as Hamas are usually afraid of their leaders being hit, and Israel is capable of detecting most of Hamas' commanders and leaders in the Gaza Strip. The goal would thus be to remove the military threat posed by Hamas and to bring back the Israeli deterrence of additional Islamist elements in the region other than Hamas. Inbar and Sellinger's approach is that a sovereign state cannot tolerate persistent attacks on its territory and against its citizens. They claim that avoiding military action will only worsen the existing situation and will pave the way for escalating violent acts of Hamas against Israel (e.g. improvements of the range and quality of rockets, further digging of tunnels, and fortifying Hamas' ground forces in the Gaza Strip).⁹⁴

An attack on the Hamas military leadership and military assets would be a difficult battle, almost certainly causing many Israeli casualties and many Palestinian civilian deaths—mainly because of the Hamas strategy of hiding among civilians.⁹⁵ This is not the place to elaborate on the IDF's tactical capabilities against the Hamas military wing. Suffice to say the IDF can defeat Hamas militarily and reoccupy the Gaza Strip. Max Singer, the author of "A Middle Way for the Gaza Fight," argues that although the

⁹³ Efraim Inbar and Max Singer, BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 167, "The Opportunity in Gaza," March 15, 2012, accessed April 3, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/the-opportunity-in-gaza/>.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Singer, "A Middle Way for the Gaza Fight."

price may be very high, it is an alternative that should be considered. Such an option would also have substantial political costs, with strong international pressure (by the U.S., United Nations, Europe, and the moderate Arab states) on Israel to stop the operation. On the other hand, the proof that Israel is not afraid to act aggressively against Hamas would strengthen its deterrent capability against Hamas and against other hostile organizations. In this context of a military option, Singer's approach begs the question of what is worse for Israel: a long and exhausting campaign with enormous costs, or restraint with a price of significant decrease in Israel's deterrent capability.

If Israel does not strike Hamas with power, Israel seems weak, not only towards Hamas but also against the rest of the enemies surrounding Israel who watch carefully to see what happens in Gaza. In the context of the last operation in the Gaza Strip (2014), this issue is summarized by Max Singer: "If Israel doesn't make this kind of attack against Hamas and there is a final ceasefire based on Israel accepting any of the Hamas demands and Hamas fires at Israel to the end, some Palestinians and others will see Hamas as gaining a victory, because they attacked Israel and were not destroyed."⁹⁶

To prevent a return to the days of martial law in the Gaza Strip, claims Singer, Israel must plan for the day after the occupation of the Gaza Strip. The optimum alternative is working with Egypt and Fatah to establish the PA's control in Gaza.

Hillel Frisch, the author of "The Need for a Decisive Israeli Victory over Hamas," claims that to attain a decisive military victory, Israel must enter Gaza City itself and act in the refugee camps with full force. It must dissolve the belief that Israel is afraid of engaging the enemy in urban areas. Israel must make it clear to Hamas that there is not a

⁹⁶ Ibid.

single bunker in Gaza that is out of the IDF's reach. Frisch cites operation "Defensive Shield" (2002), in which the IDF operated in the hearts of Palestinian cities in the West Bank, as a great example of a long-term operation's ability to affect terrorist activity. The operation was also successful politically, bringing the PA to realize that terror was not a viable option.⁹⁷ The Israeli victory should be clear and crushing and make Hamas understand what the Arab states understood after the Six-Days War and the Yom Kippur War and what the PA understood after operation Defensive Shield. Israel does not yield to violence and reacts sharply and aggressively. The question is, whether the Israeli leadership has the courage and the patience to order such an operation, despite the high cost and international criticism.⁹⁸

Yaacov Amidror, the author of *The Dilemma during Operation Protective Edge*, makes it clear that missiles fired from Gaza Strip are the central and most dangerous menace. According to him, since the Six Days' War (1967) when Israel took control until the Oslo Accords (1995) took effect, no missiles were fired from Gaza towards Israel. After the Oslo Accords were in effect and the IDF retreated from Palestinian cities, Hamas began gradually building its military capabilities. Hamas reached its peak with the IDF's withdrawal from Gaza Strip (2005), which led to the joining of Gaza Strip with the Sinai Peninsula and a substantial growth of Hamas' military power. The situation formed is intolerable to Israel and Israel must consider a long and extensive operation to put an end to Hamas' rule of Gaza. This would be a difficult and complex operation with many

⁹⁷ Hillel Frisch, "The Need for a Decisive Israeli Victory over Hamas," The BESA Center, January 12, 2009, accessed April 27 2015, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/the-need-for-a-decisive-israeli-victory-over-hamas>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

casualties on both sides. Such an operation would also create a diplomatic entanglement, since it is not certain that there would be any entity that would want to take responsibility for Gaza, even after the IDF managed to bring peace to the area. It is possible that Israel would have to re-establish civilian rule and manage Gaza Strip, with its many civilians, by itself. This is a difficult, but possible move, long and fraught with risks. However, the result would be unambiguous—when the operation ends no more missiles would be fired from Gaza Strip and no tunnels would be dug from which to conduct attacks against Israeli citizens inside the State of Israel.⁹⁹

Should Israel decide to retake Gaza Strip, Israel can do so within a few months. The main questions in this plan are: What will be the amount of casualties among Israeli forces (Israeli public opinion); what will be the amount of Palestinian casualties, militants and especially civilians (international public opinion which is extremely important to a small nation such as Israel); how long the operation will take and how will the operation affect the Israeli civilian population (in terms of security and resilience); what will be the answer to the basic needs of the Gaza population during and right after the operation; what will be the operation's effect on the civic and security reality in the West Bank and on Fatah's rule; what will be the operation's effect on other fighting fronts (the Lebanon front against Hezbollah for example); and since there is no way of eliminating Hamas' military force and leaving its civilian power in place, the question must be asked of what the day after the taking of Gaza Strip will look like (martial law, establishing Fatah's rule, transfer of rule to Egyptian hands, international involvement).

⁹⁹ Yaacov Amidror, "The Dilemma during Operation Protective Edge."

There is absolutely no doubt that this is a complex, long and costly option in terms of both lives and resources. However, the current reality, Hamas is increasing the intensity and the frequency of violent attacks, forcing Israel to take into account the possibility of toppling Hamas by force and stopping Hamas rule of Gaza Strip.

Several consequences of this option were not examined in this thesis. The first is whether the current political situation (internal and external) will allow Israel to make such a move without international opposition? What is the significance of international opposition to Israel's future? How does the U.S. would react to this? The second area is the feelings and perspective of the Gazan population. Questions to be asked are: What will be the reaction of the local population in the Gaza Strip for such an operation executed by the IDF? In which way would they get the end of the rule of Hamas? Is another group will be established with government aspirations and a desire to struggle against Israel? Some of those questions will appear later on as recommendations for further research.

Option II: Return Gaza to Egyptian Control

The current reluctance of Israel to defeat Hamas with military operations highlights Israel's desire for a different arrangement in the Gaza Strip: a settlement, which will bring peace to the area for an extended period of time which and will allow recovery of the humanitarian situation in Gaza.

Shmuel Sandler describes in his article, "Israel's Dilemma in Gaza," the relationship between the Gaza Strip and Egypt and its impact to the current situation. As a result of the Six Day War, the control of Gaza Strip transferred from Egypt to Israel (1967). This situation became permanent after the signing of the peace agreement

between Israel and Egypt (1979). This led to a strengthening of the ties between the two Palestinian entities in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, and almost completely eliminated Egyptian influence in the Gaza Strip.¹⁰⁰

The result of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, without any conditions or settlement, was two governments, one run by Hamas in Gaza, and the other under Abbas in the West Bank. This current status was described at length in the previous chapters.

Hamas' origin is in the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement. Thus, Egypt is the state with the most influence over Hamas. The relationship is based on the Muslim Brotherhood's standing in Egypt. The Arab Spring, and with it the recurring coups in Egypt, led to extreme changes in the Muslim Brotherhood's position in Egypt. During the period after President Mubarak, with President Mohammed Morsi, a Muslim Brotherhood man, the relationship between Egypt and Hamas grew warmer. After the second coup and General Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's rise to power—he is a clear antagonist of the Muslim Brotherhood—an overt conflict formed between the Egyptian leadership and Hamas in Gaza. Since the beginning of El-Sisi's rule, Egypt sees Hamas as a hostile element, a branch of the Muslim Brotherhood supporting anti-Egyptian activities in the Sinai Peninsula. Hamas on the other hand views Egypt—the traditional middleman of ceasefires between Israel and Hamas—as a hostile entity and as a strategic partner of Israel.¹⁰¹ This relationship is not under Israeli control, but it is vital for Israeli interests. This relationship has a great effect on Israel's ability to maneuver against Hamas.

¹⁰⁰ Sandler, "Israel's Dilemma in Gaza."

¹⁰¹ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 85, "Gaza's Unfinished Business," April 23, 2009, accessed February 24, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/85-gazas-unfinished-business.aspx>.

Egypt was and remains the most significant neighbor of Israel. The peace agreement between the two is strategically important for Israel, since Egypt is the only land connection to the Gaza Strip outside of Israel, and the Sinai Peninsula affects wide parts of Israel beside Gaza. Egypt was a key part of the post-hostilities agreements for all the campaigns directed by Israel against Hamas. This is also true in the negotiations for the release of the captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit. Egypt's ability to communicate with Hamas is an essential asset for Israel.

Cutting the Gaza Strip off from Sinai by creating a substantial buffer zone and razing the smuggling tunnels running between Egypt and Gaza, are part of the extensive Egyptian effort to curtail terrorism. Israel benefits from these efforts, although this is clearly in Egyptian interests.¹⁰² The idea of this alternative is the utilization of common interests created between Israel and Egypt as a result of changes in the region.

Shmuel Sandler analyzes the Israeli point of view of the conflict. He argues that the Israelis do not believe in the PA's ability to make critical decisions in regard to the future, and they are not willing to accept any Hamas government in the West Bank. Therefore, Shmuel believes, transferring control of Gaza to Egypt is the lesser evil for Israel. Israel prefers a relationship with a state rather than the non-state organization, and certainly prefers a fair and reliable relationship with Egypt than false communication through a third party with Hamas.

The State of Israel and Egypt have both common and conflicting interests in Gaza Strip. Some in Egypt argue that the siege laid by Israel on Gaza Strip is meant to separate

¹⁰² Yaacov Amidror, "Line in the Sand," The BESA Center, February 2, 2015, accessed March 12, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/?s=Line+in+the+Sand>.

Gaza Strip from the West Bank and to rid Israel from the responsibility for what is being done in Gaza Strip. Israel wishes in this manner to shift the responsibility for Gaza Strip to Egypt.¹⁰³ However, Egypt has a clear interest to be a significant and relevant factor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and the conflict between Israel and Hamas specifically. Egypt is part of the moderate front (which also includes Jordan, Saudi-Arabia and the PA) and its relationship with the U.S. is a high priority. The extremist front led by Iran (joined by Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas) is a threat to Egyptian dominance in the region, and that is Israel's and Egypt's common interest.¹⁰⁴

The option presented in this section is meant to give an answer to Israel's challenges in dealing with Hamas, especially after operation Protective Edge in summer 2014. Rebuilding Gaza Strip and improving the living conditions of its residents is an obvious Israeli interest. Taking care of the population can help reduce the extent of support Gazans give to Hamas military actions. It will also improve international public opinion towards Israel. Israel should prove to the people in Gaza, that rebuilding the strip is possible not through Hamas, but despite Hamas and the violent and unacceptable behavior of Hamas. The ongoing conflict between the PA and Hamas is reducing the range of possibilities for Israel and prevents Israel from delivering the required assistance to Gaza Strip, because of the fear that Hamas might use the economic relief to build Hamas' own military force, and not to improve the living conditions of the civilians. The

¹⁰³ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 85: "Gaza's Unfinished Business."

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

possibility of Egyptian involvement in this context raises the probability of recovering the strip more quickly.¹⁰⁵

On the other hand, it is clear that the Egyptian hostility towards Hamas, as is presented in Kobi Michael's and Udi Dekel's paper, "Recalculating the Gaza Route: Reconstruction of an Autonomous Area with Protected Zones," stems from Hamas' commitment to the Muslim Brotherhood policy in Egypt and not to the Palestinian issue in Israel. As long as the tension between the two sides continues, it is hard to see Egypt accepting responsibility for Gaza Strip in coordination with Hamas. The Israeli interest in cooperating with Egypt on the Gaza matter is clear. Egypt's ability to diplomatically influence Hamas (as well as other Arab countries) is greater than that of Israel. Hamas will not agree to concessions to Israel, but will indeed compromise with other Arab countries, such as Egypt. This is the achievement that Israel should seek.¹⁰⁶ The tight cooperation between Israel and Egypt on the ceasefire at the end of the fighting in summer 2014 is an excellent example of common interests. Egypt and Israel could dictate the terms of the ceasefire to Hamas and denied it any possibility of a victory image.¹⁰⁷

Benedetta Berti and Zack Gold, the authors of *Hamas Nears the Breaking Point; why Egypt is to Blame*, argue that the recent fighting in Gaza Strip (summer 2014) was the result of an Israeli-Egyptian pincer move around Gaza Strip. Since the end of fighting

¹⁰⁵ Michael and Dekel, "Recalculating the Gaza Route: Reconstruction of an Autonomous Area with Protected Zones."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Anat Kurts, Udi Dekel, and Shlomo Brom, "The Israeli-Palestinian Arena: Failed Negotiations and a Military Confrontation," in *Strategic Survey for Israel 2014-2015*, eds. Anat Kurz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2015).

in Gaza in 2014, Egypt increased the political and economical pressure on Hamas. These measures are in accordance with Egyptian president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi's sanctions on the Islamic opposition at home. That is the current Egyptian policy, neutralizing the Muslim Brotherhood through destabilizing their allies elsewhere (Hamas). Gaza's isolation from Sinai was intended to disconnect Hamas from extremist Islamic organizations in the Sinai Peninsula, which carried out severe terrorist acts against Egyptian forces in recent years, but created enormous pressure on Gaza Strip, as Sinai is the only land border of Gaza apart from Israel. During President Mubarak's time scores of smuggling tunnels operated between Gaza Strip and Sinai, which allowed Hamas some breathing room and military strengthening. Since these tunnels were sealed, Hamas' pressure threshold is exceeded time and again, and it erupts in the form of violent attacks against Israel.¹⁰⁸

Kobi Michael and Udi Dekel, the authors of *The Gaza Strip: What Can Israel Do to Postpone—or Even Prevent—the Next Round of Violence?* propose a complete detachment from Gaza Strip. They claim that Israel should initiate a process led by the international community and supported by the pragmatic Arab states to open Gaza Strip to the world to the point of full independence from Israeli wares and goods. This option demands close cooperation with Egypt to prevent Cairo from suspecting that Israel might

¹⁰⁸ Benedetta Berti and Zack Gold, "Hamas Nears the Breaking Point Why Egypt Is to Blame," *Foreign Affairs*, February 18, 2013, accessed April 27, 2015, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/143105/benedetta-berti-and-zack-gold/hamas-nears-the-breaking-point?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_Medium=email&utm_term=%2AMideast%20Brief&utm_campaign=2014_The%20Middle%20East%20Daily_2.20.15.

be offloading the Gaza problem onto them. This could be a good solution, should Israel encounter an Egyptian refusal to take full responsibility for Gaza Strip.¹⁰⁹

As with any alternative, there are risks here. Rearmament of the Gaza Strip with the Egyptian military would put an end to Israel's strategic depth that was achieved in 1967 and legitimized in the 1979 Peace Treaty. This alternative may also exacerbate the existing separation between the two Palestinian entities and create additional difficulties for Israel.

In any case the following questions need to be answered: Is Israel's political leadership ready for such a move? Does such a move serve the interests of the Egyptian government? What will be Egypt's reaction for such an alternative? How will Hamas react and what will be the level of resistance it may show? Some of those questions will appear later on as recommendations for further research.

Option III: Three State Solution

Israel paid a heavy price for the unilateral retreat from Lebanon in 2000 and from Gaza Strip in 2005. These uncoordinated withdrawals, stemming from internal public pressure, let non-state players fill the vacuum.¹¹⁰ The years 2000 to 2006 had a huge impact on the way Israel views the Arab world in general and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict specifically. The continuing conflict with Hezbollah, reaching its peak in the

¹⁰⁹ Michael and Dekel, "The Gaza Strip: What Can Israel Do to Postpone—or Even Prevent—the Next Round of Violence?"

¹¹⁰ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 58: "The Arab-Israeli Conflict; To Reach a Lasting Peace," October 5, 2006, accessed April 7, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/058-the-arab-israeli-conflict-to-reach-a-lasting-peace.aspx>.

Second Lebanon War (2006), and the repeating conflicts with Hamas, climaxing in the Cast Lead (2009), Pillar of Defense (2012) and Protective Edge (2014) campaigns, deeply affected Israeli public opinion and decision makers.¹¹¹

Still, among public opinion and the politicians in Israel the feeling grew stronger that an accord must be reached with the Palestinians and that uncoordinated withdrawals from what is called the occupied territories (1967 borders) should be avoided. Israel's actions against Gaza Strip since Hamas took over prove that Israel considers Hamas responsible for what occurs in Gaza. Although Israel does not view Hamas as a partner for negotiations (because of its strict policy against Israel's existence), Israel recognizes the reality in which Hamas is the sovereign in Gaza Strip.¹¹²

This section of the paper deals with the option of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians by recognizing Hamas as a separate entity within Gaza Strip. Hamas' fundamental lack of recognition of Israel as a separate entity is the main obstacle in this diplomatic alternative. Hamas' approach leads to an Israeli concept whereby Israel could not possibly recognize Hamas as a separate entity, as long as the Hamas movement declares the destruction of Israel as a Hamas long-term strategic goal. The purpose of this section is to look into the ways, if indeed they do exist, to overcome this main obstacle.

The central argument on this matter is, that the sanctions imposed by Israel together with IDF campaigns once every few years, do not lead to the anticipated

¹¹¹ The Israelis understood that it is impossible to defeat the armed groups opposed to Israel, in the same way that the IDF defeated the Arab armies in the past. All of those operations stopped as a result of truce and not because the enemies were defeated.

¹¹² International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 73: "Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas."

achievement, which is the weakening of Hamas' rule of the Gaza Strip. In fact, the opposite is true. The harsh reality of the strip's residents, coming from Israeli control over necessary resources (water, electricity, goods and movement of people in and out of Gaza Strip), strengthen the population's support of Hamas' regime. The violence committed by Hamas against Israel, being a part of the organization's long-term strategy against the occupation (which in fact does not exist anymore inside Gaza Strip) is perceived by the Gazans as legitimate and as an obligatory war. Hamas' military branch fights to break the Israeli siege and Hamas does so through the means at its disposal (firing rockets at Israeli citizens, using smuggling and offensive tunnels to deal with Israel's land superiority).¹¹³

The Israeli interest is to distance the next violent round as much as possible and to increase the possibility of rebuilding Gaza Strip and drastically improving living conditions and security of its residents, knowing that the greater the plight of Gaza grows, and that as much as Hamas, sovereign in Gaza, has a hard time improving living conditions in the area, so does the chance of a violent escalation grow, the results of which would probably not be very different than those of the last. The chances of success for rebuilding Gaza Strip, an ostensible Israeli interest to prevent Hamas' violence, will grow if Israel accepts Hamas' rule in the strip, and so Israel will have to accelerate the rebuilding process aided by the U.N. and the international community and at the same time recognize Hamas' central role in the process. Following its transformation into the de facto ruler of Gaza Strip, Hamas has begun feeling the increasing tension between its needs as a resistance movement calling for the preservation of the conflict with Israel and

¹¹³ Ibid.

its considerations as a ruler, which push it to a position of risk aversion and to focus on an internal combining of forces, not outside war. Israel should take advantage of this fact.¹¹⁴

The common term since the Oslo accords regarding the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinians conflict is the “two-state solution.” This refers to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside with the existing State of Israel. The idea of two states for two peoples is based on the principles agreed upon and accords signed by Israel and the PA since the Oslo accords. It did not undergo the necessary revision required by Hamas’ victory in the 2006 elections and by the current reality, in which Hamas governs Gaza Strip. The idea is based on a Palestinian people with a unified government and a clear representative. This is not the reality on the ground.

Colin P. Clarke, the author of *Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two*, argues that the idea of establishing a sovereign state without a clear contiguous territory is destined to fail. Like other cases in the history, the intention to connect Gaza strip with the West Bank is impossible.¹¹⁵

However, the gap between Gaza Strip and the West Bank is not just a geographical one. The deepening rift and disagreement between Hamas and Fatah emphasize the understanding of the decreasing chances for the establishment of one unified Palestinian entity. Hamas casts itself as the champion of Islamic values, while Fatah seeks to be identified with modernity and progress. In Gaza, more women wear

¹¹⁴ Michael and Dekel, “The Gaza Strip: What Can Israel Do to Postpone—or Even Prevent—the Next Round of Violence?”

¹¹⁵ Clarke, “Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two.”

hijabs, more men have beards and an Islamic culture is growing stronger. In the West Bank there is evidence of strengthening Western culture, technology, and science, and the society is characterized by a secular culture.

The accords written to end the last campaign (summer 2014) testified that as far as Israel, the U.S., Egypt and other elements in the region are concerned, Hamas enjoys a *de facto* state standing in the region. During the fighting official Israeli sources expressed a desire to strike Hamas, even if at the same time making a conscious effort to preserve its ability to enforce a ceasefire. This is contradictory to past statements made about an intention and a need to bring down Hamas' rule. This clear transformation in Israel's policy reflected a fear that Hamas crashing might unleash anarchy in Gaza, which would put a humanitarian, economic, security and diplomatic burden on Israel, and would allow extremist elements in the region to grow more powerful. Such a scenario could restrict the deterrence achieved by Israel after the campaign, and that would make it hard for Egypt to face the armed groups in the Sinai Peninsula and on the Gaza border.¹¹⁶

Seeing that current reality demonstrates that a political agreement between Israel and the PA is nearly out of sight, and the violent conflicts with Hamas only escalate, there is room to consider a different option to neutralize Hamas. This option places Hamas in a power position in Gaza Strip and exploits its main vulnerability: its official responsibility for the fate of Gaza's residents. The three-state solution offers a greater degree of security between Fatah and Israel in the West Bank. Fatah would get ownership

¹¹⁶ Anat Kurts, "Towards Changing the Course and Discussion-Balance of Power of the Palestinian Arena and of the Political Process," in *"Protective Edge"-Implications and Lessons*, eds. Anat Kurtz and Shlomo Brom (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014).

of the West Bank and access to outside help, while Israel gets a healthy relationship with a secular, modern movement that recognizes Israel's right to exist. In addition, Hamas would have the reins in Gaza, which would allow it to create a traditional Palestinian society. The three-state solution would allow the international community to isolate the extremists in Gaza and bring about economic growth in the West Bank. This would put Gaza Strip in a competition with the West Bank and force Hamas to govern with responsibility or pay the full price. Hence the Israeli interest is to create success in the West Bank and to tilt Palestinian public opinion in Gaza in that direction.¹¹⁷

An Israeli choice of this alternative is a clear change of the current way of thinking. From a place of "there is no partner" to two different partners. It cancels the "two states for two peoples" idea, since it solidifies the existing separation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This alternative carries with it quite a few risks: First, it entrenches Hamas' rule in Gaza Strip and its legitimacy to demand more and more over the years. As Israel has already experienced, Hamas employs its military branch against Israel each time its demands are not met. In this case, it will also give legitimacy to acting with violence. Second, it removes the PA's responsibility for what is being done in Gaza Strip and makes their demand for a nation in the West Bank a legitimate and immediate one. This could put the peace process in greater difficulties than those it experiences anyway. Third, the dysfunctionality shown by the PA since the Oslo accords, which made it into a failed state, makes clear the low probability of Hamas rule in Gaza succeeding as an independent state. Finally, this alternative puts Israel in a catch. In order to rein Hamas

¹¹⁷ Clarke, "Division by Addition Why a Three-State Solution Is Better than Two."

in its current situation, Israel must give Hamas clear achievements, which will further entrench its rule in Gaza Strip. This might be perceived as losing the recent fighting and as surrendering to terror.

Questions that need answers in a future research are: Does the current domestic political situation allow Israel to recognize Hamas as an entity? What will be the effect of such a recognition of Hamas' attitude toward Israel? What will be the effect of such recognition on the ability of Fatah to control the West Bank?

Option IV: Keep Mowing the Grass every few years

As long as Israel does not choose an alternative that changes the situation fundamentally, it will have to deal with Hamas' violence from time to time. This is an alternative based on "managing the conflict" instead of "settling the conflict." This is the Israeli policy of a war of attrition against Hamas in response to the same kind of war Hamas tries to have against Israel in recent years. It is based on eroding Hamas' legitimacy during the last conflict with Israel (summer 2014) among the Palestinian public in Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, as well as in the Arab world. In addition, it is based on the Arab-Sunni axis lead by Egypt (joined by Saudi-Arabia, the UAE, Jordan and the PA) and in cooperation with Israel, the objective of which is to weaken Hamas as much as possible.¹¹⁸ Egypt's president El-Sisi's clear declarations against Hamas leave no room for imagination in Israel, and his words create a fertile ground to this conception of neutralizing Hamas through its slow subduing: "You [Israel] must understand, first of

¹¹⁸ Orit Parlov, "Is Hamas Calculates Its End? From the Discussion on Social Networks of the Palestinian and Arab world Arena."

all, that El-Sisi views political Islam as an existential threat to Egypt . . . and so he has no intention of containing the movement, have any dialogue with it, allow it to rebuild its legitimacy or to weaken it. El-Sisi is interested in bringing political Islam to submission: the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ movement and its branches in Gaza [Hamas] and in Libya.”¹¹⁹

This conception is based on the assumption that there is no partner on the Palestinian side (not Fatah and certainly not Hamas) and on the Israeli principle, that there would be no dialogue with a terrorist organization. The question of whether Hamas is a terrorist organization or not is not considered in this section of the paper, but this principle is important in order to understand the wider picture. This alternative supports a continuing separation of Gaza Strip from the West Bank. This position is based on the assumption that it is possible to separate both regions, by handling them separately and without them affecting each other. This is also an option that avoids a wide-scale military operation with the objective of taking over Gaza Strip and toppling Hamas, due to the great risks, which such a campaign holds.

According to Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, authors of the article “Mowing the Grass in Gaza,” Israel is facing a crisis with a diplomatic solution only. Any attempt to defeat Hamas militarily is likely to fail, especially the types of combat actions taken by Israel (air strikes and limited ground maneuver). Therefore, Israel must set limited and realistic objectives for any military campaign against Hamas, such as degrading its military capabilities and achieving a period of quiet.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Inbar and Shamir, “Mowing the Grass in Gaza.”

Inbar and Eitan see this option as the only real one, as a political solution is totally unfeasible. Hamas and the rest of the armed organizations in the Gaza Strip view Israel as a theological perversion and absolutely reject any discourse with the Zionist enemy. Hamas' fanatic obligation to continuing the violent resistance makes the situation an unsolvable conflict. Under this approach, Israel buying time (and at the same time wearing down the other side) is a legitimate goal. Although the violent rounds do not lead to Hamas' subduing, they punish Hamas for its aggression and achieve the various periods of quiet. In addition, the IDF's offensive activity is a reminder to the rest of the players in the Middle East, that aggression against Israel is very costly. This approach claims that "the circle of violence" is forced on Israel, and that there is no solution on the horizon. Thus, periods of quiet are important and obtainable with limited operations such as Protective Edge, in 2014.¹²¹

If this option is selected, Israel must strengthen its defense elements against Hamas' aggression. Tactical elements like the anti-rocket system "Iron Dome," a smart border fence in response to incursions, a water channel against tunnels etc. that should allow Israel to conduct a long campaign against Hamas, in order to weaken its power in each round of violence.

The dangers of this alternative are obvious, since the reality of recent years is a translation of this policy: First, every few years, when the issue is Hamas' strengthening and its initiative, Israel will be dragged into a military conflict with Hamas. As history teaches us, the conflicts will escalate, will last longer and cause more casualties. Hamas will improve its main combat elements (long-range rockets) and make changes to them,

¹²¹ Ibid.

which will affect the number of Israeli victims. A rise in the number of casualties in Israel will affect the force of Israeli response, which will surely lead to a devastating damaging of the Gaza Strip (Hamas militants, civilians, infrastructure etc.). Second, Hamas will strengthen its hold of the territory and of the government and Palestinian sympathy towards Hamas will grow. Hamas will be seen as the protector of the population from the Israeli siege and aggression and its international legitimacy will increase. As a result, international support of Israel will be undermined. The rift between Hamas and Fatah will widen, and so the odds of a diplomatic move with the PA will become even smaller.

These clashes have been created and will be created as a result of Hamas' decision to escalate the situation. Loss of initiative is a component that Israel needs to take into consideration. In fact, this is an "evasion" alternative, because it avoids any decisive move (militarily or diplomatically) and it means a strategy of attrition alongside a tactical answer to any Hamas display of violence.

The risk of the grass mowing alternative is that there will always be new grass. As already mentioned, there is a chance that this new grass may be thicker, harder to uproot, and grow faster.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Hamas will never change. I have no illusions about that. But sooner or later I would like to see that the majority of Palestinian people will be represented in the government. It is not my business but I care about it. I think the only way to defeat Hamas which is as dangerous, or almost as dangerous as Hezbollah, is to give the hope of a political future to the Palestinian people through the implementation and fulfilment of their vision of an independent Palestinian state. Without this prospect, Hamas cannot be defeated because Hamas is Building on despair and poverty.

— Ephraim Sneh, Head of the Civil Administration
in the West Bank 1985-1987

The current situation between Israel and the Palestinians in general and between Israel and Hamas specifically, means there must be a long-term plan and a clear course of action. This paper examines both sides' perspective, but proposes possible actions for Israel and the IDF. The four options chosen represent an arc of the writer's subjective thoughts.

The first option, occupation of the Gaza Strip by Israel, toppling Hamas and banishing Hamas from Gaza's rule, is a result of reading the map and the dead end in which Israel finds itself. This is an option meant to give a long-term answer and change the existing order of business in the Gaza Strip. It is also intended to strengthen Israel's deterrence against Hamas, but especially against other extremist Islamic elements in the region (such as Hezbollah in Lebanon). As in any option, the risks here are great too, and can be summarized in a potential for many dead on both sides, in the continuation of Israeli martial law for Palestinian citizens (a model with problematic past experience) and a harsh hit for Israel's international support. Questions to be asked as a further research are: What will the day after a long and substantial military operation by the IDF in the

Gaza Strip look like? Who will take Hamas' place after it is subdued and removed from the Gaza Strip?

The second option, transferring control of the Gaza Strip to Egyptian hands, is an Israeli ambition, to return to the status quo before the Six Days War (1967), only this time with a peace treaty with Egypt. Egyptian control over the Gaza Strip can neutralize Hamas' violence almost entirely and allow for a fundamental restoring of the civilian conditions. Israel will enjoy a dialogue with a responsible state, with which it has a peace treaty. This option also shatters the relations between Hamas and Fatah almost completely and lets Israel focus on the effort to establish a Palestinian entity in the West Bank, while needing to have a dialogue with only one Palestinian representative (Fatah). This option too has its dangers. First, Israel must convince Egypt that this move is worthwhile. Second, the potential for confrontations between Hamas' forces and Egypt's forces is enormous, especially given Egypt's new policy against the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas' origin and source of ideological inspiration. There is nearly no doubt that Hamas would resist such a move, which would lead to another violent eruption and so to Egypt pulling back from the move. Third, Egyptian presence in the Gaza Strip cancels the security achievements of the 1979 peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, based on a demilitarized zone in the Sinai Peninsula and on creating strategic depth for Israel. Future research should explore how Egypt sees the Gaza Strip's future and how will Egypt's relations with Hamas affect the region.

The third option, a three-state solution, is actually full recognition by Israel of Hamas as a political entity and moreover, as an element with which negotiations can be handled as a neighboring state. This is an alternative that absolutely contradicts the

political climate and the Israeli position as presented so far. However, it has a potential for an immediate reconstruction of the Gaza Strip while shifting the responsibility onto Hamas. It seems that the risks in this alternative, together with its great distance from current reality, significantly lower its probability of being realized.

The fourth option, keeping mowing the grass every few years, is, in fact, consciously choosing to maintain the current state of affairs and not choosing any other alternative. This is a proven option, as that is the reality of recent years. The Gaza Strip will remain isolated, Israel will tighten the siege and Egypt will escalate its steps against Hamas. Gaza's residents will suffer a lack of their vital needs and Hamas will continue busying itself with military empowerment (improving the quality of the rockets, digging tunnels that cross the border, and fortifying the defensive positions inside the strip) to prepare for the next conflict with Israel. There is no shortage of factors that might ignite the flames and engulf the region with violence, yet again. However, it is possible that the reality forced on Israel restricts it to acting so in the foreseeable future. The most relevant question for this alternative, with regard to a future research, is what will the next conflict between Israel and Hamas look like, assuming that Israel keeps mowing the grass.

Herbert C. Kelman, the author of "Israel-Palestinian Peace; Inching toward and Looking Beyond Negotiation," claims that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Arab conflict in the new period (1982 onwards). The results of the Second Lebanon War (2006) and the results of the IDF's campaigns against Hamas in the Gaza Strip (2009 to 2014), show indecisiveness on both sides. This stems from a lack of symmetry between the sides, which manifests in gaps of power and in fundamental differences of perception. The Second Lebanon War made clear the Israeli feeling of vulnerability and this affects

the Israeli-Palestinian relationship.¹²² The Israeli response to its inability to bring its foes to submission created a fear of the loss of deterrence. The immediate response was using massive military force against Hezbollah and Hamas. However, Kelman claims, Israel must understand that its military superiority, meant to prevent other countries' attacks, is not necessarily an advantage when talking about asymmetric warfare against non-state organizations. The military conflicts between Israel and Hezbollah and Hamas pointed out several essential facts to Israel: Unilateral actions alone are not enough to ensure Israel's security; it is impossible to defend Israel's residents by building walls and smart fences, since Hezbollah and Hamas proved it possible to "penetrate" Israel over (rockets) and under (tunnels); the rocket menace that these enemies pose is deadly and very substantial; any large military campaign that drags on and on weakens Israel's position in the international community.¹²³

Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip (2005) suited the public mood: the strong desire to end the conflict (and avoid wars and victims) and the belief that there was no real partner for negotiations, created by the repeating failure of the peace process since the Oslo Accords. On the Palestinian side, this unilateral move by Israel weakened Mahmoud Abbas' (Abu-Mazen) and the Fatah's ability to advance towards negotiations with Israel, and at the same time strengthened Hamas, because the common opinion was that Hamas' armed resistance led to the Israeli decision to retreat unilaterally. The Palestinian turn to support Hamas (the 2006 elections) is an overt Palestinian choice of

¹²² Herbert C. Kelman, "Israel-Palestinian Peace; Inching toward and Looking Beyond Negotiation," *Middle East Policy* 14, no. 3 (2007): 29-40.

¹²³ Ibid.

unilaterality, just as the Israelis chose.¹²⁴ Recent years prove that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, they also show that there can be no unilateral solution. The obvious conclusion, Kelman argues, is that negotiations must be renewed and that a diplomatic agreement between Israel and the Palestinians has to be reached.¹²⁵

The current reality after the mutual choice of unilaterality (by both Israel and the Palestinians) created an immense difficulty to return to the negotiations table. Hamas, having won the 2006 elections and today being the de facto ruler of the Gaza Strip, is not an accepted party to the negotiations by Israel, since Hamas would not recognize Israel's right to exist. Fatah has an interest in creating a unified government (the inclusion of Hamas) to return to negotiations with Israel, but that would force a broad Palestinian negotiation and signing agreements that do not mesh with Hamas' basic ideology (non-recognition of the State of Israel). This puts Fatah in a bind between Israel and Hamas.

The violent conflicts between Hamas and Fatah for control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank since 2006, the dismantling of the unified Palestinian Government by the PA's president Mahmud Abbas, together with the geographic and ideological distance between Gaza and the West Bank, only make clearer the great difficulty in attaining an internal Palestinian arrangement.¹²⁶

Any military confrontation between Israel and Hamas worsens the current situation, defined as a "political dead end." Israel acts with great force to achieve a great

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

measure of quiet, while Hamas acts to break the siege on the Gaza Strip. The conflicts weaken Mahmud Abbas and distance him from the negotiation table and simultaneously weaken Israel's position in the international community. These are facts that must be taken into account by the Israeli decision makers.¹²⁷ The last operation in Gaza (summer 2014) made clear the disagreements between Fatah and Hamas. Mahmud Abbas tries to increase his influence over the Gaza Strip through coordination with the Egyptians and through getting Israel's legitimacy (control over the crossings and over the funds allocated to Gaza), while Hamas acts to recover from the fighting and further ground the "state" it established in the Gaza Strip. All the internal Palestinian attempts to create unity, before and after the last operation in Gaza, failed. Public pressure on Hamas inside the Gaza Strip increased despite its attempt to portray the fighting against Israel as a victory. Thousands were killed, tens of thousands are homeless, and the Israeli siege continues.¹²⁸

Israel has the responsibility to produce a partner and construct a long-term plan with a clear vision. The negotiations with the Palestinians should be carried out in two areas: in the short-term by creating gradual steps that would pave the way for a permanent arrangement, and in the long-term by defining the desired goal (for example, a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and its

¹²⁷ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 73: "Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas."

¹²⁸ Karin Laub and Fares Akram, "Hamas Consolidates Its Grip on Gaza as Reconstruction Stalls Gaza City," *ABC News*, accessed April 28, 2015, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/hamas-consolidates-grip-gaza-reconstruction-stalls-30308123? Single Page=true>.

government in Ramallah with full security responsibility, existing peacefully next to the State of Israel in its new borders).

The short-term negotiations, as described by Kelman, consist of trust-building steps relating to the security and living conditions of the Israeli and Palestinian societies. The areas of concern include ceasefire, the release of Palestinian prisoners, lifting restrictions on the movement of people and wares, taking care of the basic needs of the population in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, and stopping the demonization and hate all of these are examples of trust building steps that could form the basis of further advances. Israel's main challenge is to make Hamas more acceptable for Israelis, all the while keeping Fatah as the leading organization.¹²⁹ The Israeli demand of any Palestinian Government (and especially a unified Palestinian Government that includes Hamas) to recognize the State of Israel as a fundamental condition to start the talks is a major barrier, as that is a request that Hamas cannot fulfill. Kelman argues that although Israel should never sign a permanent agreement without this recognition, it is not imperative in the initial stage, so such an Israeli demand should not hinder the renewal of the talks.

Long-term negotiations are only possible if sufficient trust exists between the sides. The diplomatic vision should be based only on a historic compromise that serves the basis of both sides' needs and that permits them to declare the end of the conflict in return for obtainable justice. The final agreement should ensure that both sides' advantages far exceed the risks involved in the necessary compromises. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is grounded on many years of ideological and territorial struggle. Both sides' recognition that a military confrontation will not resolve the conflict is

¹²⁹ Ibid.

essential for moving forward with the diplomatic process. Both peoples should understand that only a historic compromise can lead to the realization of each side's ambitions in its own piece of land. Israel needs to lead the process and make the Palestinian public opinion support it. The Palestinian people need to make Hamas join the diplomatic process, or become politically irrelevant.

The conflict between Fatah and Hamas is fundamental and a central part of the research question of this paper. The internal Palestinian relations have a crucial effect on Israel's behavior in managing the conflict. Israel needs to choose between the two sides of the coin. Widening the chasm between Fatah and Hamas will consolidate the Palestinian two-headed leadership and completely tear the Gaza Strip and the West Bank away from each other. The consequence is that it will have to confront (militarily or diplomatically) the weakened bodies, geographically and ideologically separated, that represent different populations in different spaces. Such a choice will serve Israeli interests, if the intention is to choose the three-states approach or to transfer control of the Gaza Strip to Egypt.

Should Israel choose to manage the conflict with one party while neutralizing Hamas, it must do so by elevating Fatah's standing. Israel should encourage Fatah to contain Hamas (which Fatah failed to do in the past). Israel needs to make sure that reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, which makes Fatah the main partner and Hamas the secondary, is a Palestinian public interest. The compromises made by Hamas

need to be seen as internal Palestinian peace, and not as submission to Israeli demands. This is based on Israel's profound understanding of the ideology driving Hamas.¹³⁰

The obvious conclusion is that the end of the conflict with the Palestinian people, while gradually inserting Hamas into the existing process with the PA, is a major step in Israel's ability to neutralize Hamas' ongoing violence.

Although the research presents four possible alternatives, this is the place to mention that there are other options that were not discussed in this paper.

One of them is a settlement between Fatah and Hamas and reaching a diplomatic arrangement with the PA (Fatah) containing Hamas within it. This alternative's meaning is neutralizing Hamas by including it in the PA and creating a system of benefits and sanctions on the PA to neutralize Hamas. This alternative needs to be fully coordinated with Egypt, pragmatic Arab states, and the international community. The process should set the conditions for the PA to take responsibility for the Gaza Strip and lead the restoring process, an achievement that Hamas wishes to claim for itself after the recent fighting with Israel. Israel needs to deepen its re-examination of the potential advantages that exist in coordination between Hamas and Fatah, based on the assumption that a unified PA that is a clear address with a wide base of legitimacy, and which holds full responsibility for what is being done in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank, is a clear Israeli interest. This will test the PA's abilities but force Israel to respond to initiatives for renewing the peace process and to expand the PA's authority over the West Bank. In a process of bridging the gap between Fatah and Hamas and between the West Bank and

¹³⁰ International Crisis Group, Middle East Briefing no. 73: "Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas."

the Gaza Strip there are many risks, as it might strengthen Hamas' standing in Palestinian politics. However, it also holds the potential for reuniting the Palestinian territories and establishing a functioning, unified Palestinian Government. This government will be a responsible entity for Israel, one which represents the territories' residents more clearly and fully than the PA today, and so it can cast renewed meaning in a peace process and in any sort of understandings and arrangements between Israel and the Palestinians. This issue raises some questions for the future: Is the two-state solution still relevant? How does Israel reconcile Hamas with Fatah and is this an Israeli interest? Can Fatah rule?

The second option is international involvement and keeping the order in the Gaza Strip by outside forces. The paper did not deal with this possibility's consequences on Israeli politics and on the relations between Israel and the Palestinians, but this is an option that has to be taken into account, whether fully or partially.

The third option is presented by Efraim Inbar, the author of "Israel's Palestinian Challenge." He claims that there is a low chance of getting a diplomatic arrangement, because of the Palestinian national movement's inability to agree to a historic compromise with the Zionist movement in Israel, and because the PA is a "failed state" that cannot, in the short-term, unify the armed organizations under it and provide a proper government for the Palestinian citizens. Therefore, Israel needs to take the approach of managing the conflict, recognizing that it is going to continue for a long time. The regional solution Inbar suggests takes the failed PA out of the arrangement's equation and brings Jordan and Egypt into the picture as sponsor states. According to him, Israel should coordinate its position with its Arab neighbors and reach a situation where mutual interests will lead Jordan to take responsibility for the West Bank and Egypt for the Gaza

Strip. Cooperating with responsible nations such as Jordan and Egypt could be a realistic solution to an Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which under the current state of affairs cannot reach a conclusion in negotiations.

Any discussion of the diplomatic possibilities needs to take several constraints into account: The success of an arrangement between Fatah and Hamas, especially seeing Mahmud Abas' stance during last summer's fighting, is very unlikely; the Palestinian authority has no intention, will, or capability to deal with Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Fatah will lose any violent confrontation with Hamas in Gaza, unless it gets outside help; the pragmatic Arab states today have limited interest in the Gaza Strip; the international community is afraid of taking responsibility for the Gaza Strip, since that involves violent conflicts with Hamas.¹³¹

The essence of the research is presenting the alternatives as objectively as possible, while trying to assess each alternative's effectiveness. In the analysis of each alternative there was an attempt to demonstrate the advantages and disadvantages to allow the reader a deeper understanding of the complex reality. The purpose of the research is to permit a smart choice of one of the alternatives or of a combination of them. Once an alternative is picked, the goal of the research is to effectively elaborate on its efficacy and on its influence on the current reality.

Although the paper deals with Israel's attempt to neutralize Hamas' violence, it was not possible to ignore the current situation and the nature of the relations between Israel and the PA (Fatah) in the West Bank. Although I did not delve deeply into this

¹³¹ Michael and Dekel, "The Gaza Strip: What Can Israel Do to Postpone—or Even Prevent—the Next Round of Violence?"

topic, it is obvious that it will not be possible to separate a solution in the Gaza Strip from a solution in the West Bank, even if the option of widening the forming gap between the Gaza Strip and Hamas and between the West Bank and Fatah is selected. In any case, Israel will have the ability to affect reality in this matter.

On a personal note, Israel has to decide. To me, a real diplomatic move while defining an Israeli long-term vision should be the basis of any decision. A substantial diplomatic move can lead to positive long-term outcomes for Israel and to the wide international support that Israel absolutely needs. If such a move fails, it will be the basis of legitimacy for any wide-scale military maneuver. In any case, the purpose of the actions taken by Israel would be neutralizing Hamas and bringing it (whether by choice or by force) to cease its violence against Israel.

GLOSSARY

Fatah. A secular Palestinian terrorist organization founded in the late 1950s by Yassir Arafat. It is now a political faction, but has not broken completely from its terrorist past.

Gaza Strip. The disputed territory captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, bordering the Sinai Peninsula and the Mediterranean Sea.

Hamas. Also known as the Islamic Resistance Movement. This group is the primary Islamic opposition to Fatah in the West Bank and Gaza.

IDF. Israel Defense Forces or the Israeli Army.

Intifada. The term Palestinians use to describe uprisings or campaigns of violence against Israel. It literally means “shaking off.”

Muslim Brotherhood. A religious and political organization founded in 1928 in the Suez Canal town of Ismailiya, Egypt, by Egyptian schoolteacher named Hassan al-Banna.

PA. The Palestinian Authority, which is the governing body of the Palestinians, pursuant to the Oslo diplomatic process of the 1990s.

PLO. Palestinian Liberation Organization, an umbrella organization of Palestinian factions that came under the control of Yassir Arafat following the 1967 Six-Day War.

West Bank. The disputed territory captured by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War, located on the west side of the Jordan River.

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