



## **HAMAS' TERRORISM STRATEGY: OPERATIONAL LIMITATIONS AND POLITICAL CONSTRAINTS**

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*From 1996 to 1999, Hamas used suicide bombings and then relative restraint in order to derail the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In recent years, although Hamas has desired to perpetrate more terrorist attacks, its capabilities have been limited by stepped up security operations and coordination by Israel and the Palestinian Authority. What will Hamas leaders do next?*

The September 1999 incident in which Hamas recruited Israeli Arabs to bomb two buses in the central Israel towns of Haifa and Tiberias suggests that the organization has taken a strategic decision to derail the on-going negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA).

The prospect of progress in the political process, together with the likely establishment of a Palestinian state in only part of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, is unacceptable to the Hamas leadership. The election of a new Israeli government in May 1999 did not dampen the movement's support for continuing the armed struggle against Israel. Hamas has expressed fierce opposition to the PA's policies, hoping that "jihad" operations will sabotage the peace process.

Hamas has drawn intense scrutiny by researchers, politicians, and the Israeli public at large since February/March 1996, when deadly suicide bombs planted by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) allegedly handed victory to Benjamin Netanyahu's conservative Likud party in Israel's June 1996 elections.

Hamas seemed satisfied with the election results and the ensuing slowdown of peace negotiations, in keeping with its conviction that any compromise with Israel

is contrary to the interests of Palestinians and with its long-term objectives of building an Islamic state in the whole of Palestine. Its low profile terrorist activity in the 1996-1999 period was sometimes interpreted as a strategy intended to facilitate the continuation of Netanyahu's rule and, implicitly, the continuation of the crisis in relations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

### **OPERATIONAL DIFFICULTIES FOR HAMAS' TERRORIST ACTIVITY**

In reality, the sharp decline in terrorist attacks, particularly the bloody suicide bombings, was due to the combined preventive counter-terrorist policy of the PA and Israel. (1)

The PIJ, the smallest radical Islamist organization, was greatly weakened after Israel allegedly killed its leader, Fathi Shkaki, in Malta in October 1995. Hamas, meanwhile, continued attempts to perpetrate suicide attacks during Netanyahu's term. (2) In October 1998, Israeli researcher Reuven Paz pointed out a change in Hamas's terrorist tactics, as conveyed in several articles published by prominent figures in Hamas. One article was published in the October 1998 issue of Hamas'

monthly Filastin al-Muslimah under the very unambiguous title: "A new method of military resistance in Palestine." The article hints at a "green light" to various Hamas groups in the West Bank, mainly in the Hebron area, to initiate independent operations. According to Paz, one reason for this change may be the difficulties Hamas activists in the West Bank face due to increased surveillance by Palestinian security forces and Israeli pressure, concomitant with the discovery of some of its "laboratories". Among the setbacks suffered by the movement were the March 1998 killing of bombmaker Muhi al-Din al-Sharif; the subsequent arrests of Hamas political and military leaders; and the September 1998 killing of the Awadallah brothers who were wanted by Israeli and PA security forces. The article gives the impression Hamas is concerned with covering its trail due to the double impact of Israeli and PA pressure.

In April 1999, Filastin al-Muslimah published an annual report of the 1998 terrorist operations of the 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, which, as Reuven Paz stresses, revealed the difficulties Hamas combatants faced due to the Israel-PA security coordination supervised by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). According to the report, 1998 operations were characterized by the use of time bombs, commando attacks with hand grenades, and armed ambushes with light weapons. In contrast to previous years, there was only one suicide attack. This was due to an effort to preserve the variety of methods of operations and to conserve the lives of the fighters for other types of missions. The report admits a general decline in Hamas's terrorist activity in 1998, resulting in a corresponding decline in Israeli human casualties.

In an October 24, 1998 interview to the Jordanian newspaper Al-Urdun Hamas spokesman Ibrahim Ghosheh addressed

Hamas' failure to follow through on threats of revenge following the assassination attempt on the life of Hamas' political chief Kahlem Mash'al in Jordan and the killing of the Awdallah brothers in the West Bank. Ghosheh admitted: "For two years now, almost since I took over in June 1996, the [Israeli] security organs have not stopped tracking down al-Qassam operations and foiling operations almost daily." As for Palestinian security services, Ghosheh said, "they, too, have not stopped hunting down our mujahidin.... The fact is, Palestinian security organs know every detail. They are the ones which laid their hands on the explosives factory for the mujahidin in Nabulus and before that the ones in Bayt Sahur and Hebron. It was the PA security organs which seized the materials which the mujahidin use in their struggle."

Nevertheless, Ghosheh promised that Hamas "will resist through awareness, popular move, and the forces that can go ahead with their jihad, as jihad operations will be the best reply to this conspiracy. We know that many jihad operations have produced significant political results... Our Palestinian people are very close to Hamas' program. Resistance should take place every day at least with stabs or shooting from machine guns, and this is what the Zionist planners have failed to curb."

In the June 1 issue of Filastin al-Muslimah, the ex-secretary general of Hamas' political bureau, Musa Abu-Marzuq, explained the reason for Hamas' absence from the military field during Netanyahu's tenure. "[The] absence was not a decision but an expression of the realities of the balance of forces on the ground. Struggle and jihad are in an ebb and tide. Those who have rights will not allow their rights to be blown with the wind. They strongly believe that jihad is the way to regain our rights and protect our honor."

The same day, Khaled Mash'al told the Lebanese al-Diyar:

There is no change in Hamas' view that resistance must continue. Resistance in Palestine, however, is being subjected to immense pressure and challenges. The situation in Palestine is the exact opposite of that in Lebanon, which possesses an abundance of positive factors. Naturally, this pleases us and we hail this embracing of the resistance by the people and the government, the political cover provided by Syria, and the Islamic support extended by Iran. As for Palestine, the resistance is subjected to a trilateral security siege...the Zionists, the Palestinian Authority, and the United States, represented by CIA intervention...

Hamas' "internal" (or, local) leadership gave more or less the same explanations for the organization's operational weakness. Mahmud Al-Zahhar from Gaza told the London-based Al-Majallah:

The modus operandi of resistance in Hamas depends upon military targets, soldiers and settlers. But major restrictions, especially after the signing of the Wye River agreement, prevented the implementation of a large number of operations. The Palestinian jails are full of the sons of Hamas who were arrested as they were trying to carry out operations or as a result of confessions. Some of these operations were aborted the last minute... Hence, the operations continue but the attempts to abort them also continue. It is a real war in which we win one and lose one.(3)

Ramadan Abdallah Shalah, the PIJ secretary-general, addressed the same issue in an interview with the Dubai-based Al-Bayan:

Carrying out military operations inside Palestine depends on the circumstances and resources of the

strugglers there. Any objective observer can see the security cooperation that is taking place among the Israeli occupation authorities, the Palestinian Authority and the CIA with a view to encircling and aborting the Jihad action while it is still in the phase of formation. They are arresting and liquidating our strugglers...We, in the Islamic Jihad Movement, are facing enormous challenges and obstacles. Even our military action is the target of distortion, fabrications and a dirty psychological warfare being waged by the proponents of the Oslo accords. Nevertheless, the will for Jihad and martyrdom still exists in our people.(4)

In an interview to Al-Majallah, Isma'il Abu-Shanab, a leading figure of Hamas in Gaza, declared that the paralysis of Hamas's military wing should be viewed in light of objective circumstances and reasons:

The first is the change in the Palestinian reality brought about by the presence of a Palestinian authority, and hence the absence of the factor of direct friction with the occupation... [and] the continuing pursuits, not only by the Israeli side but also by the PA. This has limited the resistance activities. The political changes have another dimension that affects the resistance's ability and efficiency at the present stage. But this does not mean at all that ... that the military wing has become paralyzed. There is ebb and flow in the action and this happens in all revolutions and military operations in the world.(5)

#### SEPTEMBER 1999: A REVIVAL OF HAMAS' BOMBING STRATEGY?

It is now clear that Hamas organized the double car-bomb attacks in Tiberias and Haifa on September 5, 1999. The arrested

Israeli Arabs involved in the failed attacks were militants of the Islamic Movement in Israel--a legal organization--and had connections to Hamas activists in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jordan.

Three terrorists died in the explosions, while a fourth, who had been in the car in Haifa shortly before it exploded, was later arrested by security forces. One of the dead men was believed to have been involved in a Hamas suicide attack in the city of Afula, in 1994, when his ID card was found on the body of the suicide terrorist.

The arrested activist told police that he and his partner, as well as the team in Tiberias, intended to load the bombs onto inter-city buses. One terrorist would load the bomb then disembark from the bus before the explosion and make his getaway in a care driven by his partner.

According to a September 1999 report in the monthly Palestinian Times, considered a Hamas mouthpiece, the Islamic movement has apparently decided to resume armed attacks on Israeli targets, particularly soldiers and settlers "after a self-imposed moratorium lasting nearly ten months." And, indeed, there was a rash of shootings and ambushes in the West Bank and in Israel in the summer of 1999. The most serious attack occurred on August 10, 1999 when Akram Alkam, a 23-year-old Palestinian from a Bethlehem refugee camp, rammed his car into a group of Israeli soldiers, injuring eight soldiers before he was shot dead. The driver didn't have any "formal" affiliation with Hamas but according to the newspaper, his behavior strongly hinted of the movement's influence and Hamas eventually did take credit for the operation. The Palestinian Times stressed that the fact that Alkam--an ordinary, un-indoctrinated Palestinian---was willing to carry out "martyrdom operations" with his own meager means should be viewed as a striking success for Hamas: "The movement, after all, can now boast of succeeding in transforming 'martyrdom'

from a political faction's monopoly into a popular practice, which makes it all the more difficult for Israel and, for that matter, its subservient puppet entity, Yasser Arafat's PA, to control future attacks against Zionist targets." (6)

The 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades also took credit for an early August shooting that wounded two Jewish settlers in the Old City of Hebron. Three other incidents, including one near the northern West Bank town of Jenin in which an Israeli immigrant from the former Soviet Union was killed, are also believed to have been carried out by Hamas. A fourth attack was probably aborted when an explosive device went off inside a warehouse in Hebron on August 15. PA police said two Islamist brothers who served five-year sentences in an Israeli jail for belonging to Hamas, were preparing a plastic toy-car bomb attack for detonation at an Israeli settlement site in downtown Hebron.

Hamas can also content itself knowing that some terrorist attacks considered "private initiatives" by Palestinians--such as the murder of two young Israeli students on the night of August 30 near Megiddo, in Israel--stem from the organization's intensive indoctrination and propaganda in support of the "popular" jihad against the "oppressor."

Although the Palestinian Times claimed in September that, so far, the attacks were "relatively minor and generally un-qualitative in nature," the message they were intended to convey was sufficiently clear for all parties concerned, particularly Israel and the PA.

#### HAMAS ATTEMPTS TO REBUILD ITS MILITARY AND POLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

According to the September Palestinian Times, Hamas' military wing has been undergoing an arduous process of

rebuilding and restructuring following the assassinations of several of its top leaders in the last few years. Hamas leaders are convinced that the terrorist campaign will serve Palestinian interests in the long run. Moreover, a Jordan-based Hamas official alleged that renewed attacks on Israel would actually strengthen the Palestinian negotiating position. According to the Palestinian Times report, a senior Hamas official in Ramallah stated that “the resumption of armed struggle against the Zionist entity carries with it the message that there can be no real peace or stability in this region as long as the Palestinians don’t receive their dues in full.”

More important, claims the paper, is the fact that Hamas has probably realized that it no longer has much to lose by renewing attacks on Israeli targets. After all, the PA continues to intern hundreds of Islamist activists without charge or trial, apparently to appease Israel and the United States. Hamas does not place all the blame for these arrests solely on the PA. Rather, Israel remains the prime and ultimate culprit in forcing the PA to act virtually at its beck and call. This, Hamas reasons, makes armed struggle against Israel inevitable, even if it is dangerous.

Another reason for Hamas’ enhanced terrorist activity was offered on the movement’s website on September 5, 1999: the mounting pressure on the organization to kidnap Israeli soldiers as a bargaining chip for its own imprisoned militants. One Islamist activist said that, “the Islamic movement will have to do something to give our prisoners hope...Arafat doesn’t represent us, and he doesn’t give a damn if our brothers remained in Zionist jails for thirty years to come...we have to do something.” (7)

Hamas is also attempting to extend its influence in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, where Fatah’s influence is weak. In this framework, it has formed the

“Association of Religious Palestinian Leaders in Lebanon” with the blessing of Hizballah’s mentor, Shaykh Fadlallah, and has intensified its dialogue with Hizballah leaders.

At the same time, the Hamas leadership has refused to open a dialogue with the PA as part of a united Palestinian front in preparation for final settlement negotiations, a front that already has the blessing, in principle, of George Habbash’s Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Nayef Hawatmeh’s Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

Hamas has instead proposed, according to the Jordan Times, (8) the formation of a new umbrella organization, a “national body,” to replace the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which it describes as obsolete. Hamas is involved in intensive deliberations with Palestinian opposition factions to form the new organization before the end of this year.

Hamas leaders have stepped up contacts and visits with their allies in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, with the intention of forming a united front against the PA and Israel. Khaled Masha’al met with Syrian Vice President Abd al-Halim Khaddam and Foreign Minister Farouk a-Shara, in the wake of the arrests in Jordan, to discuss the peace process and the positions of Israel and the PA. The Hamas leaders received mainly verbal support from the Syrians.

#### JORDAN MOVES AGAINST HAMAS

Following the Wye Plantation agreement of October 1998, Hamas leaders in Jordan made passionate statements calling for the continuation of military operations against Israel. Ibrahim Ghosheh declared in the Amman-based Al-Urdun on October 15, 1998, that the movement is eager to avoid “the mutilation of the national fabric ... in the interest of the Palestinian people.” But,

he hinted, "this clear and strong Hamas position, which is appreciated by foes even before friends, cannot be guarantee forever"- a veiled threat against the PA if it goes ahead with the agreement's implementation. "The PA must not continue its present policy and think that Hamas and its leadership will not respond to agents, who cooperate with Jews and hand them mujahidin, weapons, and ammunitions."

In an interview to the French Liberation on July 6, 1999, Shaykh Ahmed Yassin declared that there is no alternative to military action and promised that Hamas' military wing would flex its muscles in the near future. In another interview to Al-Sharq al-Awsat on August 19, Yassin stressed that his movement's position on military action against Israel was firm and has not changed, due to of the continuing Israeli occupation of Palestine. Regarding claims by some Palestinian security sources about recent military moves by Hamas, Yassin stressed that "the sons of the 'Izz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, are the ones who decide when, how, and where to operate according to the conditions they face and their resources."

The Hamas leaders in Jordan also reaffirmed such militant statements to the Arab and international media. At a meeting in August with Syrian officials, Khaled Masha'al said that Hamas would continue its "jihad, struggle and uprising against the occupation." Musa Abu-Marzuq said in Filastin Al-Muslimah that Hamas' role "lies in clinging to Palestinian rights, in fighting the enemy, in activating jihad against the enemy in all spheres, and in mobilizing the Palestinian people, the Arab nation, and the Muslim nation along this course." (9)

The arrest of Hamas militants in Amman at the end of August 1999 and the closure of the organization's journal and offices in the Jordanian capital was intended to prevent radical Islamic elements from sabotaging the political process between

Israel and the Palestinian Authority. This is true as well of the mid-September arrests Masha'al and Ghosheh on their return from a visit to Tehran, and the expulsion of Musa Abu-Marzuq from Jordan. The Hamas leaders were charged with "belonging to an illegal organization," storing weapons, and conducting military training exercises in the Kingdom--charges which Hamas has denied.

Despite the seemingly resolute Jordanian position concerning punishing Hamas leaders and neutralizing their activity, intensive negotiations for their release with the active mediation of the Muslim Brotherhood leadership in Jordan.

Hamas leaders made an effort to discuss and redefine their relationship with the Jordanian government. In a plea to King Abdallah II on September 22, Musa Abu-Marzuq stated that Hamas had no intention of carrying out any military operations against Jordan even if the Hamas leaders were not released. "Hamas will never target anyone from the Ummah and will never change its policy especially in dear Jordan... The Movement's pendulum will remain directed against the Zionist enemy," he wrote. (10)

But at the same time, Shaykh Hussein Yousef Sulayman, a prominent Islamist official in the Bethlehem area, warned: "The Jordanian authorities think that Hamas will cower and lower its head as a result of [the recent crackdown, but] the opposite is true in reality. These measures could embolden Hamas and force it to cross certain red lines." Sulayman didn't say what these red lines were, but hinted that "Hamas would not cave in to pressure under any circumstances" (11) According to an Agence France Press of September 1, 1999, Hamas' armed wing even warned that it would hit Jewish targets "in the region and around the world" following the closure of its offices in Amman.

Jordan came under mounting pressure from the Muslim Brotherhood and

opposition groups to free the Hamas leaders, amid mass demonstrations in the Palestinian refugee camps and a hunger strike by the jailed Hamas leaders. By the end of October 1999, it seemed that a formula for ending the crisis had been reached. The official Jordanian news agency, Petra, quoted King Abdallah on October 23 as saying that he was confident Jordan would be able to resolve outstanding differences with Hamas "in the context of rule of law, and maintaining Jordan's sovereignty and security." This formula could include the release of the jailed leaders, who would be permitted to remain in Jordan as "Jordanian citizens," without any link to Hamas, according to Jordanian governmental sources, or under a symbolic presence of Hamas in the kingdom, according to Hamas sources. It seems that implementation of this agreement has been postponed because of differences between the more extremist leaders jailed in Jordan and the more moderate Musa Abu-Marzuq.

For the time being, Jordanian authorities continue their pressure on Hamas. On November 9, they arrested Izzat al Risheq, a member of the Hamas politburo, for belonging to an illegal organization, along with two journalists, who were charged with "hiding a fugitive." The Jordanian government continues to demand that Muhammad Nazal, a member of the Hamas political office and its representative in Jordan, be handed over, in accordance with arrest warrants issued against him when the crisis broke out.

A Hamas source, cited on November 12 by the organization's website, stated that "this sudden escalation of the crisis ...threatens the current good offices that seek to find a political solution to the crisis...and puts to an end the hopes created by these good offices."

The Jordanian Al-Dustur observed on October 30 that all issues between Hamas and the government remain in dispute,

ranging from the presence of Hamas offices in Amman--particularly its political bureau--to other minor and formal details. At issue too is the future of Hamas leaders who bear Jordanian nationality.

A Hamas source told Al-Sharq al-Awsat on November 4: "Hamas is preparing itself to deal with any possibilities and unexpected results from the mediation being conducted by the Muslim Brotherhood [with] the Jordanian Government...Within the framework of the search for an alternative, the movement has now reached the conclusion that it should not put all its eggs in one basket; that is, members of its Political Bureau should not live in one particular country." Hamas could shift its leadership to Damascus, Sanaa, Tehran, Khartoum, and other capitals in which the movement has a presence.

#### HAMAS STRATEGY DURING FINAL STATUS NEGOTIATIONS

According to political analyst Khalil Shikaki, director of the Center for Palestine Research and Studies in Nablus, the internal Hamas leadership will be strengthened, at the expense of Hamas' ability to become a regional power. According to Shikaki, as Hamas' military leadership is mainly based in Syria and Iran, the group's ability to carry out attacks might not change in the immediate future. Hamas militants have been weakened by the killings of their most accomplished bomb makers and by Yasser Arafat's clamp-down, according to Reuters analyst Wafa Amr. He notes that Hamas's priorities may now shift to consolidating a social and political network in the Palestinian-ruled West Bank and Gaza even while continuing attacks on Israel. (12)

Ismail Abu Shanab, a senior Gaza-based Hamas official, told Reuters that Hamas was debating how to structure its leadership and whether it should be based in Palestinian areas or in exile. He hinted that

basing the main activity abroad, like the PLO did in the past, is not the best choice. Concerning terrorist activity, Abu Shanab said that as long as Israel respects Palestinian civilians, Hamas will confine its attacks to Israeli military personnel. He also told al-Majallah on October 3 that the peace process does not satisfy the Palestinian people's ambitions and that Hamas wants "to be the vanguard that carries the banner of the Palestinian right until the Palestinian people retrieve their legitimate national rights. Therefore the resistance will continue under all conditions, even if there is a final solution."

The same issue of al-Majallah carried an interview with Maj. Gen. Nasr Yusuf, Director General of the Palestinian Security Department and Member of the Fatah Movement's Central Committee, in which he stated that the Hamas organization, including its military wing, will likely turn into a political party after statehood. Yusuf estimated that there will be many local, regional, and international arrangements that will hinder the military wing's activities and, hence, make it very difficult for Hamas to continue its terrorist actions. Yet, he said, Hamas's military wing is still capable of influencing the peace process, "regardless of the blows dealt to it either by the Israeli or the Palestinian security measures. [The] movement is capable of building itself despite the conditions around it and the difficulties it is now facing."

According to analysts cited by Amr, Shaykh Ahmed Yassin's release from an Israeli prison in October 1997 strengthened the Palestinian-based leadership. But the exiled leaders maintained an upper hand because they held the key to Hamas' finances and helped to mobilize regional backing for the group. Khalil Shikaki maintains that the big attacks have to be personally approved by Shaykh Yassin and all the other leaders. "But this does not mean that smaller attacks would not be carried out

because they don't require a political decision."

#### PRESSURE ON HAMAS BEARS FRUIT

Notwithstanding the very militant statements of the last year issued both by the external leadership and Shaykh Yassin and other internal leaders, Hamas has been forced to downplay its involvement in the September 1999 bombings in Israel despite the manifest attempts to perpetrate attacks even on a small scale and instill life into the declining activity of its military wing.

In an interview to the Palestinian Al-Ayyam on October 7, Shaykh Hasan Yusuf, a leading Hamas figure in the West Bank, denied the involvement of Hamas or any of its leaders in recruiting or training the perpetrators of Tiberias and Haifa attacks. Shaykh Yassin also denied rumors that Hamas was recruiting Israeli Arabs due to the latter's "special situation." (13) Yassin went so far as to propose an open-ended moratorium on attacking Israeli and Palestinian civilians by both sides. "The Ezzul Deen al-Qassam [sic] fighters are aware that Islam is against targeting civilians who are non-combatants." He suggested that attacks by Hamas's military wing on Israeli civilians were mostly a reaction to Israeli attacks on Palestinian civilians, including the murder of 29 worshipers by an Israeli settler in February of 1994. (14)

Yassin's proposals were reinforced by an 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam statement, cited on October 12 by AFP, that it was ready to stop attacks on Israeli civilians if several conditions were met. "We are ready to exclude Jewish civilians from our operations provided that Israel stops its settlement activities, and land confiscation, and that the Israeli army as well as the settlers stop attacking Palestinian civilians." The Hamas reaction was even more ambiguous after three pipe bombs exploded simultaneously

in Netanya on November 7, 1999, injuring 27 people, two of them seriously. The three bombs, plus a fourth later found by police, appeared very similar to pipe bombs found near the Netanya police station last August.

The day before, 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam warned in a statement that it was preparing to escalate its armed attacks against Israel despite its October pledge not to target civilians. "The Zionist regime, in the coming weeks and months, should prepare itself for a wave of armed attacks, which will take different forms," reported the AFP. "Because of its stupidity and arrogance, the Zionist government has missed a historic opportunity to keep Israeli civilians from being part of our operations and spare innocents on both sides the horrors of bloodshed," it said. On October 25 in Bethlehem an Israeli soldier had killed a Palestinian who tried to stab him, although Palestinian police and eyewitnesses denied there had been any such attempt.

Hamas' website repeated earlier statements by Shyakh Yassin that Hamas wouldn't target civilians and didn't seek to harm relations with the Palestinian Authority. Ismai'il Abu Shanab said he was sure Hamas had nothing to do with the incident and suggested that other groups might be responsible for the attack.

According to the assessment of the Israeli defense establishment, as reported by the Israeli Haaretz on November 12, 1999, Hamas has ceased carrying out suicide bombings in Israel for tactical reasons. "The organization now appears to prefer planting bombs, having reached the conclusion that the use of suicide bombers enables Israel to find those behind the attacks by means of DNA tests performed on the bodies of the suicides." According to the report, Hamas tried to hide the identity of the terrorists who attacked in Jerusalem in 1997. The labels were removed from their clothing and the terrorists scraped the skin off their fingertips to prevent identification by means of

fingerprints. Nevertheless, DNA testing enabled the bodies to be identified, which afterward led to the uncovering of the terrorist ring involved.

The two attacks perpetrated by Israeli Arabs in Tiberias and Haifa in September, both of which were organized by Hamas, were not planned as suicide missions. Three of the four terrorists involved were killed when the bombs they were transporting to the central bus station exploded prematurely. The pipe bombs in Netanya were also not suicide missions, though the method employed demonstrated the low technical level of the perpetrators.

## CONCLUSION

The behavior of Hamas's military wing and the numerous declarations of its political leaders during the last year show that the organization is earnestly interested in perpetrating major terrorist attacks. The goal of such attacks would be to interrupt the peace process and to show that Hamas stands in the vanguard of the struggle for the liberation of all of Palestine. Nevertheless, the blows to its military apparatus-especially at the senior and medium level-during the last two years delivered by Israeli and PA security forces have seriously hampered these efforts, bringing about not only a reduction in the number of attacks but also a sharp decline in the operational capabilities of its militants.

These limitations in operational effectiveness have been manifest in the (possibly temporary) abandonment of suicide attacks, the use of unprepared and poorly trained Israeli Arabs, and the call to "the Palestinian masses" to return to the use of the knife and the stone, as in the old days of the intifadah. The fact that Hamas has taken responsibility post factum for small terrorist attacks or attempts perpetrated by locally organized groups or individuals also illustrates the difficulties it encounters in

recruiting and training expert terrorists. Moreover, the Jordanian move against the external leadership has certainly seriously disrupted Hamas's logistical, financial, and operational infrastructure, and neutralized, at least for the time being, the more extremist elements in the leadership.

The new situation strengthens the position of the internal leadership vis-a-vis the external leadership, with which seemingly it has disputed lately on the strategy and the timing of the terrorist attacks. While leaders in the West Bank and Gaza have had to take this new situation into account in planning their activities, they are also more vulnerable to the counter-measures of the Palestinian Authority. This does not mean that Hamas cannot reorganize operationally and again become a critical threat to the peace process.

According to the evaluation of the Israeli military intelligence organs, the PA is attempting to prevent "strategic" terrorist attacks--those that result in heavy human casualties. However it does little to halt the more diffuse violence, which leads to "tactical" attacks against Israeli settlers and soldiers in the Territories. The Palestinians will try to gain sovereign independence over most of the territories through resistance and struggle. General Amos Malka, Head of the Israel's Intelligence Corps, recently told the Knesset's Committee for Security and Foreign Relations that as the final settlement negotiations continue, Yasser Arafat may make use of "controlled crisis" to achieve his goals in the event of an impasse. The Palestinian police do take action following specific incidents, but he said there is no sign of a strategic decision to uproot the terrorist infrastructure. In addition, the PA is not condemning attacks. According to General Malka, the Palestinians have not renounced the use of violence and terrorism. As for Hamas, Malka said its military wing is in a "deep crisis" and is aiming to get out

of its situation by carrying out a terror attack. (15)

Against this background, Hamas will probably lower the profile of its terrorist activity, reorganize its weakened military apparatus, recruit and train new militants and wait for the right moment to try and strike again at the difficult and complex process of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. Another option would be to transfer part of its military infrastructure and activity to southern Lebanon and attack Israel from there. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad has already adopted this solution and its guerrillas recently joined Hizballah in fighting against Israeli and South Lebanon Army troops. Ramadan Shallah, head of the PIJ, told Al Hayat on November 14, that his militants were undertaking "a new strategy" to fight Israel from southern Lebanon, to wage jihad "from any open front with the enemy."

Although Hamas has indeed stepped-up its presence in Lebanon and enjoys good relations with Hizballah, the use of Lebanon as the main battleground against Israel would be a sign of extreme weakness, as it is for the PIJ. This solution would thus be taken *in extremis*, in the case that both the area under Palestinian control and Jordan become forbidden territory for any Hamas terrorist activity.

It has been shown over the last three years that only an intense endeavor by all the parties involved in this long and arduous process, plus close and sincere cooperation between Israel, the PA, and Jordan, can defuse the radical Islamic organizations' terrorist schemes. The question remains whether the PA leadership, and more specifically Chairman Arafat, will understand that terrorism is a two-edged weapon. Its "controlled" manipulation or the giving of the "green light" to Hamas and other forces to use violence and terror could eventually backfire and damage the

achievements and hopes of the Palestinian people itself.

#### ANNEX I

#### HAMAS AND PIJ MAIN TERRORIST ATTACKS: MARCH 1997-AUGUST 1998

March 21, 1997: A terrorist detonated a bomb on the terrace of the "Apropo" restaurant in Tel-Aviv. Three young women were killed and 48 people injured. The terrorist, a member of Hamas' "al-Tzurif" cell, was also killed.

May 9 - 12, 1998: Two bombs were detonated electronically near IDF patrols.

July 30, 1997: Two bombs detonated in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem, killing 15 persons including two suicide bombers and wounding 168 others. The 'Iz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, claimed responsibility for the attack.

Aug 20, 1998: Rabbi Shlomo Raanan was stabbed to death by a Hamas terrorist in his home in Tel Rumeiyda, Hebron. The attacker entered the house through a window and escaped after throwing a molotov cocktail that set fire to the house.

August 27, 1998: A small bomb placed in a garbage dumpster near Allenby Street in Tel-Aviv injured fourteen people. One woman was seriously injured, and two moderately. The other ten suffered light injuries.

September 4, 1998: Three suicide bombers detonated bombs in the Ben Yehuda shopping mall in Jerusalem, killing eight persons, including the bombers, and wounding nearly 200 others. The 'Iz-al-Din al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack.

October 13, 1998: One man was killed and another critically wounded in a terrorist attack as they swam in a spring in the Jerusalem Hills. The two were ambushed by two men who opened fire on them at close range and then escaped in a car belonging to one of the victims. This was the second

terrorist attack in under a week. On October 9, a Palestinian stabbed a woman soldier to death as she arrived at a bus stop near her home.

October 19, 1998: A Hamas member hurled two grenades into a crowd at the Central bus station in Be'er Sheva before running from the scene. At least 59 people were wounded in the rush hour attack. Most of the injured were lightly or moderately wounded, though two were seriously hurt. Several bystanders caught the attacker and turned him over to civil guard policemen.

October 29, 1998: A Hamas suicide bomber targeted a school bus carrying children from the community of Kfar Darom to a regional school near the Gush Katif Junction. The suicide bomber driving an explosives-laden vehicle attempted to collide head-on with the bus. One soldier in the escorting the jeep was killed, along with the suicide bomber. Two passengers of the jeep were seriously injured. Six people sustained light-to-moderate injuries, including three young people and three children.

November 6, 1998: Two terrorists were killed and more than 20 people injured in a terrorist attack in the Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem. A car drove at speed into the crowded market and exploded. In the car, two suitcases were found containing a relatively small amount of explosives. The bomb was described by security sources as "amateurish." The Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) has claimed responsibility for the bombing in Jerusalem.

August 8, 1999: The Hamas military wing, the 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades released a statement taking responsibility for a shooting attack on Jewish settlers in Hebron. The attack occurred when gunmen opened fire on two settlers as they drove through the Israeli-controlled city center.

#### ANNEX II

#### HAMAS INFRASTRUCTURE EXPOSED: JANUARY 1998-AUGUST 1999

January 14, 1998: Members of Hamas were arrested in the Nablus area (by the Palestinian Authority), Ramallah (by Israel and the PA) and Bait Lehem (by Israel). In Nablus, Palestinian security officials discovered a bomb factory in an unoccupied building, which the PA had raided after a tip from Israel, where they found 700 kilos of explosives. Dozens of plastic containers full of an unidentified liquid, in addition to 10 plastic containers containing gas mask kits, and bomb making chemicals such as acetone, alcohol, and hydrogen peroxide. Four Palestinians were arrested.

The interrogation of the suspects arrested in the areas under Israeli control revealed that they planned suicide bombings in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem. In addition, members of the Hamas intended to shoot at and kidnap Israelis as well as plant car bombs in Jewish settlements. The arrests foiled plans to stage attack during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan and prevented serious terrorist activities in the near future.

March 30, 1998: Palestinian police uncovered seven large explosive factories in Gaza, the largest discovered so far. A Palestinian security official denied initial reports that the factories were connected to Hamas. More than 1,000 hand grenades, guns, anti-tank missiles and large quantities of explosives, some of them smuggled from Israel, were discovered in the factories.

March 29, 1998: A Palestinian was killed in a car bomb explosion in Ramallah, apparently while preparing a bomb for a suicide attack in Israel. The vehicle had Israeli license plates and had been previously stolen in Israel. The dead man was Muhi a-din Sharif, the Hamas bomb maker responsible for the death of a score of Israeli civilians and the wounding of hundreds more in a series of suicide bombings. The explosion that killed Sharif

occurred in a garage, apparently used by Hamas as an explosives factory.

Israeli officials denied any involvement in the death of Muhi a-din Sharif, while later Hamas accused the PA of his assassination.

April 6, 1998: PA security forces arrested the alleged killers of Hamas bomb-maker Muhi a-Din Sharif. The PA claims that the killing of Muhi a-din Sharif was the result of a power struggle within the organization. In response, Hamas accused the Palestinian Authority of "collaboration with the Zionists" in the murder of Sharif, and the attempt to put the blame on members of Hamas.

April 13, 1998: In an unprecedented move, Palestinian security forces arrested a number of key Hamas leaders, among them: Amad Awadallah, who is suspected of having shot the bomb-maker Sharif; Ibrahim Maqadmeh, considered Hamas's senior leader in the territories; Hamas spokesman Abdul Aziz Rantisi, for violating a signed agreement with the PA not to carry out any media campaigns following Sharif's death; Abdallah al Shami, a leader of the Islamic Jihad organization.

June 29, 1998: Israeli security forces arrested five Hamas members in connection with two attacks on Israeli patrols in the Jenin and Nablus areas. The attacks took place on May 9 and May 12, when two bombs were detonated electronically near IDF patrols. The subsequent investigation revealed that the cell was planning to set off a large bomb in the restaurant area of the northern town of Afula. The members of the cell were all residents of the Samaritan village of Marka.

September 11, 1998: Two Hamas activists, the brothers Adel and Imad Awadallah, were killed in a clash with Israeli security forces. The shootout took place at an isolated house just outside the village of Taibeh near Hebron. The house where the confrontation took place was found to contain munitions and disguises, leading Israeli security

officials to believe that the two fugitives were on the verge of carrying out a terrorist attack.

The brothers Awadallah were well known to Israeli security. Both were leading members of 'Iz al-Din al-Qassam, the military wing of the Hamas. Adel Awadallah was among Israel's most wanted men. He was thought to have been behind a number of terrorist attacks on Israeli civilian targets, including the suicide bombings in Jerusalem in which 21 Israelis were killed. His brother Imad was accused by the Palestinian Authority of killing Hamas bomb-maker Muhi a-din Sharif in an internal feud over use of Hamas funds. Imad Awadallah escaped from a Palestinian jail on August 15, and was hunted both by Israel and by the Palestinian Authority.

November 30, 1998: The Palestinian Authority arrested the man suspected of planning the November 6 suicide bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market. Iyad Hardan, who was arrested at the request of Israel, is thought to be the commander of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the Jenin area. According to Israeli security sources, he sent out two suicide bombers, Yusef Ali Mohammed Zughayar and Suleiman Musa Dahayneh, to execute the attack, which resulted in 27 injured and the deaths of the bombers. Only a malfunction in the explosives charge kept the attack from ending in more casualties.

In January 1999: a Palestinian military court sentenced two Hamas members to 15 years of hard labor for preparing explosives for the July and September 1998 suicide bombings that killed 21 Israelis.

February 1, 1999: A Palestinian policemen and an eight-year-old girl were killed in a car chase after Hamas fugitives in Rafiah. The PA had reportedly been tracking the fugitives since the arrest of several members of an allied 'Iz al-din al-Qassam cell. This incident marks the first time a member of

the Palestinian security services was killed in a clash with Hamas.

May 24, 1999: In a crackdown on Hamas activists, Palestinian police arrested Sa'ed al-Arabeed, a senior member of 'Iz al-din al-Qassam. Al-Arabeed, an aide to fugitive bomb-maker Mohammed Dief, was wanted by both Israeli and Palestinian security services. He and his assistant Khalil Sakani were arrested in a dawn raid on a Hamas hideout in Gaza.

Al-Arabeed had been in hiding since 1995, following a series of suicide bombings in Israel carried out under his direction. He allegedly assisted Hamas bomb makers Imad Akel and Yihye Ayyash. Suicide bomb attacks planned by Akel and Ayyash resulted in the deaths of scores of Israeli citizens.

August 8, 1999: The Palestinian Security services detained several Hamas activists in what it called "preventative" measures after renewing calls for terrorism against Israel by Hamas.

Among the detained was Abdelaziz Rantisi and Ahmed Nimr Hamdan. Rantisi was recently released after serving 15 months in jail. A third man, Ismail Abu-hanab, was detained in Gaza City after giving an interview to a television station. Palestinian security sources said the arrests were in reaction to the group's recent calls for terrorist action against Israelis.

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#### NOTES

1) See Annex II for a partial list of the main blows to Hamas's operational infrastructure.\

- 2) See a partial list of Hamas's terrorist attacks in Annex I.
- 3) Al-Majallah, August 15-21, 1999.
- 4) Al-Bayan, July 29, 1999.
- 5) Al-Majallah, October 3, 1999.
- 6) Ibid.
- 7) <http://www.palestine-info.org>
- 8) Jordanian Times, August 26, 1999.
- 9) Filastin Al-Muslimah, June 1999.
- 10) Abu-Marzuq's plea appeared on Hamas' website, <http://www.palestine-info.org> .
- 11) See Hamas's website [http://www.palestine-info.net/index\\_e.htm](http://www.palestine-info.net/index_e.htm).
- 12) Wafa Amr, Reuters, September 23, 1999.
- 13) Palestinian Times, November 1999.
- 14) Ibid.
- 15) See Haaretz, November 2, 1999 and the Jerusalem Post, November 3, 1999.