

Evaluating Hamas' Struggle in Palestine

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ABSTRACT *This article examines the history and outcomes of Hamas' involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By using published sources and conducting interviews with five incumbent Hamas officials living abroad, the article evaluates the group's achievements and failures since the onset of its active role in the military struggle against Israel and in Palestinian politics against the other main actor, Fatah. It concludes that Hamas, while achieving some success in its military struggle against Israel, has not delivered the expectations of the Palestinian people, partly because it was squeezed into the Gaza Strip by the Palestinian Authority, and partly because international actors have blocked aid from entering the Hamas-controlled areas. Hamas is expected to continue fighting, but may partially withdraw from politics, as the people of Gaza are not happy with its governance due to higher unemployment, as well as the Israeli blockade and attacks.*

Keywords: Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Hamas, Fatah, Gaza Strip

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Introduction

As a state-like and armed non-state actor, Hamas (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, Islamic Resistance Movement) has a complex identity. Since its foundation in 1987, the organization has been a dominant actor in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict due to its ongoing combat against Israel. However, the organization's military combat and political activities have had intra-community, regional, and international implications. Domestically, Hamas is now contending with its main Palestinian rival, Fatah, and striving to meet the needs of the Gazan population. Meanwhile, Israel's pressure on Palestine has risen due to Hamas' armed resistance and hardline politics. The group's militant image also threatens to undermine sympathy and support for the Palestinian cause. However, a non-state armed group such as Hamas would inevitably come into being since Palestine is under Israeli occupation. Hamas is not the first Palestinian armed group, and if current circumstances continue

unchanged, it will not be the last one that opts to fight to find a solution to the conflict. However, whether fighting is the correct way to realize a non-state actor's goals is questionable.

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This article analyzes Hamas' military and political struggle, and questions whether the group could handle the conflict per its ideals. As one of the main actors on the Palestinian side, the group's military, political, social, and international policies directly affect the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and vice versa. Hamas has had a direct impact on what the Palestinians have

gained and lost since the beginning of its active role in the century-old conflict. Moreover, how Hamas has transformed itself in the course of time is directly related to the conflict. By analyzing the views of Hamas officials as expressed in interviews, this study will argue that, in political terms, the group has not gained what it expected at the beginning of the venture and will likely withdraw from politics, if only partially. The group seems to have somewhat minimized its objectives and may maintain its cause through fighting.

This article will mainly focus on whether Hamas has been able to carry the burden of the conflict. In addition to using official documents and secondary sources, the authors interviewed five top Palestinian officials with pseudonyms Zakariyya Yasin, Mahmoud Saeed, Yasir Ali, Nasser Mustafa, and Muhammed Hamdi. The first two sections will present brief background information regarding the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how Hamas responded to the conflict militarily and politically. The following sections will examine the results of Hamas' military and political venture.

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Organized and formal attempts to found a Jewish homeland began in earnest when Jewish intellectuals and businessmen accepted the decision to create a Jewish nation-state in Palestine during the first World Zionist Congress held in 1897. The World Zionist Organization (WZO) encouraged European Jews to immigrate to Palestine and contacted the Ottoman Sultan for permission to settle systematically in Palestine. As Sultan Abdülhamid II categorically opposed the creation of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, they turned to the British government and received a proposal called the 'Uganda Scheme,' which proposed granting a homeland to Jews in the Uasin Gishu region of modern Kenya. Needless to say, the WZO refused it. As Jewish lobbyists put pressure on the British government during the First World War, they eventually obtained a legal promise for a Jewish state in Palestine through the Balfour Declaration in 1917.¹ The British decision favoring a Jewish homeland was shocking for Arabs rebelling against the Ottoman Empire, since the same lands had been promised to them as well. This two-faced policy led to clashes between Palestinians and Jews until the end of the British Mandate.

In 1945, the British declared that they would give up their obligations in Palestine; thus the United Nations formed a committee that eventually advised the partition of Palestine into two states in 1947. The UN General Assembly passed Resolution 181, partitioning Palestine, on November 29, 1947. According to the resolution, 56 percent of the territory would be given to Jews on the assumption of more Jewish immigration in upcoming years.² Since the Jewish population was only 31 percent (589,341) of the total population at that time, Arabs furiously refused the decision.³ The Jews proclaimed the State of Israel on May 14, 1948. Refusing a Jewish state on the Palestinian lands, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq declared war against Israel but lost since Israel was well-prepared, well-equipped, and outnumbered the Arabs in terms of combat force. Therefore, after the war that left 15,000 casualties, Israel controlled 78 percent of the Palestinian lands while Jordan annexed the West Bank and Egypt took over the Gaza Strip.⁴ In other words, the State of Palestine was partitioned by belligerent countries including Arab states, and was thereby born dead.

The Arab countries and Israel fought two more wars after the War of Independence. In 1967, Israel defeated the Arabs in the Six-Day War through a sudden and unexpected attack on Egyptian air forces. Israel seized Sinai and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria during the war.⁵ The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) then passed Resolution 242, which declared the new Israeli occupations illegal.⁶ In October 1973, Anwar Sadat's Egypt attacked Israel on Yom Kippur to take the latter off guard and achieved some early and temporary military victories. Yet Egypt was defeated again thanks to help from the U.S. and steadfast Israeli

Ismail Haniyeh sways a Palestinian flag during a protest within the "Great March of Return" and "Palestinian Land Day" at Israel-Gaza border, March 30, 2019.

ISMAIL HANIYEH'S
PRESS OFFICE /
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resilience. Following this war, Anwar Sadat withdrew from the Arab-Palestinian cause and recognized Israel in return for getting Sinai back from Israel in accordance with the Camp David Agreement of 1979.

The Palestinians became desperate in the 1970s. Left alone against Israel and unable to control Palestinian lands, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) had to relocate its headquarters to Jordan until it had a war with the Jordanian army and was defeated by it. It then moved to South Lebanon and attacked Israeli forces from there. The Israeli army retaliated by invading Lebanon in 1982 and expelling the Palestinian armed groups, some of which went to Tunisia. In 1987, not militants but ordinary Palestinian people ignited an uprising against Israel, which was called the First Intifada; it led to the death of 1,500 Palestinians and 422 Israelis. This first concerted effort of civil disobedience continued for several years and helped Palestine rise to the top of the agenda of world politics and to obtain the sympathy of world public opinion.⁷

After the First Intifada, Israel and Palestine decided to try for a peaceful solution through the Oslo Accords in 1993. According to the agreement, Israel would withdraw from Gaza and some parts of the West Bank and Palestinian self-government would be allowed. The Palestinian side, in return, would recognize the State of Israel. However, the accords did not address the serious problems between the two people.⁸ The withdrawal took longer than required and Palestine's status did not improve in comparison with the pre-Oslo period.

The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish fanatic halted the progress and led Israel to pursue an irreconcilable attitude toward the Palestinians. On September 28, 2000, when Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited holy Masjid al-Aqsa with his guards and used ugly words about the mosque, Palestinians took the streets and commenced the Second Intifada, which would last until 2005 and culminate in the death of 3,682 Palestinians and 69 Israelis.⁹

This much bloodier Palestinian uprising led to more intensified Hamas attacks against Israel, including suicide bombings, and increased the group's popularity among Palestinians. In 2006, Hamas won the general elections by winning 60.6 percent of the votes. This unexpected result was used as an excuse by Israel to blockade Gaza from land and sea, as Hamas did not accept its terms.¹⁰ In 2007, the Fatah-Hamas conflict broke out, dividing the Palestinian Authority (PA) into two. After Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas expelled Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh from office, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip while Fatah continued to control the West Bank. The separation was not peaceful, causing deaths on both sides.

As Hamas continued to pursue a hardline stance against Israel, it clashed with Israeli forces from 2006 onwards. In order to minimize the Hamas threat, Israel launched Operation Cast Lead in 2008, Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012 and Operation Protective Edge in 2014.¹¹ Meanwhile, in 2011, the Palestinian Authority applied for United Nations (UN) membership in order to become a recognized sovereign state, but was unable to obtain unanimous recommendation by the Security Council due to the expected U.S. veto.¹²

Perhaps one of the worst eras in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict began when Donald J. Trump became the U.S. President in 2016, as he openly sided with the Israeli government against Palestine. The Trump Administration's first attempt to show his utmost support to Israel was to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (al-Quds). Despite harsh criticism from many countries, he did not backtrack. Between March 30 and May 15, 2018, Gazan Palestinians conducted peaceful demonstrations at the border to protest their worsening life conditions and the relocation of the U.S. embassy. Although the protestors did not use firearms, 183 of them were killed and 6,000 wounded.¹³ Moreover, in 2019, the Trump Administration formally recognized the Golan Heights as part of Israel, greenlighted the Israeli government's annexation of the Jordan Valley and declared Israeli settlements legal. Therefore, during Trump's presi-



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capital of Palestine. Rather, the deal suggests a de-militarized Palestine under the supervision of Israeli forces. In addition, the al-Aqsa Mosque will remain under Israeli control, more areas of the West Bank will be annexed by Israel, and the Palestinians will have no airspace or border control.¹⁴ While the plan was rejected by the Palestinian side, the Arab States have managed to back the process without enraging the Palestinians.¹⁵

dency, Israel found the chance to legitimize many of its illegal occupations. What is more and worse, Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and advisor, developed a peace plan called the 'deal of the century,' whose terms were disclosed by Trump on January 28, 2020. The plan does not offer an independent Palestine nor East Jerusalem as the

Identifying Hamas

Co-founded by Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi immediately after the First Intifada started in 1987, Hamas is a Nationalist-Islamist Palestinian movement and non-state actor that seeks an independent Palestine. Its ideology and unofficial structure date back to 1948, when Palestinian refugees settled among members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. When Palestinian refugees in Egypt returned to Gaza, they established the Islamic Centre in 1973 and were known as the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (PMB).¹⁶ Thus, the group had already existed long before it formally declared its foundation. The members renamed themselves Hamas as a result of pressure from the grassroots of PMB in 1987.¹⁷

Regarding its Islamist ideology, "The emergence of Hamas in 1987 was an example not only of the reformist 'Islamism from below' (Hassan al-Banna) and of the revolutionary 'Islamism from above' (Sayyid Qutb), but also of 'post-facto Islamism,' where an existing territorial and ethnic conflict was Islamised."¹⁸ According to our interviewees, Hamas' endeavor to revive Islam in Palestine was due to the belief that Fatah's ideology and policies did not provide strong support for the Palestinian cause. Before Hamas, Muslims in Palestine had a more secular lifestyle, as many of them did not pray, there were fewer mosques, and veiling in universities was forbidden. In order to strengthen religious identity among Palestinians, Hamas started to build mosques, taught Islamic lessons and helped people through their humanitarian associations.¹⁹

If Hamas is to be explained by its words, the 'Hamas Charter,' written in 1988, tells a lot about the group. The introduction of the charter clearly states that

the group's struggle is with Jews and will continue "until the enemy is vanquished."²⁰ Article 2 says that the movement is one of the wings of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). In Article 7, it links itself with Izz al-Din al Qassam fighters, who had fought in the war of 1948 and carried out the *jihadi* operations of the MB from 1968 onwards. The charter emphasizes the group's affiliation with the MB almost in every article. In Article 12, it underlines that nationalism is a part of its religious creed. Unlike Fatah, which favors secularism, Hamas strictly adheres to the *sharia* (i.e. Islamic law) and sees it as one of the pillars of the movement.²¹

Hamas updated its charter in May 2017. According to the new charter, titled "Document of General Principles and Policies," Hamas accepts the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the borders before the 1967 war. Second, it separates Judaism/Jews from Zionism/Israel and implies that the enemy is not Jews but Zionists. Third, the document does not refer to the MB. Despite these revisions, not all Hamas members accept that the group's basic goals have changed. Palestinian interviewee Yasin says that it is just an adjustment to the new era and emphasizes that the "Palestinians' fight with the enemy is perpetual and will continue until Palestine is cleared from them."²²

While the First Intifada gave birth to Hamas, it was the second one from 2000 onward that consolidated its power and influence. Previously, as Hamas gained popularity among the Palestinian people due to Israel's disproportional use of force and the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority's incapacity to struggle with Israel in military terms, Fatah's leader Yassir Arafat had become disturbed and arrested many Hamas commanders in 1996 and 1997. However, during the Second Intifada, Arafat deliberately allowed Hamas to conduct military operations against Israel. Hence, Arafat both applied pressure on Hamas and opened their ways to fight.

While Abbas, who replaced the late Arafat, preferred a political solution over combat, Hamas was able to gain the hearts of the Palestinians thanks to its military successes against Israeli forces. As a result, Hamas won the elections in 2006 and ruled all of Palestine for one year, until Abbas fired Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh and ousted Hamas from the West Bank with the help of international actors, namely the Middle East Quartet (the UN, the U.S., the EU and Russia) and Saudi Arabia. Consequently, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip and left the control of the West Bank to Fatah.

Hamas has only been influential in the Gaza Strip since then. To limit Hamas' capabilities, international donors, including Arab countries, have cut off donations partly or totally. Currently, Qatar regularly transfers \$15 million to Gaza via Israel for the salaries of public clerks. Israel says it mediates between the two sides in order to know where the money is going.²³

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Structurally, Hamas consists of political and military wings, between which there is a blurred line. Which wing has control over the other has been a matter of debate. According to Wilson, while the political branch does not intervene in the armed one, it backs the latter's actions.²⁴ In contrast, an interviewed Hamas official claims that the military wing is under the control of the political one.²⁵

The international community is currently divided about the legitimacy of Hamas. Since it does not hesitate to combat against Israel, Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization by many countries, including the United States (since 1997), Canada, the European Union, and Japan (although the latter recognized Hamas' electoral victory), as well as Israel. Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Paraguay list the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, as a terrorist organization. Other countries, including Turkey, China, Russia, and Switzerland (due to its neutrality) do not see it as a terrorist group. As for the Arab states, despite not declaring it a terrorist organization, countries like Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, and Jordan do not approve of the group's policies.²⁶ Interviewee Saeed stated that although Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have not officially declared Hamas a terrorist organization, they have arrested its members in their territories. In addition, Egypt did not allow Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh to go abroad from Gaza for three years.²⁷

Hamas' Military Struggle

Hamas is both an armed and political group fighting against Israel to liberate the Palestinian lands. While the political wing governs the Gaza Strip, the military one (the al-Qassam Brigades) combats the Israeli army. The number of militants in the al-Qassam Brigades is not exactly known. According to one study, while the core armed militants number several hundred, in the event of war, Hamas can gather 20,000 men, consisting of militants from the al-Qassam Brigades (approximately 10,000), and police and security forces.²⁸ Another estimation posits that Hamas has 15,000 to 16,000 combatants, including 2,000 well-trained combat fighters.²⁹ There are also as many as 30,000 operatives that check the accuracy of rockets and other weapons, digging tunnels, getting in-



involved in protests and mobilizing people.³⁰ Interviewee Mustafa argues that the number of militants is around 40,000.³¹

As military combat is the primary method Hamas uses in order to realize its goals, Hamas mostly utilizes rockets to counter Israeli forces because they are easy to produce and use, and less risky for operators as they are launched remotely.³² Hamas produces rockets of various ranges in workshops and homes located in Gaza through reverse engineering; since the group is not able to acquire sophisticated parts for its rockets they are somewhat primitive and lack accuracy.³³ As a result, the death toll from rocket attacks has remained low. For example, despite firing 4,561 rockets from 2001 to 2009, the number of Israelis killed was no more than 28. However, “rocket attacks help Hamas preserve its political credential as the leading Palestinian resistance organization and enable its leadership to retain the loyalty of militant members of the organization who oppose any cessation of attacks.”³⁴ In addition, they cause psychological trauma and pause the daily life of Israelis with the fear they create. As a precaution, Israel built the Iron Dome missile defense system to hit Hamas’ rockets. The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) claims that the system has an 86 percent success rate, but when 690 rockets were launched from Gaza in May 2019, the Iron Dome intercepted only 240 of them, killing four people and injuring more than 200.³⁵ Thus, the actual success rate was much lower, calling into question the efficiency of the missile defense system. Particularly, the system is useless against short-range missiles landing 3-4 kilometers from their launch site.

Palestinians marking the 30th anniversary of Hamas, in al-Katiba Square, Gaza City, December 14, 2017.

MUSTAFA HASSONA / AA Photo

Whether Hamas has been successful in its military struggle is debatable, but the economic and political consequences of its struggle look grim

In addition to rockets, Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups like the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and the Islamic Jihad resort to the use of suicide bombings. While Palestinian groups have reduced suicide bombings in recent years, from 1993 to 2003 they conducted more than 300 attacks, which consequently led the Israeli government to construct security barriers.³⁶ In total, Palestinian groups killed more than 700 Israelis prior to 2008, Hamas being responsible for more than 400 of these deaths.³⁷

Since Gaza is under aerial and naval blockade imposed by Israel, their only way to reach outside is via tunnels. While Hamas builds some tunnels below the Gaza-Israeli perimeter to attack Israel, most of the tunnels are dug underneath the Gaza-Egypt border. There are also tunnels in Gaza to store weapons and to be used as hideouts, command posts and war rooms.³⁸ Hamas reportedly spends \$40 million a year on building and repairing tunnels, for which it employs 1,500 people.³⁹ Indeed, Israeli forces have suffered from Hamas attacks conducted via tunnels: besides killing Israeli soldiers, the al-Qassam Brigades have also kidnapped soldiers via tunnels.⁴⁰ However, when these tunnels are discovered, they are destroyed either by the Egyptian army on the Rafah border or by Israel on the Gaza-Israeli border in order to prevent weapons smuggling and attacks. The IDF discovered and destroyed 32 tunnels during Operation Protective Edge; recently it has built an underground barrier made from galvanized steel.⁴¹ Schanzer asserts that the closure has cost Hamas a 75 percent budget loss.⁴² The barrier has reportedly caused a shortage of weapons in Gaza, although Hamas leaders deny such claims and argue that they are better prepared for a likely war. Interviewee Hamdi claims that Hamas can find weapons anytime it needs them, even via Israeli arms smugglers.⁴³ This claim might be true; in 2000, the Israeli police revealed that Arab and Israeli arms dealers had stolen weapons from the Israeli army's depots and sold them to Fatah militants.⁴⁴ Mustafa also notes that not ISIS but Bedouin tribes smuggle weapons on the Egyptian side of the border since ISIS militants in Sinai accuse Hamas of being in a "traitorous collaboration with Egypt and Israel."⁴⁵

What has Hamas gained from this struggle? The Israeli side argues that they have broken the wings of Hamas and paralyzed them by taking strict precautions.⁴⁶ However, although a large number of tunnels have been destroyed, retaliations rarely take place. The two sides have different views regarding the merits of developing new tactics of attack versus foiling attacks. For example, some media reports claim that Hamas is smuggling drones in order to mon-

itor Israeli facilities and attack them,⁴⁷ but Israel seems to have already taken precautions against this strategy since their two drone-makers were allegedly killed by Mossad in Tunisia and Malaysia, respectively.⁴⁸ In addition, unlike many other armed non-state groups, Hamas cannot easily access weapons or use hit-and-run tactics, since it is besieged by Israel and Egypt. Hence, the degree to which they can sustain their fight against Israel with smuggled arms is open to question. Unsurprisingly, it is the Palestinians who have suffered the highest death toll: according to UN reports, 87 percent of the casualties in this conflict are Palestinians.⁴⁹

Despite these facts, Hamas officials are still confident about the military capacity, capability and strength of the group. Our interviewees argue that since there are no Jewish settlements in Gaza, Israel can neither gather intelligence nor detain Palestinians there. Also, they argue, Hamas has fought several times with Israel and became stronger each time. As there has been no direct conflict since 2014, Hamas has grown well-prepared for a likely war as it has learned how to arm drones and produce submarines and rockets through reverse engineering with the help of experts. Moreover, praising Hamas' effective struggle, Saeed claims that the armed group was able to force Israel to release 1,000 Palestinian prisoners, 500 of whom had been sentenced to death, in return for releasing an Israeli private.⁵⁰ Finally, they argue that it was Hamas' resistance that forced Israel to withdraw permanently from the Gaza Strip. They believe that the more intensive their resistance, the more Israel will retreat.⁵¹ Their comments indicate that Hamas will most likely continue to fight, as expected by some Israeli scholars as well.⁵²

Economic and Political Consequences

Whether Hamas has been successful in its military struggle is debatable, but as the interviewees admit, the economic and political consequences of its struggle look grim for Hamas. It was the election victory of Hamas in 2006 that made it feel the heavy burden of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It took less than one year for Hamas to find itself isolated and confined to Gaza. International aid to the Hamas-controlled area suddenly halted and international actors increased pressure on the group. Israel conducted more attacks and built a wall surrounding the Gaza Strip. As a result, the social life of Gazans deteriorated so much that the unemployment rate, which was around 25 percent before Hamas took power, rose to 52 percent in 2019.⁵³ The unemployment rate is only 13 percent in the West Bank, a fact that enrages the Gazan people. Meanwhile, the shortage of money affects public servants as well. Clerks in Gaza get only 45 percent of their salaries, while those in the West Bank receive between 70-100 percent of the full amount. The Gazan people complain about their economic and social conditions and charge the

Officials from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine attend a meeting in Gaza City, January 13, 2018.

MUSTAFA HASSONA / AA Photo



Hamas administration for causing their poverty. Media reports, as well as our interviewees, indicate that while people do not want to be ruled by Hamas, they do want the group to continue to its military struggle which they see it necessary for the Palestinian cause.⁵⁴ Hamas is in such a desperate position that it allowed Mohammed Dahlan's association to operate and distribute aid in Gaza, despite the group's longstanding contention with him.⁵⁵ In addition, interviewee Yasin says that Iran sent \$40 million to Hamas to be distributed to Gazans in 2019.

Regarding external affairs, our interviewees think that because of the group's economic problems and international isolation Hamas would meet even with Saudis if they received an invitation.⁵⁶ Despite still being besieged by Egypt under the pretext of preventing arms smuggling, the group has partly restored its relations with the Egyptian regime, which resulted in the reopening of the Rafah border for the transportation of goods and civilian travel in 2018. Egypt appears to be eager to cooperate with Hamas because they have a common enemy, ISIS, in Sinai. In addition, Egypt wants to break the influence of Qatar over Hamas. What is more, the group now accepts a two-state solution, which it deemed unacceptable before.

Finally, President Abbas has hinted that elections, which have not been conducted since 2006, might be held soon. However, according to our interviewees, since the people do not want Hamas to govern them, a fact of which Hamas is aware, Hamas is not planning to nominate a candidate for the pres-

idential elections. Instead, it intends to support a neutral, qualified, and reliable one. The group will not support Fatah's candidate, particularly Dahlan, but it will not nominate a Hamas member either. Nonetheless, Hamas officials are a bit pessimistic about the elections. They argue that Fatah has been divided into four factions and two of them are

already clashing with each other, thus they expect more turmoil after the elections. What is more, unlike the interviewees, some analysts believe that Abbas may not issue a governmental decree for holding elections since he is no longer eager and is asking Hamas to deliver its arms to the PA, a condition that the group will not accept.⁵⁷ On the other hand, supposing that elections will be held, Hamas wants 40 percent representation in the parliament and will participate in local municipal elections in order to get closer to the population.⁵⁸ If elections are held, Hamas is not expected to hold crucial governmental positions due to Gaza's economic woes. This decision can be read as Hamas' estrangement from politics. Arguably, while Hamas once aspired to rule the whole of Palestine, economic factors and international pressure may have forced it to step back.

Hamas will likely to continue fighting against Israel as it thinks there is no other choice and since combatting is fruitful for the Palestinian cause

Conclusion

Having examined the outcomes of Hamas' rule in Gaza and its struggle against the Israeli state in terms of military force, economics, social life, politics, and international relations, this article concludes that Hamas, while having some success in its military struggle against Israel, has not delivered the expectations of the Palestinian people, partly because it was relegated to the Gaza Strip by the PA, and international actors have blocked aid from entering the Hamas-controlled areas. Therefore, it can be argued that Hamas did not achieve its political aims.

Hamas will likely to continue fighting against Israel as it thinks there is no other choice and since combatting is fruitful for the Palestinian cause. However, it seems that their decision to govern people through democratic elections was wrong, since their governance has culminated in a blockade, unemployment, widespread unhappiness and more Israeli attacks. Yet, the same people want the group to continue its combat. Hamas is also aware of the situation and plans to withdraw from politics, albeit not entirely. Its hardline stance has eroded over the course of time as it now accepts a two-state solution. However, regardless of Hamas' decisions and transformation, in which direction the Palestinian cause will move forward is not clear. Further, despite the group's re-

luctance to govern and likely reduced participation in politics, new inter and intra-factional clashes are not out of the question. ■

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