



Title: Hamas: Unwritten Chapters

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Publisher: Hurst & Company, 2007

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This is a book that provides a detailed account of the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine – better known as Hamas – from a Hamas perspective. Azzam Tamimi argues that Hamas is an organization of Arabs and Muslims who happen to be Palestinian, victims of a Jewish state in the very heart of Arab and Muslim lands. Israel is their oppressor who has deprived them of their land and persecuted them for generations. Although the struggle against Israel is top on Hamas's agenda, it is by no means its only *raison d'être*.

How did Hamas come into being? Following the incidents that sparked the Intifada on December 8, 1987, the seven men who composed the senior leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimun, decided to transform the organization in Palestine into a resistance movement to be known as Hamas. It was on December 14, 1987 that Hamas came into being. These events were preceded by the Ikhwan, between 1967 and 1977, trying to regain some of the ground they had lost to secular nationalist movements working against the Israeli occupation. Outside Palestine, in Egypt and Kuwait, Palestinian student communities played a major role in revolutionizing the thinking within the movement as a whole.

By 1978, a number of highly qualified Ikhwan graduates had returned from abroad. The Islamic University was the first university founded in the Gaza Strip whose board members hailed from Ikhwan. The establishment of the university was an important landmark in the history of the Islamic movement in Palestine as it could reach out to the community, providing much needed services in employment, training and education, thus bringing enormous prestige to Ikhwan. Not only did Ikhwan recruit through its university but also from across the region, in countries such as Egypt and Iran. After Fathi Al-Shiqaqi founded the 'Islamic Jihad' in the early 1980s, he was expelled from Ikhwan but still continued to compete with them with regard to the jihad to liberate Palestine. But it was only in the early 1980s that Ikhwan moved to take the decision to wage jihad to bring about the liberation of Palestine. Nonetheless, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, one of the seven original founders of Ikhwan, was arrested by the Israelis and, in 1984, sentenced to 13 years imprisonment but released one year later. Despite its failure, Sheikh Yassin's bid to take military action against the occupation did succeed in giving a boost to the morale of the younger generation of the Ikhwan, and had the effect of forcing a change in

attitude and policy. In June 1986, the Islamic faction at Birzeit University held a rally which was suppressed by Israeli troops, with two fatalities. Ikhwan now had its martyrs.

After the 1987 Intifada, Ikhwan – now acting under the name of Hamas – mobilized its members, called for civil disobedience, organized rallies, threw stones at Israeli troops, burnt the Israeli flag, and set up improvised road blocks with burning tyres. Not only did Hamas demand the end of Israeli occupation but also the abolition of the state of Israel. Most of the demonstrators were refugees, victims of ethnic cleansing, who had lost their homes in 1948 when the Jewish state was created. Israel ordered the closure of the Islamic University in Gaza but this only served to ignite anger against it. Israel also imposed a state of siege on Palestinian refugee camps coupled with a shoot-to-kill policy against unarmed demonstrators and brutal beating of teenagers caught throwing stones. Various public figures and outspoken critics of Israel within the Ikhwan were arrested in order to establish who exactly was orchestrating the Palestinian unrest.

The author then recounts some of the major events affecting Hamas from the immediate aftermath of the start of the Intifada in 1988 up to the Oslo Agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel in 1993. Hamas managed the daily activities of the Intifada, and Sheikh Yassin and his close aides in the military wing constructed a military cell known as “Cell 101.” However, the recruits had neither training nor experience and, as a result, they either failed completely or had a very limited effect. Notwithstanding this, Israel still declared an all-out war on Hamas. After Hamas killed two Israeli soldiers, some 1,500 Hamas members, including Sheikh Yassin, were arrested. The mass detentions decapitated Hamas. Musa Abu Marzuq assumed command of Hamas in 1989 and revitalised the organization. In the meantime, the PLO had accepted Israel’s right to exist, participated in an international peace conference on the basis of UN Resolutions and rejected terrorism in all its forms. This PLO position was considered to amount to the forfeiture of the right of return of Palestinian refugees, and thereby it lost its credibility among millions of Palestinian refugees who had been waiting for half a century to return home. Hamas was thus gaining more ground among the Palestinians.

In December 1990, Israel arrested 1,700 people suspected of being Hamas members but there was little disruption to the movement because of its strategy to maintain its leadership abroad, out of reach of Israel. In the meantime, Sheikh Yassin was sentenced to life imprisonment and so were other Hamas leaders. Hamas began to form small groups to mount attacks on Israeli targets, or to improvise whatever attacks they could on an individual basis. It was out of this phenomenon that Hamas’s military wing, Kata’ib Al-Shahid Izzadin Al-Qassam – the Martyr Izzadin Al-Qasam Brigades – was born. The ‘war of the knives’ waged under the banner of the Brigades continued unabated until December 1992. Following the kidnapping and subsequent execution by Hamas of an Israeli policeman, Sheikh Yassin was interviewed on Israeli television. Israel retaliated by deporting to Lebanon more than 2,000 Palestinians and this gave Hamas worldwide publicity. The UN condemned the deportation while the US was obliged to express its disapproval. The deportees refused to move forward from the spot where they had been dumped and set up camp there until, in August 1993, a process began for their repatriation.

When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990, Hamas lost its main base of operation and thus had to move to Jordan. Abu Marzuq was appointed head of the Political Bureau of Hamas (operating in Jordan). But this agreement was not to last. After the PLO and Israel signed the Oslo Agreement in September 1993, Jordan began to pave the way for a reversal in policy when it was negotiating a peace settlement with Israel which eventually was concluded in October 1994. Jordan thus harassed Hamas making it difficult for the latter to continue operating from the country. After several killings perpetrated by Hamas against Israel, the latter demanded that Jordan prevent Hamas from making statements that more killings were planned in Israel. Jordan expelled non-Jordanian Hamas members from its territory. Tension was also created between Hamas and the Jordanian Ikhwan.

Sheikh Yassin had turned deaf in prison, and campaigns were organised for his release. He was eventually released at King Hussein’s request and flown to Jordan. Israeli agents had attempted to kill Hamas leader

Khalid Mish'al in Jordan but the operation failed. To rescue their special relationship with Jordan, Israel agreed to spare Mish'al's life and to release Sheikh Yassin. The latter subsequently toured several Arab and Muslim countries garnering support for Hamas.

In October 1998, the PLO and Israel concluded the Wye River Memorandum, which was brokered by US President Bill Clinton and Jordan's King Hussein, an agreement that was denounced as an act of treason by Sheikh Yassin. This memorandum signaled the beginning of the end of Hamas presence in Jordan. Following the death of King Hussein in January 1999, Jordan appeared to have lost interest in Hamas but still supported the PLO. Subsequently Jordan closed the offices of Hamas and deported its leaders. Hamas had to move to Damascus where it was granted space and protection by Syria.

In 1988 Hamas had published its Charter written in highly religious terms. In the mid-1990s Hamas explained its existence as a Palestinian national liberation movement that struggles for the liberation of the occupied lands and recognition of the legitimate rights of Palestinians. But the Charter, today, no longer appeals to well-educated Muslims, non-Muslims, or secular Muslims. The Charter is not written for the public as a whole, and is thus the subject of criticism by both Palestinians and foreigners. Neither does the Charter recognize Israel's right to exist. Since Hamas has not changed this policy, it continues to be criticized by pro-Israeli states.

Suicide or martyrdom operations have since 1994 been used by Hamas against its enemy. Although many Palestinians were shocked by this suicide tactic when first launched, Hamas said that this was the only means available to it to deter Israeli attacks on defenceless Palestinians. Hamas has, however, on occasions agreed to a temporary unilateral *hudnah* or truce. But Israel's refusal to reciprocate has guaranteed recurrence of suicide bombings.

The author discusses also the relationship between Hamas and the PLO. He suggests that the Palestinian Authority has tried several times to undermine Hamas since the PLO has seen Hamas as a challenge to its authority and an obstacle to the peace process. In Tamimi's view, the Palestinian Authority has attempted to contain or liquidate Hamas.

In the last analysis, the author stresses the latest developments in Palestine brought about by the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004 and the victory for Hamas in the January 2006 legislative elections. He provides an insight into the measures taken by Israel, the US and the Fatah leadership to oblige Hamas to abandon the leadership of the Palestinian Authority and recognize the existence of the state of Israel.

Clearly, this book provides an authoritative account of the origins and evolution of the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine. Its analysis may suffer from insufficiently taking on board Hamas' opponents views, yet its lucid and comprehensive style may go a long way in making the Movement familiar to a circle beyond Hamas sympathizers.