



Lauder School
of Government,
Diplomacy & Strategy



The Ninth Annual
**Herzliya
Conference**
on the Balance of Israel's
National Security and Resilience

— *POLICY, STATECRAFT AND LEADERSHIP FOR TRYING TIMES* —

February 2-4, 2009

WORKING PAPER

When Green Meets Black:
**Relations between a Shiite Patron and
Its Sunni Protégé Organizations**

The Case of Iran and the Palestinian Radical Organizations
 Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

The Sunni-Shiite Rift

First Draft

July 2008

Project Leader: Shmuel Bar
Rachel Machtiger
Shmulik Bachar

Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya
Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy
Institute for Policy and Strategy

The views, opinions, and findings contained herein are those of the author(s) and should not be construed as an official U.S. Department of Defense or National Institute for Public Policy position, policy, or decision, unless so designated by official documentation.

When Green Meets Black: Relations between a Shiite Patron and Its Sunni Protégé Organizations

The Case of Iran and the Palestinian Radical Organizations Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)

The Sunni-Shiite Rift

A. Preface

Recent years have witnessed a rising fear among Sunni Arab elements of the intensifying Shiite-Iranian involvement in the Sunni and Arab theaters. It seems that the words of *Al-Sharq al-Awsat's* Saudi columnist, Husayn Shubakshi, from October 2006, reflect quite well the feelings in the Arab and Muslim world concerning this phenomenon, especially in light of what Shubakshi defines as Iranian involvement in more than one theater in this region. He maintains that in the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon War Iran was seeking maximum gains from the war's ramifications, especially in light of the ascendance of a new legendary Arab hero, Hasan Nasrallah, Secretary General of Hizballah, who gained enormous popularity in Arab public opinion during the war. According to Shubakshi, Shi'a per se has never been a project that aims at spreading its ideology and dividing Sunnis and Shiites. Responsibility therefore lies solely in the hands of Iran. Shubakshi describes Iranian penetration into the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) movement, with all its factions, trends and symbols: Hamas leader Khalid Mash'al boasts of his organization's relations with Iran and the dissemination of the Shi'a in Palestine becomes a reality; Shiites penetrate Egyptian independent newspapers; there is an open, blunt pro-Shiite propaganda in the Syrian media. Shubakshi says that the Sunni-Shiite interface under Iranian custody arouses dismay and concern. Furthermore, Iranian penetration into the depth of the Sunni sphere creates instability and shakes the face of the earth.¹

The above-mentioned statement is one out of many that attest to the intensification of the Arab discourse on what is perceived to be a Shiite-Iranian danger to the Middle East and the creation of a "Shiite Crescent" led by the Islamic Republic. This research deals with one of the more complicated dimensions of the Sunni-Shiite relations, trying to typify the nature of the relationship between a Shiite patron and a Sunni client. The case study ahead of us analyzes Iran's relations with two of the most prominent Palestinian Islamic organizations, Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), focusing on the time period between the 2006 Lebanon War and the spring of 2008.² Our aim is to see whether or not the Sunni organizations that operate under Iranian tutelage and finance are influenced by Iran not only in the political and military dimensions, but also culturally, religiously, ideologically and dogmatically, thus becoming protégé organizations in every sense of the word.

¹ Husayn Shubakshi, "Al-Mashru' al-Irani al-Murib," (The Distressing Iranian Project) *Al-Sharq al-Awsat* (London), October 24, 2006.

² It is worth mentioning in this context that Iran also operates vis-à-vis other Palestinian factions, among which is the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF), Fatah al-Intifada (Fatah Uprising) and Al-Sa'iqa (literally: storm; also known as the Vanguard for the Popular Liberation War). *ISNA* (Iran), July 12, 2006. There is an article in the PFLP website that deals with the "awaited Mahdi among the Twelver Shi'a" (*al-Mahdi al-muntazar 'inda al-Shi'a al-ithna' ashariyya*), which might reflect a trend of Shiitization among fellow members of the organization, or a sense of sympathy for the Shi'a, or it might attest to attempts to disseminate the Shiite belief among these members. <http://www.palestinesons.com/sub.php?id=1819>.

The first part of the research presents a general overview on the principle of the "Export of the Islamic Revolution", its metamorphosis along the years and stages in its development since the 1980s until now. The second part describes the progression of Iran's relations with Hamas and PIJ from a historical perspective. The third part of the research contains a typological analysis of Iran's relations with these two Palestinian radical Sunni organizations in the political, cultural-religious, economic and military spheres. Naturally, this research will also look into the role of the Lebanese Shiite organization, Hizballah, Iran's most prominent and obvious protégé. This organization operates some of Iran's most critical aspects in the latter's relations with Hamas and PIJ, especially in the military dimension (operating terror attacks against Israel from within the Palestinian Territories, training camps, indoctrination, etc.). However, since the emphasis is on the Iranian activity, Hizballah's involvement will be analyzed as an integral part of the analytical research, not separately. In any case, the above-mentioned thematic division was meant to explore how great Iran's influence is on Hamas and PIJ in each and every aspect, in which cases each organization succumbs to Iranian dictates, and under which circumstances these organizations maintain a sense of autonomy vis-à-vis Iran. We have been especially keen on exploring the amount of Iranian religious and ideological influence on these two organizations that are deeply rooted in the Palestinian, mostly Sunni, society, and that have imbibed most of their dogmatic worldview from Sunni political Islam, under the guidance of the "mother" organization, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood.

Already at this point it is possible to maintain that Iran's influence upon Hamas and PIJ is far from being identical or even similar. While PIJ has since its foundation been identified with Iran and the principles of Khomeini's Islamic Revolution, and the organization's leaders have always expressed enthusiasm and an ideological fervor toward the Revolution, Iran's relationship with Hamas has been and still is much more complicated. Hamas is a much bigger and by far more popular than the PIJ among Palestinian society, which is almost completely Sunni. Therefore, the former's leadership has since its foundation considered itself to be heading a prominent, autonomous social and ideological movement, both in terms of the Palestinian national struggle for independence and the implementation of the Sunni Islamic doctrine in Palestine in the aftermath of the "expulsion" of the "Zionist occupation".

Therefore, while Hamas has become closer than ever before to Iran in recent years politically, economically and militarily, particularly in the aftermath of Hamas's landslide victory in the January 2006 parliamentary elections, it is harder to assert that Iran's influence on the organization has also been manifest in the religious, cultural and ideological arenas. It seems that so far Hamas has been able to set some ideological and religious boundaries to Iran's influence upon the organization's cadres and supporters. Nevertheless, it is already clear that Iran's influence upon Hamas is getting stronger and blunter as time goes by, since Iranian financial, military and political support is not given to Hamas free of charge, and the latter has already been asked to pay back and will be asked to do so in the future under Iranian conditions. Meanwhile, payback mainly refers to decision-making processes in the organization and Hamas's need to adhere to Iranian dictates, which significantly contributes to radicalization in the organization's policies and statements, especially regarding the continuous negotiation on the release of the Israeli kidnapped soldier, Gilad Shalit, who has been captive in Hamas's hands since June 2006. It is important to note though that the boundaries set in front of Iran are not those of Hamas alone, since there are several forceful elements in Palestinian society, Islamic and others, that are utterly revolted by the mere possibility of Iran's imposing its religious Shiite agenda upon the Palestinian Sunni society. This research will make the voice of the radical Islamists "barrier guards" be heard in order to realize how great the fear is among those elements from what they perceive as Iranian penetration of their lands that threatens the very foundations of the Sunni creed in Palestine and throughout the Arab and Muslim world.

B. The Principle of Exporting the Revolution and the Utilization of Proxy Organizations

First of all, we shall review the main guidelines of Iranian foreign policy, its goals and most basic values. According to Dr. Manouchehr Mohammadi, a lecturer on law and politics at the Tehran University, there are five fundamental values that construct Iran's foreign policy:

1. Founding a united, universal Nation: the Islamic Republic of Iran should lead the Muslim world toward the establishment of a universal Islamic coalition. Those who are responsible for the divides among Sunnis and Shiites are the enemies of Islam, who strive to prevent the forces of Islam from uniting. One cannot coerce the Muslims to unite. This goal can be reached only via the creation of a unified ideological and spiritual system under which all Muslims would willingly subjugate.
2. Protecting the oppressed peoples of the earth and supporting their fight against their oppressors.
3. Defending the boundaries of the Iranian motherland.
4. Inviting people to join Islam through means of *da'wa*.
5. Adopting a non-alliance between East and West.

In the framework of these fundamentals there are two of the main goals of Iran's foreign policy: disseminating the Revolution to the oppressed peoples of the world and supporting movements for national liberation. Iran divides the world into Muslim and non-Muslim governments. The former are sub-divided to three kinds: those that are friendly to Iran and share with the latter the same political views concerning the "global forces of occupation" (i.e. the US and the West); neutral Muslim government that do not agree with Iran's policies, but refrain from taking positions opposed to those of Tehran, thus enabling the latter to maintain its relations with them; Muslim governments that are utilized by the West and should be convinced to relinquish such policies. Non-Muslim governments are also divided to three sub-divisions: "revolutionary" governments that take an independent stand vis-à-vis the West, and should be persuaded to accept Iranian policies; governments that neither support nor oppose Iran, and therefore economic and political relations with them should be maintained in order to make them operate independently from the US; anti-Iranian and anti-Muslim governments that should not be recognized and must be isolated from the international community, i.e. Israel and the US.³

Stages in the Development of the Principle of Exporting the Revolution (1980s-1990s)

Drawing upon the above-mentioned notions, we shall now explore more deeply the principle of Exporting the Islamic Revolution, which has been, as we have mentioned before, a central element in Iran's foreign policy and the Islamic Republic's ideological platform since its very foundation. In his book *Iran: a Research on the Revolution and the State (Iran: Dirasa 'an al-Thawra wa-al-Dawla)*, Dr. Walid al-Nasir maintains that national revolutions tend to follow two main directions: the first is the stage of nation-building, which includes the formulation of a revolutionary ideology and gaining support for these ideas among neighboring peoples and countries. The second stage consists of an attempt by the revolutionary regime to export the revolution and spread it actively; believing that the best way to defend the revolution is through an ideological attack. The revolutionary state considers the export of the revolution to be a preemptive step against an attempted attack against it, since its neighbors might perceive that regime to be potentially aggressive.⁴

³ Manouchehr Mohammadi, "Al-Siyasa al-Kharjiyya li-Jumhuriyyat Iran al-Islamiyya," (The Islamic Republic of Iran's Foreign Policy) *Al-Rasid*, No. 52, (Shawwal 1428 H; October 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=789.

⁴ Walid al-Nasir, "Iran: Dirasa 'an al-Thawra wa-al-Dawla," (Iran: a Research on the Revolution and the State) *Al-Rasid*, No. 13, (Rajab 1425 H; August 2004), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=412.

Iran perceived the export of the Revolution and its support for radical Islamic movements, especially Shiite ones, to be a means for a defensive attack against neighboring countries purported to utilize the vivid ideological fervor in favor of taunting Arab nationalism. Those in Iran who supported the export of the Revolution immediately after its triumph in 1979 believed this would be the proper way to defend the Revolution domestically, the rationale being that aiding radical anti-regime forces in different countries in the region would eventually bring about the establishment of Islamic governments that would follow the Iranian model. Khomeini wished to promote revolutions in other Muslim countries, hoping this would be the first step toward unification of these countries with Iran, thus turning Tehran into the center of this unified nation. Such an Islamic bloc would be able to fight the enemies of Islam from both the East and the West. He aspired to replace the Arab and Muslim "corrupt" regimes with Islamic governments, while creating a linkage between the export of the Revolution and the fight against "Western imperialism" and the fight to "liberate Palestine". Khomeini maintained that if Iran did not export the Revolution it would be weakened vis-à-vis its enemies. However, he used the principle according to the balance of power between Iran and the relevant states: in certain cases he settled for propaganda and *da'wa* through the media, while in others he insisted on inciting the radical organizations and the populations against their governments. His final goal was to pave the road for the creation of a universal Islamic state led by the Twelfth Imam, upon the latter's return.⁵

The principle of Exporting the Revolution has thus become a religious precept in addition to its inherent political dimension. The promotion of this principle entailed financial aid, military guidance and indoctrination given to the radical organizations with which Iran wanted to cooperate on two levels: creating a united front against Israel and the US and undermining the regimes in Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. The Iranian constitution defined the battle to expand the Sovereignty of God in the world and the assistance to the oppressed peoples of the world against their oppressors as two of the tasks of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Nevertheless, the same constitution also maintained that Iran would not interfere in other states' internal affairs, thus expressing the existing discrepancies among the different factions of Revolution's leadership in the aftermath of the Revolution.⁶

Still, during the first years after the ascendance of the revolutionary regime Iran utilized the Islamic wave that had started even before the Revolution, aiming at strengthening that wave for its own national interests. Tehran mobilized the Islamic movements for action by using religious symbols and ideas. The Iranian regime used all kinds of platforms, including international events and forums, in order to recruit religious scholars, authors and leaders, while trying to supply them with dogmatic guidance and indoctrination according to the concepts of the Islamic Revolution. Despite Iran's formal commitment not to interfere in other countries' domestic affairs, leaders such as Mir Hossein Mosavi (former Prime Minister), 'Ali Akbar Mohtashemi (former Interior Minister) and Mehdi Karoubi (former Speaker of the Majlis) spoke vehemently in favor of exporting the Revolution, especially among countries that were allies of the US. Unlike these functionaries, Ayatollah 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, currently Head of the Expediency Discernment Council and Chairman of the Assembly of Experts, and formerly Speaker of the Majlis and President of Iran, opposed the principle of Exporting the Revolution and maintained that most efforts should be invested in implementing the Revolution domestically. Appointed President in 1989, Rafsanjani practically annulled the implementation of the Export of the Revolution and removed all the supporters of this principle from the ruling circles. Among others who were banished was Ayatollah Hossein-'Ali Montazeri, who had been signaled as Khomeini's heir and had been a staunch supporter of exporting the Revolution. This turn inward stemmed from the sense of economic suffocation felt in the aftermath of the war against Iraq and the need to extricate the country from international isolation through opening up Iran for Western investments and the reconstruction of the country.⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Despite the moderation of the calls to export the Revolution, Iran did not cease to take an ambivalent position on this issue throughout the 1990s. Supreme Leader, 'Ali Khamene'i, kept on declaring that Iran is the axis of the Islamic Revolution and it is the only true Islamic state. Iran hosted dozens of radical Sunni Islamic organizations and religious scholars and trained Islamic cadres in training centers under its auspices. It was blamed by the West for financing and militarily training members of radical organizations, especially in Iraq and Lebanon, encouraging them to carry out terror attacks. Iran gave Muslim students scholarships for studying in Iranian religious centers, where they received a Shiite revolutionary indoctrination. In this manner Iran was competing against Sunni universities, primarily Egypt's al-Azhar. Iran even assisted a few activists that escaped from Arab and Muslim countries to find refuge in Europe, and finance their dwelling there. Iran's relations with various Islamic organizations enabled it to activate the latter as a means of pressure against rival regimes, but these links also intensified the tension between Iran and those governments. The export of the Revolution has collided (and still does collide) with Iran's security and defense interests, and as Walid al-Nasir maintains, this is a constant contradiction in Tehran's foreign policy. Iran finds it difficult to create a balance between its ideological platform and its national interests and needs. Quite often, revolutionary slogans are much more radical than Tehran's actual behavior, thus expressing an ambivalence that contains an ideological and dogmatic commitment versus foreign policy and *realpolitik*.⁸

Despite Iran's vigorous commitment to export its Revolution, it still seems that the Shiite character of the Islamic Revolution has curbed Iran's influence upon radical Sunni organizations in the Arab and Muslim world. The fact that most of the Revolution's ideological material has been written and published in Persian and included Shiite slogans, has estranged the Sunni radical activists. Therefore, in its attempt to market its perceptions to Sunni movements Iran has been striving to project universal worldviews, such as non-alignment and support for the world's oppressed peoples, in order to turn the Revolution into a more attractive model.⁹

Upgrading the System: From Export of the Revolution to "Soft Conversion"

In recent years some changes in the policy of Export of the Revolution have given it a more sophisticated character. The anti-Shiite online periodical *Al-Rasid* has defined these changes as "soft conversion to Shi'a" (*tashayyu' na'im*), referring to a non-violent and attractive proselytizing for the Shiite creed by entering the Sunni world through backdoor, indirect approaches. It is most obvious in countries where there are no Shiites at all, or where they are a very small minority. The reason for this "soft" method is the need to overcome the anger and reluctance with which attempts to convert people to Shi'a are entangled with what has been perceived as Iran's policy of destruction in Iraq with the assistance of Tehran's Shiite accomplices. The "soft conversion" is activated through penetration into the target society via civil society organizations and the media, as well as guiding decision-makers and public opinion leaders toward the Shiite idea. "Soft conversion" also includes the following:

1. Cooperation with the Sufi *tariqas* (orders) under the title of the love of *Ahl al-Bayt* (the family of the Prophet and his descendents, referring specifically to the lineage of 'Ali).
2. Establishing networks with leaders of Arab tribes and clans, trying to attract their sons to come and study in Iran, so that they bring the message of the Shi'a back with them upon their return to their tribesmen.
3. Publishing newspapers and magazines, and activating satellite channels and internet sites, which propagate for the Shi'a in many countries (e.g. Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Bahrain, Egypt, etc.)
4. Establishing institutions and organizations that advocate for the Shi'a: The Imam 'Ali Center for Human Rights (Markaz al-Imam 'Ali li-Huquq al-Insan) in Egypt, The Shiite Parliament in Holland and the World Union for the Defense of the Shi'a (Al-Rabita al-'Alamiyya li-al-Difa' 'an al-Shi'a) in the US.
5. Attempting to penetrate formal newspapers and television channels in the Arab and Muslim world.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

6. Attempting to penetrate the diplomatic corps of the target states in order to recruit these states' resources for Iran's benefit.
7. Using democratic mechanisms to reach power (in Bahrain, for instance).
8. Using pro-human rights and pro-minority slogans.
9. Delivering aid to regions that were hit by ecological disasters.

The *Al-Rasid* periodical sends a warning to the Sunni Islamist movements against cooperation with Iran, maintaining that the former are unaware of the dogmatic danger that Shiite thinking poses. While some of these movements wish to gain political dividends from cooperation with Iran they do not realize that they constitute the bridge upon which Iran enters the Sunni world, since "soft conversion" weakens Sunni resistance to the Shiite influence.¹⁰

Arab publicity also deals with what is perceived to be an Iranian conspiracy to achieve hegemonic status in the Arab region. An anti-Shiite website, *Al-Haqiqa*, which acts under the name of The Committee for Defending the Sunni Dogma in Palestine (Lajnat al-Difa' 'an 'Aqidat Ahl al-Sunna fi Filastin), publishes articles and inquiries just for the purpose of exposing this Iranian alleged plan. A Syrian author called Muhammad al-Hisnawi publishes an article in which he maintains that Iran's contemporary ambitions to rule the Middle East are hardly new ones, and that the notion of Exporting the Revolution is clearly a continuum of Iran's imperial ambitions that date back to the days of the Shah. According to al-Hisnawi, recent years' conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and the civil strife in Lebanon, have turned the Sunni-Shiite rift into an open one, with Iran's clear involvement in each and every one of them. He maintains that since the Sunni countries are the central economic power in the Muslim world Iran must utilize their resources in order to fulfill its regional ambitions, and at the same time get the support of other countries with a Shiite majority population. Al-Hisnawi believes that the 2006 Lebanon War served Iranian-Syrian interests and exposed Tehran's plan to take control over the entire region. According to the Syrian Islamist thinker 'Abd al-Mun'im Mustafa Halima (aka Abu Basir al-Tartusi), Hizballah carried out the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers (which provoked the war) anticipating an atmosphere that would make attempts to preach for *tashayyu'* and the promotion of Iranian ideology more lenient, at the expense of Lebanese human lives, while minimizing human damages to the organization itself. According to al-Hisnawi, there are several indications to an Iranian conspiracy to create a Shiite Crescent in the region: the policies of the Shiite majority-based Iraqi government that wishes to root out the Sunnis from all power positions in the country; Hasan Nasrallah's silence regarding Shiite activities against Sunnis in Iraq despite pleadings from Islamic movements asking him to raise his voice in protest; and what al-Hisnawi defines as a strategic expansion of the Shiite *madhhab* (religious school of jurisprudence) while creating a "scorched earth" in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Sudan, Yemen and the Gulf.¹¹

What, then, has Iran gained from its relations with Sunni organizations such as Hamas in recent years? It seems that it has accomplished several achievements: **First**, it has been able to establish an entangled network of loyal allies that serve its interest, from Iraq through Lebanon's Hizballah via Palestine. Hamas's loyalty has been expressed, for instance, in the aftermath of the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, in June 2006, when Hamas's Head of the Political Bureau, Khalid Mash'al, residing in Damascus, seemed to have followed the orders of Tehran and expressed his allegiance to his ally, even at the price of worsening the already bad situation of the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and despite internal opposition to the kidnapping and its timing, expressed by Isma'il Haniyya, Hamas Government's Prime Minister. **Second**, the declared Iranian support of Hamas and the Palestinian issue enables Iran

¹⁰ "Al-Tashayyu' al-Na'im," (Soft Conversion to Shi'a) *Al-Rasid*, No. 52, (Shawwal 1428 H; October 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=785.

¹¹ Muhammad al-Hisnawi, "Al-Mukhattat al-Irani li-al-Nufudh wa-al-Haymana," (The Iranian Master Plan for Influence and Hegemony) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date (the article seems to date back to early 2007), <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=347>; 'Abd al-Mun'im Mustafa Halima, "Al-Shi'a al-Rawafid wa-al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya," (The Shiites and the Palestinian Issue) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=95>.

to present itself as the leader of the Muslim world in a way that transcends any religious law schools or Shiite-Sunni rift, especially in light of Iran's problematic image resulting from its involvement in the war in Iraq. **Third**, supporting Hamas legitimizes Iran's continuous activity in the Arab world since it takes under its custody an organization that opposes Israel and is under Israeli blockade since Hamas's victory in January 2006's elections. **Fourth**, supporting Hamas reduces the latter's objection of any missionary activity inside Palestine. As we shall see later on, in recent years several arenas of Shiite activity have appeared on the surface in the Palestinian theater, especially under PIJ initiative with the latter's acting under Iran's direct orders. Hamas's leadership appears not to release many anti-Shiite declarations, since it does not wish to anger Iran, its highly valuable strategic patron. **Fifth**, supporting Hamas also enables Iran to get declarations of support from the Sunni organizations' leaders, thus helping the cause of exporting the Islamic Revolution.¹²

¹² "Alaqaat Hamas ma'a Tahrān: Man al-Rabih wa-Man al-Khasir," (The Hamas-Tehran Relations: Who is the Winner and who is the Loser) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=420>.

C. Iran-Hamas-PIJ Relations in Historical Perspective

Iran-Hamas

Hamas (acronym for Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya, or the Islamic Resistance Movement) was founded in December 1987, but its roots go back to the end of the 1970s, when Sheikh Ahmad Yasin had established, under Israeli approval, an institution called "The Islamic Complex" (Al-Majma' al-Islami).¹³ This institution was supposed to be focusing on sports, but Yasin turned it into a locus for the dissemination of Islam and studying the Qur'an, and initiated the construction of mosques, schools and clinics. During the 1980s the Complex started to accumulate weapons, although at that point it was still not involved in terror activity. In 1982 Yasin established the Islamic organization's armed wing, "Palestine's Holy Warriors" (Mujahidi Filastin). However, the Israeli security forces managed to infiltrate the latter's ranks and neutralized them with the arrests of Sheikh Yasin and his comrades, who would later on be released. A few months before the outbreak of the first Intifada (December 1987), Sheikh Yasin, together with his close aide Salah Shahada, decided to set up an organization that would fight the Israeli occupation and encourage the Palestinian population to take part in the resistance. It was decided that the organization would consist of an armed wing, headed by Shahada, which would fight the IDF and accumulate weapons, and a security wing that would prevent the infiltration of undesired elements into the organization's ranks, thus learning a lesson from past experiences. Hamas was actually conceived as a union of several Islamic movements that operated in the Territories inspired by their mother organization, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. After the foundation convention of December 8, 1987, several organizational wings were set up, among which the armed wing, named after 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, one of the most prominent Palestinian fighters against the Jews and the British back in the 1930s, and the organization's branch in the West Bank. Hamas has been committed since its very beginning to its covenant, according to which jihad is the only way to liberate the whole of Palestine, including what is today the State of Israel inside the Green Line. The organization utterly and totally rejects any recognition of Israel under any circumstances, even if the latter withdraws to the pre-1967 borderline. In the last decade Hamas has expressed its willingness to negotiate a long-term truce with Israel, provided the latter withdraws from the entire West Bank and Gaza Strip, evacuates all settlements and accepts the Right of Return of all Palestinian refugees back to Israel-proper, a condition that actually means the annihilation of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Hamas has been using what it terms "the weapon of resistance", namely terror, suicide attacks and other acts of violence, in order to achieve its political, religious and national goals. The organization strives to found an Islamic state in Palestine that would follow Islamic Law (*Shari'a*) strictly. It perceives itself a pan-Islamic universal movement, similarly to the MB.¹⁴

With the arrest of Sheikh Yasin in 1988, a Hamas Political Bureau was opened in Amman, Jordan, headed by Dr. Musa Abu Marzuq, who was unauthorized to return to the Territories. During the 1990s relations between King Husayn and Hamas worsened. Abu Marzuq was deported to the US in 1994, and was replaced by Khalid Mash'al as Head of the Political Bureau. In 1999 the Jordanian government decided to close down the Bureau. Mash'al and his entourage wandered around the Arab world until they finally settled in Damascus, where the exiled leadership of Hamas resides to this very day.¹⁵

Relations between Iran and Hamas started a short while after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, when the organization was invited to take part in a delegation of Muslim movements that went on a tour of several Arab and Muslim countries, including Iran. In 1991 Ibrahim Ghawsha, Hamas Spokesman, was invited to a conference in Tehran that was gathered for support of the Intifada. At the same time Iran promised to give Hamas annual financial support of 30 million dollars, in addition to military training in the IRGC facilities in Lebanon, Sudan and Iran. Hamas's relations with Tehran became even stronger with Hizballah's assistance in 1992, when Israel deported 415

¹³ A short while afterwards, Israel went back on its approval, although it permitted the institution to keep on functioning in order to balance its activity with the nationalist and secular Fatah movement that was perceived to be a threat to Israel's control over the Territories.

¹⁴ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, December 29, 2007; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servecity.net/his/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

¹⁵ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, December 29, 2007; *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Israel), June 30, 2006; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 7, 2008.

Palestinian Islamic activists to Marj al-Zuhur in Southern Lebanon. Among the deportees were Hamas leaders and activists such as 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rantisi, Isma'il Haniyya and Mahmud al-Zahar. In 1993 Iran agreed to open a Liaison Office of Hamas, headed by 'Imad al-'Alami. Relations between the two sides tightened as relations between Iran and the PLO deteriorated, although it had worsened even before hence, due to Yasser Arafat's support of Iraq in its war against Iran. In 1994 these relations further deteriorated in the aftermath of the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO. Nevertheless, during the 1990s Hizballah was still relatively marginal in Iran's eyes. It was not popular enough in the region, especially due to the serious rift between the organization's exiled leadership and the "inside" leaders, who resided in the Territories. Iran therefore preferred to invest most of its resources in its Shiite client in Lebanon, Hizballah. Furthermore, although he visited Iran after his release from the Israeli prison and was promised generous financial support, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin was utterly revolted by Iran's attempts to manipulate the organization's policies. This issue was one of the major causes for division between Yasin and Mash'al, with the latter choosing to run a very close relationship with Tehran, against the desire of Hamas's spiritual leader.¹⁶

Iran-PIJ

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement was founded at the end of the 1970s by a group of Palestinian students, who were residing in Egypt at the time. Dr. Fathi Shiqaqi was the leader of these students, among which was Dr. Ramadan Shalah, currently the PIJ Secretary General, 'Abdallah al-Shami, Nafidh 'Azzam, Muhammad al-Hindi, Sheikh As'ad Buyud al-Tamimi and Sheikh 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Awda (the latter two got into an argument with Shiqaqi and later on left the organization). Shiqaqi (1951-1996) was born in Ramallah and left with his family to the refugee camp in Gaza. Later on he went to study in Egypt and became a pediatrician. Politically, he was initially a Nasserist, but after the 1967 War he joined the MB, which he left in 1974 due to differences of opinion regarding jihad against Israel. In 1978 he founded the Islamic Jihad organization, and in 1979 he was arrested after writing a book on the Islamic Revolution in Iran (the book was titled *Khomeini: the Alternative Solution*, and in Arabic: *Al-Khomeini al-Hall al-Badil*). In 1980 the organization left its hideout. Shiqaqi returned to the Territories and was arrested in 1983 for a year. In 1986 he was arrested once more, and in 1988 he was deported to Southern Lebanon. In 1996 he was liquidated in Malta.¹⁷

The relations between Iran and PIJ date back to the first days of the organization, since its leader Shiqaqi was immensely affected by the Shi'a and the Islamic Revolution. A short while after the Revolution had erupted, Shiqaqi's comrades asked him to elaborate on the dimensions of the Khomeinist movement and its goals, in order to grasp this new phenomenon. He intended to write a brief research paper, which eventually turned into a booklet that was spread in markets and bookstores in Cairo and around the Arab world. This research was based upon several books that had been written on the Shi'a and Khomeini's movement (including books that were written by the Revolution's leader himself and were smuggled to several Arab countries), which Shiqaqi had taken from the Shiite society Ahl al-Bayt in Cairo. Shiqaqi's booklet shows he was carried away by the heat of the Islamic Revolution. He claimed that this was the first time for over a hundred years that Islam was ruling a territory, a government and a people in a spirit of soul sacrifice (*ruh istishhadiyya*). He praised Iran's Islamic movement's deep commitment to the Palestinian issue. According to Shiqaqi, the Islamic Revolution was not a sectarian or ethnic one, and therefore the dogmatic controversy between Sunna and Shi'a had no significance. Shiqaqi may have researched the tenets of the Shi'a; however, according to the Jordanian Salafi intellectual, Usama Shahada, Shiqaqi did not refer to the issue of Imamate (*imama*, i.e. a Shiite term that refers to the right of 'Ali and the Imams that are directly descended from him to exclusively lead the Islamic nation) as one of the main pillars of Shiite ideology. Shahada maintains that Shiqaqi's

¹⁶ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, December 29, 2007; Ha'aretz (Israel), December 11, 2006; Ha'aretz, December 20, 2006; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.serveloccity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

¹⁷ Usama Shahada, "Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami wa-al-Hawa al-Shi'i al-Irani," (The PIJ Movement and Its Shiite-Iranian Inclination) *Al-Rasid*, No. 51, (Ramadan 1428 H; September 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=766.

booklet is a naive presentation of a person lacking certain knowledge about the Shi'a, which made the PIJ leader underestimate the extent of the dogmatic conflict between the Sunna and the Shi'a.¹⁸

Shahada's research shows how Shiqaqi tightened his organization's relations with the Iranian regime and became enamored by Shiite ideology throughout the 1980s. Writing for PIJ's journal *Al-Mukhtar al-Islami*, Shiqaqi maintained that the Revolution was a phenomenal event in Islam's fourteen centuries and that this was the Muslims' first triumph in the modern era; a triumph that regained Islam its lost spirit. Shiqaqi does not cease to hail and praise Khomeini, whose life, according to PIJ leader, express the character Islam has given to humanity in its entirety, since Khomeini is the glowing light, a brave revolutionary with a bright vision, who is preoccupied with the suffering of the Muslims, and whose heartbeats carry Imam Husayn Bin 'Ali's sense of responsibility. Shiqaqi maintained that the Revolution was successful where others had failed, i.e. in establishing a vibrant and effective political movement that was capable of toppling a vicious, tyrannous regime. The Revolution has proved that it was possible to form a true Islamic government in shape and content in this era, says Shiqaqi. He protested against the "enemies of the Revolution", saying that whoever opposes it for its being Shiite has no place in Islamic history. He believed the way Muslims in the Arab world treated the Iranians was pure racism that was merely mischievous propaganda, since the Islamic Republic had already annulled all Persian emblems in favor of the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. Shiqaqi wished to emphasize the proximity between Sunna and Shi'a and praised Khomeini and the Iranian regime for what he perceived as their attempts to bring both sides closer.¹⁹

As for PIJ's relations with Iran and Hizballah, Shiqaqi maintained in 1990 that he perceived the Islamic Revolution as an ally of all Muslims struggling against the infidels and the oppressors. He said that Iran's position regarding the Palestinian issue determined PIJ's relations with Tehran. In 1993 he said that the Islamic awakening created by the Revolution had sown the seeds of the revolution that came out of the mosques of Palestine, whose heart was tilting toward Islam. The belligerent Islam that was ignited by the Islamic Revolution in Iran was growing in Palestine, waiting for its moment to outburst in the (first) Intifada. Regarding Hizballah, Shiqaqi hailed the organization, saying its activities against Israel were every Palestinian youth's dream, and that the PIJ should boast its closeness to Hizballah and its jihad, as it should be proud in its relations with every struggling movement.²⁰

However, Shiqaqi, and Shalah after him, were not the only ones in the PIJ leadership sympathizing with the Islamic Revolution. In fact, most of the founders of the organization sided with the Revolution, and regarded the alliance with the Iranian regime a central factor in the PIJ strategy. The Islamic Revolution thus created a split inside the ranks of political Islam, with one part alienating from the MB discourse and sticking to the Shiite revolutionary discourse instead. Hence, one of the cultural elements characteristic of the PIJ from its cradle has included the studying of the Revolution's tenets. The period spent at the Marj al-Zuhur refugee camp in Southern Lebanon after the expulsion of 415 members of Palestinian radical organizations back in 1992 was highly critical and crucial for the PIJ activists that were deported. They spent long hours at meetings and gatherings with Hizballah activists, where some of the PIJ leaders and members turned into Shiites, studied its principles and started operating as Shiites in an organized, clandestine manner.²¹

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Gharib, "Zahirat al-Rafida fi Filastin – Taqirir Maydani," (The Shiite Phenomenon in Palestine: A Field Report), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=79>; Ulfat 'Abd Rabbuh, "Influwanza al-Tashayyu' al-Farisi fi Filastin," (The Iranian Conversion to Shi'a's Influenza in Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, April 3, 2006, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=81>.

Still, despite Shiqaqi's identification with the Islamic Revolution he claimed in 1990 the PIJ should not be accused of *tashayyu'*, adding that there had been unfortunate attempts to incite the Palestinian people against the organization's jihad activity in order to alienate the people from the PIJ. He stressed that the PIJ position regarding the conversion to Shi'a was not at all different from positions held by imams, *ulama* and other Sunni leaders. It is therefore assumed that Shiqaqi did not fully convert to Shi'a, but was rather emotionally and intellectually identified with the Shiite dogma.²² This assumption is reinforced in research conducted by Sabah al-Musawi, Head of the Political Bureau of the Ahwaz Arab Renaissance Party (AARP), an Arab separatist exiled party that opposes the Iranian regime and carries out attacks inside Iran in order to destabilize the regime. Al-Musawi blames Iran for taking every possible advantage to "hunt" men of belief who come in good faith and with genuine feelings in favor of the Revolution, in order to promote the Shiites' desire of expansion by using such people. Al-Musawi maintains that the Iranians exploited Shiqaqi's moving away from the MB, the effects of the Revolution upon him and his enthusiasm with the establishment of an armed Islamic movement in Palestine in order to offer him their help. It was an offer he could not turn down. However, according to al-Musawi, sometime during the 1980s Shiqaqi started to realize the real picture behind the Iranian regime's character, especially the way the Revolution turned toward an ethnic, anti-Arab path. Al-Musawi claims that the better he understood the Iranian conduct, the more Shiqaqi got closer to Arab countries that had alienated from him due to his pro-Iranian inclinations. This is how the PIJ established its ties with Syria, Libya and Sudan, which opened their doors for PIJ members who arrived there for academic studies and military trainings. In addition, these countries provided the PIJ with a substantial financial aid.²³

According to al-Musawi, Iran was infuriated at Shiqaqi's reluctance to carry out its orders, first and foremost PIJ's refusal to accept Khamene'i's ideological and spiritual authority. Shiqaqi was critical of Iran's arrogance and its disrespect for the Arabs. According to al-Musawi's conspiracy theory, in Shiqaqi's last visit to Tehran, eight months before he was liquidated, he had been held hostage in his hotel room and had not been allowed to attend meetings. It took him a month to persuade the Iranians to set him free, after he had promised to cut his ties with Libya and annul the position of PIJ's General Guide. He accepted the Iranian conditions fully, including their insistence to decide upon the exact schedules and locations of PIJ's terror attacks against Israel. Al-Musawi claims that Iran decided back then to replace Shiqaqi for Ramadan Salah, who had had close ties with Tehran and expressed his utmost loyalty to the Shiite creed. Furthermore, after Shiqaqi's elimination the position of PIJ's General Guide was cancelled, and Sheikh 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Awda was expelled from the organization's ranks. Khamene'i then became the supreme spiritual authority of the PIJ. Salah purged the leading positions of the organization, thus removing all those who had known about the rift between Shiqaqi and Tehran. Al-Musawi further maintains that the PIJ stopped distributing Sayyid Qutb's *Milestones (Ma'alim fi al-Tariq)*, which had been mandatory for each PIJ member. Instead, members of the organizations started to get better acquainted with books written by Iranian leaders and books on the Shi'a, which became popular especially among PIJ members outside Palestine.²⁴

However, there had been no external indication of a *tashayyu'* process among PIJ members, at least not until the outbreak of Intifadat al-Aqsa in the year 2000, when the armed Islamic organizations appeared in public, thus taking advantage of the total chaos, the organized resistance to Israel and civilians' sympathy toward each and every armed person, in order to present the Shiite dogma out in the open. PIJ members opened several institutions, especially in Bethlehem, among which was the Union for Muslim Youth (Ittihad al-Shabab al-Islami), a missionary and charity association that established a youth center in order to attract the younger generation to the Shi'a. PIJ opened up

²² "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamirran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>.

²³ Usama Shahada, "Harakat al-Jihad al-Islami wa-al-Hawa al-Shi'i al-Irani," (The PIJ Movement and Its Shiite-Iranian Inclination) *Al-Rasid*, No. 51, (Ramadan 1428 H; September 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=766.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

clinics, started courses for teaching the Qur'an in mosques and gave financial aid to needy students and their families.²⁵

In March 2000 the Lebanese weekly *Al-Watan al-'Arabi* published an inquiry titled "an Iranian plan to disseminate the Shiite *madhhab* among the Palestinians". The inquiry reviewed Iranian efforts to spread the Shi'a in Palestine and the Lebanese refugee camps through PIJ and Hizballah. The inquiry also cited Palestinian intelligence reports from early 2000 that exposed proof of the intensification of phenomena such as religious and intellectual transformation among PIJ rank-and-file, with a growing number of members converting to Shi'a. Still, these reports also indicate that acts of *tashayyu'* have not won complete agreement among PIJ members. There were leaders who refused to convert, saying it would be a critical process that might eventually annihilate the religious and intellectual basis upon which the organization had rested since its foundation. Palestinian circles and Islamic leaders expressed their concern of the Iran-PIJ relations' putting down roots, so much so as to turn into a religious-ideological bond that would go much further than merely financial-political-military Iranian support for the organization. These estimates expressed their concern that eventually the PIJ would operate only under Iranian order, contrary to the Palestinian interest. According to the inquiry, Hizballah had a major role in the successful outcome of Iran's plans to take over the PIJ agenda and recruit to organization to jihad activity. All these activities were orchestrated by 'Imad Mughniyya (liquidated in February 2008), who served as Head of the Special Operations Unit in Hizballah. There were even talks about a possible appointment of an Iranian representative to the PIJ leadership, similarly to the Hizballah model, the Shura (consultative) Council of which includes Iranian representatives.²⁶

According to *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, already in the year 2000 Mughniyya operated inside the Lebanese refugee camps in cooperation and coordination with Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani, Commander of the Qods Force in the IRGC. It appears that Mughniyya managed, through Lebanese government officials collaborating with him, to grant a Lebanese citizenship to some members of PIJ, who converted to Shi'a. Among those who turned into Shiites: Sharid Tawhan from the Al-Rashidiyya camp in Lebanon, Muhammad Qaddura from Tyre, and Muhammad al-Majdhub, PIJ official. Other outstanding Palestinians who converted are: Ibrahim Barud, Yahya Jabir, Mahmud Zatma and Nisan al-Tahila (the latter is reported to have become a radical Shiite). The Iranians even sent some Shiite religious scholars to the refugee camps in Lebanon in order to enable the Palestinians who had turned Shiites to deepen their acquaintance with the Ja'fari *madhhab*. Iran tried to smuggle *mutashayyi'un* (people who converted to Shi'a) to the Palestinian Territories, in order to turn them into the spearhead that would set up cells that would operate according to instructions from Tehran. Iran transferred large sums of money via the Iranian Mu'assasat al-Shahid (The Martyr's Institute), in addition to many books on the Shi'a, written by Shiites or *mutashayyi'un* (such as Muhammad Mar'i al-Intaqi), all of which were dispatched among PIJ members. It is reported that conversion to Shi'a also spilled over to Muslims communities in the West.²⁷

²⁵ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Gharib, "Zahirat al-Rafida fi Filastin – Taqir Maydani," (The Shiite Phenomenon in Palestine: A Field Report), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=79>; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamirran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>.

²⁶ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamirran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>.

²⁷ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; <http://www.m-alhuda.com/showthread.php?t=1800>.

It is important to note that PIJ's conduct vis-à-vis Iran has been criticized from within the organization and from outer elements, among them Hamas members. It has been claimed that Dr. Ramadan Shalah, PIJ Secretary General, has been aware of the scope of conversion to Shi'a and its consequences, but has been doing nothing to prevent its spread among Palestinians, due to his inner belief according to which the organization's future lies in its relations with Iran.²⁸

²⁸ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56

D. Political Relations between Iran, Hamas and PIJ since Hamas's Seizing Power (January 2006)

In recent years, and especially in the aftermath of Hamas's seizing power in the January 2006 elections, Iranian involvement in the Palestinian arena has intensified, with Tehran tightening its ties with Hamas and other Palestinian Sunni factions. It seems that Iran took advantage of the opportunity that was created with Hamas taking control over the Palestinian Authority (PA) in order to tighten its grip on Palestinian affairs by creating another stronghold on Israel's southern border (in addition to Hizballah's northern outpost). Iran also wished to expand its influence upon the Arab-Sunni arena in order to achieve more legitimacy, thus taunting both Israel and the US.

Anti-Shiite Palestinian elements describe the Iranian discourse regarding the support for the Palestinian cause as mere arrogance, nothing further, and maintain that behind the verbal support of President Mahmud Ahmadinejad and other Iranian officials there is no act that proves the Iranian regime's sincerity. According to the *Al-Haqiqa* website, Iran (or the "Safavi project", as it is referred to) has been using the discourse on Palestine to get more credit and legitimacy, both in Iranian public opinion and in the Arab and Muslim world. The website, in fact, blames Iran for the suffering of the Palestinian refugees residing in Iraq. These Palestinians get kidnapped inside Iraq by armed Shiite groups. The Shiites blame the Palestinians living in Iraq for having been privileged under Saddam's rule. They are also blamed for having close contacts with the Sunni rebels that operate against the current Shiite government. Many Palestinians have been tortured and murdered, while others have managed to flee to camps near the Syrian border, where they live under unbearable conditions. According to the website, Iran's conduct together with its Shiite allies (especially Hizballah) has exposed the true face of the "Safavi plan", which Iran wishes to accomplish. The website blames the Shiite Jaysh al-Mahdi (The Mahdi's Army), led by Muqtada al-Sadr, for getting its orders from Qomm, Iran, and harming the Palestinians living in Iraq far more severely than all the damages caused to the Palestinians by the hand of the "Zionists" in decades of occupation. *Al-Haqiqa* maintains that one cannot accept Iran's masquerade as the protector of the Palestinian people and the Islamic nation, while at the same time murdering the Palestinians in Iraq mercilessly.²⁹

We shall now characterize the relations between Iran and Hamas and the PIJ by analyzing several case studies, as follows.

Iran-Hamas

The relations between Iran and Hamas were upgraded already in the beginning of Intifadat al-Aqsa (September 2000), and have intensified immensely in the aftermath of Hamas's landslide victory in the parliamentary elections in January 2006 and the formation of the Hamas government. A short while before, in August 2005, right after Mahmud Ahmadinejad's winning the presidential elections in Iran, Khalid Mash'al arrived at Tehran and stressed the ideological affinity between Hamas and its Iranian mentor. He declared that as the Iranians defend the rights of the Palestinians, so Hamas protects the rights of Iran, and that both Hamas and Iran are part of a united front against the enemies of Islam. It seems therefore that recent years' events have proven to Iran that Hamas can be a very useful partner in the framework of Iran's ambitions to ascend to the level of regional hegemony. Iran seems to be striving to

²⁹ "Al-Ra'is al-Irani wa-Shi'ar 'Tahrir Filastin' al-Istihlaki," (The Iranian President and His Overused Statements on the 'Liberation of Palestine) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=531>; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamiran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>; 'Abd al-Mun'im Mustafa Halima, "Al-Shi'a al-Rawafid wa-al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya," (The Shiites and the Palestinian Issue) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=95>.

keep the final decision on matters related to Israel in its hands, thus forcing Hamas to operate similarly to Hizballah in Lebanon.³⁰

Hence, there are several factors that enabled the tightening of relations between Iran and Hamas in the last couple of years:

1. A common denominator, i.e. Israel: Hamas's calls for the destruction of Israel are part and parcel of the organization's political discourse, and Iran has been using that discourse to promote its own interests, as we have mentioned above, in addition to the destruction of Israel being a fundamental principle in the revolutionary regime's ideology.
2. Hamas's desperate need to get external aid: Hamas and its government have been striving to get financial aid since Isma'il Haniyya's government was formed, in light of the international boycott that was declared on and enforced against it after the elections. Iran has taken upon itself a commitment to provide the organization with economic aid since the 1990s. This aid has bloated over the years. Right after Hamas's victory, Iran gave it 50 million dollars in aid. It also promised to help out in projects related to rehabilitating the infrastructure that was ruined during the second Intifada. Hamas has therefore willingly succumbed to Iranian political, military and economic patronage. It has been running a liaison office in Tehran and its officials hold frequent meetings with Iranian governmental officials and IRGC commanders.
3. A rift between Hamas and the more moderate Arab countries: Hamas's relations with the moderate Arab axis (Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan) have loosened and suffered from ups and downs in recent years. These conflicting relations enabled Syria and Iran to embrace Hamas and its exiled leadership. The organization's Political Bureau operates in Damascus, and IRGC commanders go there quite often for meetings with Mash'al and his entourage. The Damascus-Tehran-Hamas axis has become so tight that Mash'al has been accused of getting his orders directly from Iran.
4. The MB's conciliatoriness toward Iran: The MB, as the mother organization of Hamas, has expressed a rather moderate viewpoint regarding Iran and the Shi'a on dogmatic issues, and, according to anti-Shiite elements, it has not been able to divert Hamas's inclination toward Iran on key political issues, thus proving it has no actual influence upon the latter.
5. Mash'al's ideological affinity to Iran: Hamas has been blamed by anti-Shiite elements for ignoring Iran's master plan to rule the Middle East and its support for the Shiite militias that slaughter Iraqi Sunnis. This support has been realized in Mash'al declarations in which he reiterated that Hamas would stand alongside Iran if the latter were attacked by Israel, saying that Iran is Hamas's most steadfast ally.³¹

Hamas's conduct in the course of a few remarkable events in the Palestinian theater in the last couple of years illustrates the extent of affinity between the Shiite state and the Sunni radical organization, and the dynamics that have characterized Hamas's policies in light of the Iranian dictates.

³⁰ Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.serveloccity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

³¹ "Alaqaat Hamas ma'a Tahrān: Man al-Rabih wa-Man al-Khasir," (The Hamas-Tehran Relations: Who is the Winner and who is the Loser) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=420>; "Muhawala li-Nashr al-Madhab al-Shi'i," (An Attempt to Spread the Shiite *Madhab*) *Al-Haqiqa*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=514>.

1. The Kidnapping of the Israeli Soldier Gilad Shalit (June 2006)

On June 25, 2006, an Israeli soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit, was kidnapped during a well-organized clash between Hamas's activists and IDF soldiers that were operating in an area adjacent to the Gaza Strip.³² A short while afterwards (July 12, 2006) Hizballah carried out its own operation ("A Lasting Promise", in Arabic *Al-Wa'd al-Sadiq*), during which eight Israeli soldiers were killed and two kidnapped (Ehud Goldwasser and Eldad Regev). This operation ignited the Second Lebanon War. The time proximity between the attacks and the operational similarity raised assumptions regarding a possible linkage between both fronts. Militant declarations with similar wordings of Iran's and Hamas's officials contributed to these assumptions. On June 15, 2006, a few days before the Shalit kidnapping and about a month before the war broke out, it was reported that Iran and Syria had signed a treaty for strategic cooperation between both countries' armed forces. These countries' defense ministers met in Tehran to discuss the situation in Lebanon and Palestine, and the need to assist Hamas and the PIJ in their struggle against Fatah. On July 11, 2006, a day before the war erupted, 'Ali Larijani, then in charge of the Iranian negotiating team on the country's nuclear program and Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, paid a surprise visit to Damascus. That very day President Ahmadinejad threatened the Western countries against supporting Israel, warning that the explosion waves would reach anyone that supported Israel. The kidnapping of Shalit constituted a breach of Hamas's ceasefire policy that had been kept for months up until then, and it may have been connected with the international pressure on Iran regarding its nuclear program (a G-8 summit was about to convene a few days later to discuss the broadening of the sanctions against Iran). The day the war broke out Khalid Mash'al said, after a meeting with Larijani, that Hizballah's operation was a tremendous achievement, and that if Israel wished to release its prisoners it had no alternative but to succumb to the will of the Palestinian and Lebanese resistances.³³

The Lebanese weekly *Al-Watan al-'Arabi* claimed in October 2006, based upon a report written by a European intelligence body, that Syria and Iran had thwarted the deal to release Shalit in exchange for Palestinian prisoners that was about to be carried out under Egyptian mediation.³⁴ Further information indicates that Supreme Leader Khamene'i sent his emissaries to Damascus in order to see to it that the Shalit deal was thwarted, and gave Mash'al 50 million dollars provided he toughen his positions and demand the release of dozens of Palestinian prisoners, many of whom are considered taboo in Israel, knowing that he would never set them free. It was further claimed that keeping Shalit as Hamas's captive enabled Mash'al to preserve his power inside the organization. Mash'al claimed that although he was not the one who gave the order to kidnap Shalit, he was not remorseful about it (unlike Nasrallah, who after the 2006 War said that had he known the kidnapping of the two soldiers would provoke such a war, he would never have authorized the operation).³⁵ It seems that Hizballah has also been involved in making the Shalit deal reach a cul-de-sac, before the war in Lebanon and in its aftermath. Hizballah apparently pressured Hamas not to consent to the release of Shalit without raising the price tag on the Israeli soldier. Such actions have won the support of Mash'al, even if there has been objection among the more moderate leaders of Hamas inside the Palestinian Territories.³⁶ Nevertheless, it seems that other than Mash'al, the body that calls the shots regarding the Shalit deal is Hamas's armed wing, 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, led by Ahmad al-Ja'bari, with the latter taking radical positions under Iranian inspiration and not allowing Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyya to take part in the discussions regarding the list of prisoners the organization would demand that Israel release.³⁷

³² Operation "Shattered Illusion" (*Al-Wahm al-Mutabaddad*) was carried out in a joint operation of the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam's Brigades, the Saladin Brigades (Alwiyat al-Nasir Salah al-Din) of the Popular Resistance Committees (Lijan al-Muqawama al-Sha'biyya) and the Army of Islam (Al-Jaysh al-Islami) headed by the Durmush clan, a crime gang that operates in the Gaza Strip under the command of Zakariyya and Mumtaz Durmush (the latter was killed in an Israeli Air Force attack against militants in June 2008). Three Israeli soldiers were killed in this operation, in addition to the kidnapping of Shalit.

³³ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 16, 2006; *IRNA* (Iran), July 16, 2006; *Ha'aretz*, July 20, 2006.

³⁴ "Sinariohat al-Harb al-Ahliyya fi Filastin," (Palestinian Civil War Scenarios) *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, October 11, 2006, quoted in *Al-Rasid*, No. 40, (Shawwal 1427 H; October 2006), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=466.

³⁵ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, August 28, 2006; *Ma'ariv* (Israel), October 12, 2006; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 14, 2006; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 15, 2006; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 19, 2006; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 20, 2006; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 31, 2006;

<http://www.iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/printarticle.pl?l=en&y=2006&m=10&d=19&a=6>.

³⁶ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, July 10, 2006.

³⁷ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, April 17, 2007. As we shall see later on, al-Ja'bari tends to take an independent stand more often than not, even if it contradicts Mash'al's positions, especially when it concerns the Shalit deal.

2. The 2006 Lebanon War (July-August 2006)

During the war and in its aftermath Hamas adopted a similar approach to the Iranian one regarding the linkage between the Palestinian and the Lebanese fronts against Israel. The organization's propaganda pointed to a clear connection between events on the northern front and what was happening almost simultaneously in Israel's southern border. According to Hamas's mouthpiece, *Filastin al-Muslima*, both kidnapping operations proved that the IDF's true capabilities and what had been termed its "mighty" power had been overrated and exaggerated. These operations made the IDF go mad, aroused hysteria and severely damaged Israel's self esteem and sense of security, the journal argues. Israel is blamed for avenging the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples for the kidnappings, thus trying to break both resistances. The links between the two fronts is further stressed by the assertion that Israel wishes to liquidate both Mash'al and Nasrallah. The journal continues to mock Israel, maintaining that it cannot stop the rocket firing, neither from Gaza nor from Southern Lebanon. According to Hamas, Israel's blaming the organization's exiled command for the kidnapping of Shalit and the allegations concerning Iranian and Syrian fingerprints on this operation, are all part of an Israeli scheme to divert domestic and international attention from the inner political and military crisis in order to convince the US to help it narrow even further the already limited spheres of action Hamas is still capable of maneuvering, by tossing Hamas's cards with those of what the West terms "international terrorism". Hamas also blames Israel for carrying out a policy of *divide et impera*, trying to arouse a domestic friction between the exiling leadership of the organization and its Palestine-based leadership, trying to portray Mash'al as an extremist versus the allegedly more moderate Haniyya, both struggling against each other on the issue of Gilad Shalit. Israel is also accused of trying to link Iran and Syria to terrorism, in order to make them pay for that in the international arena, thus convincing both countries to regard Hamas a burden they should get rid of.³⁸

In the aftermath of the war in Lebanon, Hamas expressed its solidarity and sympathy toward Hizballah, using expressions that resemble the terminology used by the leaders of Iran and Hizballah regarding the imminent extermination of the State of Israel. *Filastin al-Muslima* maintained that the Israeli people have lost their faith in the "undefeatable" IDF that suffered humiliating downfalls against Hamas and Hizballah. Therefore, the collapse of the Israeli army's image has been regarded as one of the major achievements of the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine. It was also said that Israel, that superficial entity that was founded by the West to deter and oppress the Arabs, had suffered a "strategic disaster" that wiped out the uncontested image of an unbeaten country. Interviewed to Hamas's journal, Dr. Ahmad Milli, member of Hizballah's Political Bureau, maintained that the war had eroded Israel's deterrence, and that the result of this process would be a revivalist movement that would sweep the Arab and Muslim world. He added that Israel had not been heavenly predestined, and therefore solidarity among the Arab and Muslim peoples would enable them all to defeat it. He called upon the Arab regimes not be afraid of Israel and the US anymore, and to make peace with their citizens for the sake of a better future.³⁹

During a visit to Tehran in December 2006 Isma'il Haniyya declared that the Palestinian people are not alone in their battle and that they are a part of the Islamic nation. In a speech at the Tehran University mosque Haniyya addressed Israel and the US, saying that the Palestinian people has a strategic depth embodied in the Islamic Republic of Iran that fully supports the Palestinians. With the same militant spirit Haniyya declared that the Palestinians will not give up even one inch of the lands of Palestine, and will persist in their fight against Israel in the spirit of jihad and resistance. In a meeting with Hashemi Rafsanjani, Head of the Expediency Discernment Council, Haniyya said his government would never recognize Israel and would wage a jihad against the occupation. He blamed the "enemies of Islam" for doing whatever they can to spark a rift between Sunnis and Shiites, especially after Hizballah's "victory" in the war against Israel. At the same time, Khalid Mash'al declared that the resistance factions would be willing to accept a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital and the fulfillment of the

³⁸ *Filastin al-Muslima* (PA), No. 8, August 2006; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 22, 2007.

³⁹ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 9, September 2006.

Right of Return of all the refugees. Other conditions would be the dismantling of the separation "wall" (i.e. the West Bank Israeli barrier) and the release of all Palestinian prisoners. Mash'al emphasized that it would serve Israel's and the US' interests to accept all these demands since future generations would place much tougher conditions, and besides, time is on the Palestinians' side. Therefore, threatened Mash'al, Israel had better succumb to Hamas's will, or get ready for an open struggle (*sira' maftuh*)⁴⁰, in which the Palestinians would have the upper hand.⁴¹

These statements attest to Hamas's decision to join Syria's and Iran's radical axis, which enables the organization to become stronger economically, militarily and politically, while at the same time becoming further alienated from the Saudi-Egyptian-Jordanian axis that quite often criticized Hamas's conduct (albeit Qatar did pay the Palestinian teachers' wages, and it has been Egypt all along that tried to broker a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip). The organization believed the economic siege over the Palestinian government would be broken and that holding on against the international pressure would pay off, since eventually Europe and the US would give in to radical Islamic dictates. Furthermore, it seems that the ceasefire with Israel in the winter of 2006 had strengthened Hamas's self confidence and made the latter harden its positions against Israel and regarding the Shalit deal. Still, it seemed that Hamas was unwilling to break all its ties with the more moderate Arab countries. The organization has considered itself a fighting national movement, whose battle takes place in Palestine and not in an ideological sphere between Sunna and Shi'a, and this is why it has applied an opportunistic approach that has strived to promote close ties with everyone who is willing to assist the organization politically, economically and militarily.⁴²

3. The Mecca Agreement (February 2007)

The road to the Mecca Agreement on the forming of a Palestinian national unity government (February 2007) was full of obstacles and tensions between Hamas and Fatah in light of the deteriorating relations between both sides, especially in the Gaza Strip.⁴³ According to *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, and based upon a report made by a European intelligence body, foreign elements were involved in the rolling down to the Palestinian civil war that was intended to preoccupy the international public opinion and the world powers, mainly the US. The report asserts the both Syria and Iran share a common interest in a Palestinian *fitna* (civil strife). Both countries put pressure on Hamas's leaders in Damascus in order to hinder all attempts to form a national unity government in the PA.⁴⁴

In light of Saudi Arabia's concern of the growing Iranian involvement in various crises in the Arab world, King 'Abdallah invited the leaders of Fatah and Hamas to convene in Mecca, maintaining that the Palestinians' problems should be solved by the Arabs and nobody else, thus hinting at Iran's undesired interference. Fatah's and Hamas's delegations arrived at Mecca in the beginning of February 2007, as equal partners, in order to reach a ceasefire agreement and consent on the terms to the formation of a national unity government. The discussions resulted in an agreement on several issues: a ceasefire between the two sides was to be implemented immediately; they also agreed to turn the National Consensus Document (also known as the Prisoners' Document that had been signed earlier on by Hamas and Fatah leaders imprisoned in Israeli jails); PA President, Mahmud 'Abbas renounced his intention to bring forward the general elections, and agreed that Hamas and Fatah would be equal political partners; he also agreed to a reorganization in the PLO and acknowledged the Palestinian elections' results (i.e. Hamas's victory); both sides also agreed to cooperate in lifting the siege over the PA. Hamas was especially content with the removal from the agreement of the condition that obliges the organization to accept all the agreements and accords

⁴⁰ The use of this term resembles Nasrallah's declarations against Israel, especially his July 14, 2006, speech in which he declared an "open war" against Israel, a couple of days after the kidnapping of the soldiers and the outbreak of the fighting between Israel and Hizballah.

⁴¹ *Fars News Agency* (Iran), December 9, 2006; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 9, 2006; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servelocity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

⁴² *Ha'aretz*, December 10, 2006; *Ha'aretz*, December 11, 2006.

⁴³ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 2, February 2007; *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 3, March 2007.

⁴⁴ "Sinariohat al-Harb al-Ahliyya fi Filastin," (Palestinian Civil War Scenarios) *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, October 11, 2006, quoted in *Al-Rasid*, No. 40, (Shawwal 1427 H; October 2006), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=466.

that were signed with Israel.⁴⁵ Right after the signing of the agreement Hamas spread optimism regarding the chances to achieve a deal on the release of Shalit.⁴⁶ The organization's mouthpiece demanded that Mahmud 'Abbas convince Israel and the US to cooperate with the new government. In any case, Hamas assumed that even if Fatah accepted Israeli and American demands from the PA, thus failing the Mecca Agreement, such moves would ultimately benefit Hamas rather than Fatah.⁴⁷

The Mecca Agreement aroused ambiguity among Hamas's leaders regarding the acceptance of international agreements that PLO and the PA had been committed to. Mash'al said that Hamas would be obliged to the government's platform that stressed the honoring of the agreements that had been signed by the PLO, which implicitly includes those signed with Israel, and added that Hamas would adopt a new political language that would benefit the Palestinian national interests.⁴⁸ A short while after the signing of the agreement Mash'al said that the PA's President would be running the negotiations with Israel and that any agreement would be approved in the Palestinian parliamentary institutions. He also said the Mecca Agreement would hold on for at least a certain period of time, under the circumstances, since the main goal was to break the international siege over the PA.⁴⁹

During a visit to Tehran in the beginning of March 2007, and afterwards, Mash'al's stand against an agreement with Israel became clearer and blunter. Mash'al announced that the struggle against Israel will never cease and that Hamas would never recognize Israel, adding expressions of loyalty to his Iranian patrons by promising that Hamas will always stand by Iran in the service of its interests, especially in times of trouble and under the threat of Israeli and American attacks. He praised Iran's moral, political and economical support of Hamas. Meeting with Mash'al, President Ahmadinejad called upon Hamas to keep on resisting the "Zionist regime" through its devoted and brave men.⁵⁰ Other Hamas spokesmen also said that the Mecca Agreement did not entail recognition of Israel. Hamas Spokesman, Isma'il Radwan, said that Hamas is one thing and the national unity government was another. He denied the claim that the Prisoners' Document recognized Israel, saying that the PLO's recognition of Israel was the former's business and had nothing to do with Hamas. Nizar Rayyan, a Hamas official in Gaza, declared that Hamas will never recognize Israel, and that there is no such thing called Israel, neither in reality nor in the imagination; there is only Palestine.⁵¹

The words of Turki al-Hamad, a Saudi journalist and author and columnist for *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, are very enlightening in this context. Aside from the compliments to Saudi Arabia for making the Mecca Agreement possible, al-Hamad expressed his pessimism regarding the chances of this agreement to be implemented successfully, particularly due to Iran's involvement in the intra-Palestinian arena. While Fatah acknowledges Israel's existence and follows a realist worldview, Hamas has embraced a purely ideological attitude that cannot accept the politics of negotiations. Furthermore, al-Hamad blames Iran for striving for Palestinian instability. He maintains that Iran needs to spread its arms throughout the region in order to achieve its long-term strategic goals. Among other things, Iran needs Hamas in Palestine for political reasons, while Hamas needs Tehran economically. Al-Hamad believes this is the reason for Hamas's being captive in the hands of the Iranian politics. He maintains that under the current regime Iran cannot live in stability while its strategic goals are threatened, and therefore it considers the Mecca Agreement a burden on its attempts to carry out its regional strategy, thus turning the agreement into a target for sabotage and delegitimization. Al-Hamad maintains that as long as Hamas ties its fate with Iran's the inner conflict will only get

⁴⁵ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 3, March 2007; *Ha'aretz*, February 4, 2007.

⁴⁶ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 11, 2007.

⁴⁷ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 3, March 2007.

⁴⁸ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 10, 2007.

⁴⁹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 25, 2007.

⁵⁰ *Fars News Agency*, March 6, 2007; *Mehr News Agency* (Iran), March 6, 2007; *Fars News Agency*, March 7, 2007; *Ma'ariv*, March 7, 2007.

⁵¹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 10, 2007.

deeper. He calls upon Hamas to move from the revolutionary phase to the nation-building phase, while relinquishing some of its fundamental principles for the sake of the Palestinian interest.⁵²

4. Hamas's Taking Control over Gaza (June 2007)

The Mecca Agreement did not live long. About a month after its signing the fighting between Hamas and Fatah renewed. Three months later, on June 10, 2007, bloody clashes erupted between Hamas (the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and Al-Tanfidiyya, the forces that were formed by the Interior Ministry after Hamas had won the elections) and Fatah forces (the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, the Counter Terrorism Service, the General Intelligence Service, the Presidential Guard, the National Security Service and the Police) throughout the Gaza Strip. All in all, 125 people were killed on both sides after four days of fighting at the end of which Fatah was humiliated and expelled from Gaza. In fact, for the first time since 1967 the Palestinians were ruled by two separate (and adversary) governments: the PA government in the West Bank and the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip.⁵³ In fact, it was Khalid Mash'al who expressed more conciliatory positions toward Fatah, saying that Hamas was not striving for parting the Palestinian homeland, since a separate state in Gaza would turn into the biggest prison in world history. Mash'al called for Arab governments' interference and custody for renewed intra-Palestinian negotiations that would enable both factions to solve the Palestinians' fundamental problems, reestablish the national unity government and unite all security bodies under one sovereign authority. Mash'al also said that Hamas does not export revolutions (thus referring implicitly to accusations against its links with Iran), does not pass on contaminated thoughts and does not interfere in other regimes' internal affairs. He added that Hamas does not operate in correspondence with foreign calculations, saying that such assumptions only create a false impression, according to which Syria is a super-power and Iran is a mega-power. Hamas's project is a national one, and so are the organization's calculations; nobody purchases us and we are not the sole property of anyone, said Mash'al.⁵⁴

A few days after Hamas's takeover, Yasir 'Abd Rabuh, President 'Abbas's adviser, accused Iran of encouraging Hamas to take violent acts in order to seize control over the Strip. He dismissed the accusations of Manouchehr Mottaki, Iran's Foreign Minister, according to which the formation of the emergency government by 'Abbas had been hostile to democracy, saying that Iran has no right to teach Fatah a lesson in democracy. In response, Sami Abu Zuhri, Hamas Spokesman, said that 'Abd Rabuh was using these accusations in an attempt to cover up Fatah officials' conspiracy with Israel against Hamas.⁵⁵

A rather blunt criticism against Iran came from Tawfiq al-Tirawi, Head of the General Intelligence Service in the West Bank, who blamed Iran and Syria for financing Hamas's coup d'état, activating it and backing Hamas after the events had taken place. According to al-Tirawi, hundreds of Hamas men went to Iran and other Arab countries for training. He also said that he had warned the PA leadership a year earlier of a military campaign Hamas was preparing for against PA institutions and security bodies. He said he had suspected all along that the weapons Hamas was smuggling through the tunnels and accumulating in Gaza were not intended to be used against Israel, but against the Palestinian brethren from Fatah. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry also blamed Tehran for encouraging and supporting Hamas's coup. Tehran, on its behalf, hastily denied any connection to Hamas's taking over the Gaza Strip. In a meeting between Mottaki and Hamas official 'Imad al-'Alami in Tehran the former called for a renewal of the intra-Palestinian dialogue until the crisis was solved and the national unity government formed once again. Hamas blamed al-Tirawi for spreading lies and betraying the Palestinian people, and threatened to publicly expose embarrassing

⁵² Turki al-Hamad, "Wa-Fi al-Nihaya Arju an Akuna min al-Mukhti'in," (At the End of the Day I hope I am Mistaken) *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, February 11, 2007.

⁵³ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 13, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 14, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 15, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 16, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 17, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 18, 2007; *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 7, July 2007; Ehud Ya'ari, "Hamastan in Gaze – En Route to the West Bank," *The Jerusalem Report*, July 9, 2007; Menahem Milson, "The Fatah-Hamas Conflict: Roots and Implications," *MEMRI, Inquiry and Analysis Series*, No. 376, July 20, 2007, <http://memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=IA37607>.

⁵⁴ An interview with Khalid Mash'al, *Al-Manar TV* (Hizballah, Lebanon), June 15, 2007, quoted in <http://www.mideastwire.com/search.php>.

⁵⁵ *Reuters*, June 18, 2007.

documents on the PA's conduct in Gaza and its security services' cooperation with Israel and supplying the latter with intelligence on Arab states among other things.⁵⁶ Abu Usama 'Abd al-Mu'ti, Hamas's Representative in Tehran, repelled the accusations against Iran and said that Hamas had not planned to take over Gaza in advance, especially in light of the Mecca Agreement, the 13th agreement that was signed between Fatah and Hamas. He claimed that Fatah's accusations against Iran were an attempt to divert the former's treasonous conduct toward the Palestinian people.⁵⁷

In response to the accusations against it in the PA and the Arab world Iran waged a media campaign of its own. Khamene'i's international relations' adviser, 'Ali Akbar Velayati, blamed Israel and the US for direct involvement in the events in Gaza, saying they had both wanted the Palestinians to be preoccupied with domestic struggles in order to prevent the latter from fighting Israel. He also claimed that Fatah, together with the US and Israel, conspired against Hamas in order to weaken its political power. The Iranian daily *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* called upon Hamas to destroy Israel through violent resistance, saying that Hamas's leaders must realize that the PA was playing games with them, which they should not be a part of. Hamas must realize, like PIJ before them, that annihilating the Zionist regime was the only way to win the Palestinian battle for liberation, as Imam Khomeini used to claim, says the newspaper.⁵⁸

President Ahmadinejad's visit to Damascus, about a month after Hamas's takeover of Gaza, included meetings with Syrian President Bashar al-Asad, Hasan Nasrallah and a Hamas delegation headed by Mash'al. The visit was very fruitful and resulted in an arms deal Iran was committed to supply Syria with, and it also led to the intensification of Iran's relations with Hamas and the PIJ. The Ahmadinejad-Mash'al meeting dealt with the transformations in the Palestinian arena, with the Iranian President saying his country will stand by the Palestinian people and stressing the need to respect their choices, i.e. implicitly demanding that Mahmud 'Abbas respect the 2006 elections' results. It was also reported that Ahmadinejad gave Mash'al an additional sum of money, and conveyed to the latter Khamene'i's support and admiration for Hamas's applying the *Shari'a* in Gaza. Hamas denied, however, Israel's claims, according to which Ahmadinejad demanded that Hamas procrastinate the decision on the Shalit deal. The organization said it was willing to release the Israeli soldier immediately if Israel would accept the deal's conditions, set by Hamas.⁵⁹ Despite Hamas's denials an anonymous Iranian source claims that Iran has profoundly strengthened its influence in Palestine, and that the remote control over Hamas's affairs is in the hands of Qassem Soleimani, Commander of the Qods Force in the IRGC, and Sheikh Ramadan, Head of the IRGC's Intelligence Unit.⁶⁰

It is important to note, regarding the Gaza events, that Hamas's takeover has not only aggravated Hamas's relations with Fatah, but has also worsened the former's relations with the PIJ. Throughout October 2007 there were reports coming from Gaza on clashes between Hamas militiamen and activists who belong to PIJ's armed wing, Al-Quds Units (Saraya al-Quds). These incidents involved shootings and kidnappings, with the PIJ claiming that Hamas had kidnapped its men and abused them since the latter's military takeover, although those PIJ fighters had been on their way to carry out attacks against Israel. Such claims have enabled the PIJ to tarnish Hamas's face and claim that it operates as Israel's accomplice. Hamas denied any involvement in these alleged kidnappings, and in return accused PIJ men of kidnapping 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam's men. Dr. Ramadan Shalah, PIJ Secretary General, claimed that

⁵⁶ *IRNA*, June 25, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, June 25, 2007; *Fars News Agency*, July 7, 2007; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.serveloccity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

⁵⁷ www.aljazeera.net, June 25, 2007.

⁵⁸ <http://memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=SP164407>.

⁵⁹ There are differences of opinion regarding Mash'al's position in Hamas. On the one hand, it seems that Mash'al is still a key figure in the organization and is also influential in the matter of Shalit. On the other hand, there is an assumption according to which Mash'al may be the one in charge of the financial aid that comes from Iran; however, once the money and weapons reach Gaza, he has no control over their distribution. Furthermore, according to this version the person that calls the shots in the matter of the Shalit deal is Ahmad al-Jabari, head of Hamas's armed wing, 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, who coerces both Mash'al and Haniyya to concede to his demands, and rains terror over the organization's political wing. In any way, in the framework of the prisoners' exchange deal's negotiations the list of prisoners that Hamas demands their release was narrowed from 1500 to 450, in two consecutive phases.

⁶⁰ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 21, 2007; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 22, 2007.

Hamas had tried to take over some of PIJ's mosques in Khan Yunis and Gaza. He condemned Hamas's actions, saying it had no right to shove the PIJ from its military achievements. He called for unification between the two organizations, maintaining that the common cause is far greater than anything that divides them. Regarding Hamas's takeover Shalah claimed the deadlock between Hamas and Fatah was threatening Palestine and its people. He called upon all factions to sanctify the culture of resistance to the occupation and refrain from lapsing to a culture of *fitna* that might deteriorate to a new *nakba* (catastrophe, the term refers to the 1948 War and what the Palestinians regard as its disastrous consequences to them).⁶¹

Hamas's conduct in Gaza was harshly criticized not only by rival factions, but was also unpopular among some elements from within the organization. Dr. Ghazi Hamad, formerly Hamas's government spokesman and a close aide to PM Isma'il Haniyya, was so critical of the coup d'état, he was expelled from the organization's ranks. It seems that Hamad's ousting reflects an absolute control of the radical faction inside Hamas over the organization's matters. In a letter he wrote and published in the Palestinian press in October 2007 Hamad maintained that Hamas was no longer colored in pure white in light of its brutal taking over the Gaza Strip and its handling of affairs there ever since. Hamad thinks that Hamas has not been able to leave its organizational and oppositional framework in favor of a governmental one. The organization lacks political flexibility, and has therefore lost its credentials, which could have been preserved had it adopted a more calculated policy and adjusted itself to the transformations in the regional and international theaters, even without relinquishing its most fundamental values. Hamad invited the organization to conduct a deep soul search regarding its conduct, especially in light of the June 2007 events. He thinks there was no justification for a military resolution, which was a shameful act that may have solved one problem but aroused a thousand new ones: the Gaza Strip is under siege; its inhabitants suffer from a terrible economic hardship; PA clerks do not get their salaries on a regular basis; the passageways to the Strip and from it have been closed for months; enmity and hostility between Hamas and Fatah have only deepened, and so has the division between the West Bank and Gaza. Hamad thinks Hamas should finalize a strategic plan that will entail tactic flexibility and political maneuvering skills, and stop calling for futile intra-Palestinian dialogues in this Arab capital or another. Hamad also attacked Hamas's relations with Iran, saying the organization has lost the language of compassion, forgiveness and mutual understanding, and has followed the Ayatollahs. This is how the same element that is supposed to be hostile to Hamas has turned into its savior and protector, a process that is bad for Hamas, according to Hamad.⁶²

5. Iran's Maneuvers in Light of the Annapolis Conference (November 2007)

The next phase in the Hamas-Fatah rift was manifested in the period prior to the Annapolis Conference (the end of November 2007). During a Fatah memorial rally for Yasser Arafat that took place in mid November, Hamas's Tanfidhiyya Forces shot at the rally's participants, wounded dozens and killed seven people. In response, Fatah accused Hamas of having lost any sacred value that had existed in the intra-Palestinian sphere. Fatah also claimed that Hamas had tied itself with the fate of Iran, and was thus willing to serve the latter's ambitions to incite a Palestinian civil war. According to Fatah, the Tanfidhiyya was determined to scatter the "one million rally" (in which about 200,000 people were assembled) violently, since it was an unprecedented display of Fatah's political power and a vote of no-confidence against Hamas's brutal policies in Gaza. Fatah claimed that the Hamas government, which was committed to the Iranian expansionist project, was counting the days till its political, ideological and public death.⁶³

Iran's activism was manifested prior to the Annapolis Conference, when all the leaders of the hard-line Palestinian factions opposed to the peace process, among whom was Khalid Mash'al and Ramadan Shalah, were invited to Tehran for a meeting that was supposed to take place between November 25-27, 2007. The meeting was initially

⁶¹ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, October 20-27, 2007.

⁶² <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, November 22, 2007.

⁶³ *Ha'aretz*, November 13, 2007; <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, November 29, 2007.

meant to convene in Damascus. However, after Syria's decision to take part in the Annapolis Conference it could no longer host the elements opposed to the conference. Iran expressed its enthusiastic will to substitute Syria's place, but eventually had to cancel the meeting in light of Syria's absence and Saudi Arabia's pressures on Hamas not to take part in that meeting as well. The anti-Hamas website, Hamasgaza, maintained that Iran was trying to attract as many Palestinian and Arab forces as possible through such maneuvers in order to strengthen its regional standing. Iran was also blamed for trying to set up a new regional bloc, which would include Syria, Turkey, Hizballah and Hamas, in order to accumulate bargaining chips in its struggle against the US.⁶⁴

Despite Iranian attempts to maneuver Hamas's decision-making processes, Tehran sometimes encounters Saudi moves that force Hamas's leaders to reconsider their actions. And so, about six months after Hamas's coup it seemed as if Mash'al was willing to give up Hamas's control over the Gaza Strip in light of the Saudi and Egyptian efforts to bring the warring parties (Hamas and Fatah) back at the negotiations table. Saudi pressure on Hamas made its leaders reject Iran's invitations to visit Tehran twice in a row, before and after Annapolis. Any refusal to Tehran's proposals is immediately interpreted as credit for Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, Hamas kept on setting intolerable conditions as far as Fatah was concerned. Furthermore, despite false displays of unity inside Hamas, such as the December 15, 2007 counter-rally marking Hamas's 20th anniversary, there has been evidence of growing friction inside the organization, between the radical wing, headed by Mahmud al-Zahar (formerly foreign minister in the Hamas government that was formed after the 2006 elections) and Ahmad al-Ja'bari (commander of 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam's Brigades and Hamas's strongman in Gaza after the takeover), and Isma'il Haniyya and Khalid Mash'al, who appears to be struggling to impose his authority over al-Ja'bari's armed wing.⁶⁵

6. Hamas's Adoption of Iran's Regional Strategy

Hamas's mouthpieces express a total identification with Iran's interests and policies. In the aftermath of the signing of the Mecca Agreement, Hamas's magazine, *Filastin al-Muslima*, analyzed the geostrategic situation in the Middle East while also examining the possible outcomes of an armed escalation in the Iranian theater. On the one hand, the magazine quotes some scenarists who estimate that Israel will be the main beneficiary in the case of an American attack against Iran, since the latter's destruction will silence Syria's and Hizballah's military capabilities and paralyze them politically. Furthermore, Iran's annihilation will deprive Hamas of its strong ally, on which the organization has been leaning at times of duress. According to these scenarists, the despair among the Muslims will grow, and like the 1967 defeat many years will pass before the Muslims recover, and in the meantime Israel will enjoy stability and tranquility. On the other hand, the magazine quotes former Israeli MK Ephraim Sneh, who said that if Iran got a nuclear bomb, most of Israel's population would leave the country, thus bringing about the destruction of the state without a single shot. The magazine estimates that Israel regards attacking Iran's nuclear facilities as its last solution. The magazine's reporter quotes Iranian officials who maintain that Iran does not seriously believe in Israel's capability to attack more than three targets at once in a prolonged air strike. They also claim that in light of Israel's defeat in the 2006 War, it needs at least three to five years to recuperate its military capabilities and rebuild the trust among its soldiers before it can initiate another war.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, November 19, 2007; <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, December 11, 2007.

⁶⁵ *Ha'aretz*, December 14, 2007; *Ha'aretz*, December 16, 2007.

Recently there have been reports claiming that al-Ja'bari's conduct inside the armed wing has antagonized some of that wing's leaders, in addition to a continuous tension between al-Ja'bari and Mahmud al-Zahar, who blames the former for not adhering to the political leadership's directives. There was even an attempt to replace al-Ja'bari with 'Imad 'Aql, his primary adversary inside 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam's Brigades. *Ha'aretz*, June 25, 2008.

⁶⁶ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 3, March 2007.

According to Hamas's magazine, the Iranian officials that were interviewed by the magazine's reporter, who came to Iran on a special mission to tour the country and convey his findings, are highly confident regarding their country's position, and estimate that the chances for an American attack are rather slim. One of these officials said the Americans' interference in Iran's nuclear program, which is a sacred national interest, has been quite stupid. Furthermore, an American attack will be too expensive and there is no way the US will get involved in such an adventure. No international blockade against Iran has ever been useful or ever will be, and therefore the US should acknowledge a future nuclear Iran. These officials warn against what they call the Iranian "surprise tactic", claiming that Iran knows perfectly well what the Americans' most valuable interests in the Middle East are, i.e., oil and Israel's security, and adding that Washington has no idea what is awaiting these interests in the case of an American attack. They threaten that Iran would close the Strait of Hormuz and launch missiles at oil tanks or hit them through mines, aircrafts or suicide bombers. Under such circumstances the price of oil would reach outrageous amounts. The Iranians also warn against any attempt to bring down the Iranian regime, saying that 13 million men and women, members of the Basij voluntary militia force, will immediately defend their people and the Revolution, armed with religious zeal and morals.⁶⁷

Iran-PIJ

The relations between Iran and the PIJ are close and are considered tighter and more intimate than the former's relations with Hamas. The contacts include frequent visitations of PIJ leaders in Iran and meetings with Iranian officials in Damascus, sometimes in a joint Palestinian delegation headed by Hamas. Ramadan Shalah, for example, visited Iran in the beginning of June 2007, and during that summer Ahmadinejad visited Damascus and met with Shalah, who was a part of a Palestinian delegation. Like Hamas, the PIJ also has a permanent representative in Iran, Mahmud Abu Jihad.⁶⁸ These intimate relations can be demonstrated by analyzing PIJ's conduct during certain events.

1. The Aftermath of the Second Lebanon War (July-August 2006)

PIJ leaders very often take militant positions that are in line with Iran's positions regarding Israel and the Palestinian issue. Certain events in the Palestinian arena illustrate the ideological affinity between both sides, while at least part of this affinity stems from Iranian dictates that the PIJ is obliged to follow. In an interview to the *Al-Jazeera* network right after the war in Lebanon (August 2006) Ramadan Shalah, Secretary General of the PIJ, claimed it was a Zionist-American war against Lebanon and Palestine in every sense of the word, and that any attempt to link Iran to this conflict was an utter lie. He defended Hizballah's goals in its struggle against Israel and added that the former was striving to defend Lebanon, bringing about the release of Lebanese prisoners and getting the Shab'a Farms back under Lebanese sovereignty. Shalah also protected Hizballah against allegations that the latter supports the Sunni massacres in Iraq, stressing that Hizballah utterly and absolutely rejects these sectarian-based massacres. Shalah rejected the notion of a Sunni-Shiite rift, claiming that both sides keep calling for the unity of the Islamic nation in light of the historical battle against the Muslims' mutual enemies – the US and Israel. He believes this is not a sectarian issue of Sunna vs. Shi'a, but a matter of support for the US and Israel or opposition to these countries. Shalah said that Syria and Iran are the stimulus to the Lebanese and Palestinian resistances' devotion to their just cause.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 9, September 2007.

⁶⁸ *Jomhuri-ye Eslami* (Iran), July 24, 2007.

⁶⁹ An interview with Dr. Ramadan Shalah, *Al-Jazeera*, August 13, 2006, quoted in *Al-Haqiqa*, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=56>

2. PIJ's Adoption of Iran's Regional Strategy

PIJ leaders tend to identify with Iran's regional perception and its struggle against the US. In a festival organized by the PIJ in Gaza in honor of Jerusalem Day (*Yawm al-Quds*)⁷⁰ in October 2006, with the participation of about 50,000 people, Shalah said that the Palestinians are not entitled to rest even for one day in their holy jihad against the forces of evil, led by America and the "Zionist entity" and their regional accomplices. He also said that the Palestinian people had been created in the inspiration of the divine oneness (*tawhid*) and had been refined through the hardships it was going through. He promised that Israel will be annihilated, and that Palestine, which was taken by force, will be returned only by the force of resistance.⁷¹

In an interview to the Iranian news agency Qudsuna in February 2007 (marking the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution) after his visit to Iran, Shalah said he had discussed with the Iranian leadership the ways to struggle against the US attempts to sabotage the victories of the Islamic resistance in Palestine and Lebanon, and the devotion of the Iraqi people in its resistance to the American occupation. Like his predecessor Shiqaqi, Shalah also takes every opportunity to praise Iran's desire to unite the Islamic nation and claims that the Islamic Revolution was a one-time event in the history of Islam that shook the entire world. He also praised Khamene'i and said that "His Eminence the Commander" (*samahat al-qa'id*) has a special position among the Palestinian people's fighters, who view Khamene'i as a role model for Islamic leadership that was long gone ever since secularism struck the Muslim world and separated religion from state affairs. Shalah claimed that it sometimes seems to him that Iran is sacrificing its own interests at the expense of the Islamic nation's interests that give Khamene'i primary attention.⁷²

On another occasion, in an interview to *Al-Jihad* in March 2007 Shalah refuted the accusations, according to which Hamas and the PIJ have turned into Iran's tools in its struggle against the US, in exchange for political and financial aid, and said that Iranian help is necessary for the Palestinians, whether it is Hamas or the PIJ, in their battle against the Zionist occupation, especially in light of a clear lack of Arab aid.⁷³

Shalah referred to the Iranian aid to the Palestinian organizations again in an interview to *Qudsnews* in October 2007 after he had been asked about the criticism against the PIJ for its close ties with Iran. In this interview Shalah refuted the allegations that the PIJ's continuous missile firing at Israel and its refusal to engage in the political process turn the organization into Iran's pawn. He stressed Iran's invaluable support for the Palestinians, specifically under the international siege. He also refuted claims that among PIJ members there are Shiite inclinations that might explain Iran's support of the organization, and declared that the PIJ is a Sunni Islamic movement that belongs to the creed of *Ahl al-Sunna wa-al-Jama'a* (a title given to the followers of the Sunna; although Shalah did not refer to the fact that this term has a Shiite interpretation as well), and that the organization will never betray its beliefs and principles. He added that even if there had been another *madhhab* operating inside the PIJ it would have been denounced immediately. The PIJ's first obligation is to hit the Zionist enemy, and this is the meeting point for all those in favor of that cause, be they Sunni, Shiite or even non-Muslims, says Shalah.⁷⁴ Ziyad Nahala, Shalah's deputy, also defended Iran, saying it supports the Palestinians' cause, rights and resistance.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ The Jerusalem Day is commemorated annually on the last Friday of the month of Ramadan, under the initiative of Khomeini.

⁷¹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, October 21, 2006.

⁷² An interview with Dr. Ramadan Shalah, *Qudsuna*, February 12, 2007, quoted in *Al-Rasid*, No. 45, (Rabi' al-Awwal 1428 H; March 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=624; <http://www.falestiny.net/mkblt-133.htm>.

⁷³ *Al-Jihad*, March 2007.

⁷⁴ <http://www.qudsnews.net/mkblt/166-2.htm>.

⁷⁵ *Al-Jihad*, March 2007.

E. Between Religious-Cultural Influence and Political Affinity

Examining the religious-cultural relations between Iran and the Sunni Palestinian organizations, primarily Hamas, obliges us first and foremost to typify Iran's relations with the Sunna, as it is manifested in the Sunni world's most important Islamic movement, the Muslim Brotherhood, which is the mother movement of Hamas. According to the Jordanian Salafi intellectual, Usama Shahada, it has been actually the MB that has historically expressed a compromising, moderate attitude toward the Shi'a and Khomeini's Islamic Revolution. Furthermore, the MB's positive attitude to the Shi'a and Iran stems from its inclination to treat Muslims wherever and whoever they are positively without focusing upon ideological and dogmatic diversity, especially when Iran is in a state of confrontation against anti-Islamic forces. Ever since its foundation the MB supported a Sunni-Shiite rapprochement, and this was expressed by the organization's founder, Hasan al-Banna, and his followers and successors. The MB's third General Guide, 'Umar al-Tilmisani, referred to the need to bring Sunnis and Shiites closer as a religious duty. Sheikh Muhammad al-Ghazali, one of the Sunni world's most important religious authorities, claimed that the distance between Sunna and Shi'a is just like the distance between each of the four Sunni *madhahib* (schools of law). The Pakistani Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi, one of the most prominent leaders of political Islam in the twentieth century, also regarded the Iranian revolution an Islamic revolution in every sense of the word, and called upon all the Islamic movements to support it and cooperate with it.⁷⁶ It was Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, today's most prominent Sunni religious authority in the Arab world, who called during *'Id al-Fitr* this year upon all Muslims to help Iran defend itself if it were attacked by the US, claiming Iran is a Muslim state.⁷⁷ In an interview to *Al-Watan al-'Arabi* at the end of August 2006, after the war in Lebanon, the MB General Guide, Mahdi 'Akif, expressed his full support of Hizballah's struggle against Israel, and said that all ideological differences of opinion should be pushed aside until the ultimate victory over the enemies that occupy the lands of Islam. As far as 'Akif is concerned, the struggle against Israel is much more important than anything else, and therefore all efforts must be concentrated in that direction. Nevertheless, he denied the allegations regarding the MB's alleged support of the Iranian agenda in the region, and said that first there should be a fight against the Israeli-American agenda.⁷⁸ Still, Tariq Dilwani, *Al-Haqiqa's* reporter, defines the relations between the MB and Iran as a one-sided love of the organization toward the Shiite state, and blames the MB for exporting the Islamic Revolution in Khomeini's era and after the latter's death.⁷⁹

As opposed to the MB's tolerant attitude toward the Shi'a, it seems that Iran perceives the former as a conservative reform movement, the policies of which are based upon education, culture, *da'wa*, non-violence even against a usurper, oppressive ruler, and political participation. Iran casts doubts regarding the MB activity's effectiveness, maintaining that it has not achieved a thing in decades of activity. Anti Shiite Usama Shahada concludes that one cannot trust the Shiite worldview and must therefore grasp its dangers, since it wishes to incite rebellion among Sunni movements illegitimately. He claims that Iran regards its relations with the MB as a means to fulfill Shiite interests, and not as relations based upon unity and Islamic cooperation. Shahada also says that whoever attends Shiite conferences may hear how the MB movement is blasphemed, and how scathingly the participants refer to Hamas,

⁷⁶ Usama Shahada, "Mawqif al-Shi'a wa-Iran min Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin," (Iran's and the Shi'a's Viewpoint toward the Muslim Brotherhood Movement) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=400; Tariq Dilwani, "Hamas wa-al-Ikhwan wa-Iran," (Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=402>.

⁷⁷ "Akhta' fi al-Ta'amul ma'a al-Mushkila al-Shi'iyya," (Mistakes in Handling the Shiite Problem) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=806.

It is important to note though that at the same time al-Qaradawi expressed his fear from an intensifying Shiite penetration into Sunni Egypt, and warned against a possible civil war that might break out if the Sunni-Shiite rift deteriorates in Egypt, where only one percent of the population is Shiite. Later on, he had to apologize for making such generalizations and said he had referred to a small margin that tries to create division in the Egyptian society and spread the Shi'a in the country. He also said that the Ja'fari *madhhab* is a legitimate Islamic school of law. <http://memri.org/bin/opener.cgi?Page=archives&ID=IA31106>.

⁷⁸ An interview with Mahdi 'Akif, *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, August 23, 2006, quoted in *Al-Rasid*, No. 40, (Shawwal 1427 H; October 2006), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=465; Dan Murphy and Sameh Naguib, "Hizbullah Winning over Arab Street," *The Christian Science Monitor*, (July 18, 2006), <http://www.csmonitor.com/2006/0718/p01s03-wome.htm>; Andrew McGregor, "Support for Hezbollah in Egypt Threatens Mubarak's Stability," *Terrorism Focus*, Vol. 3, Issue 34, (September 6, 2006), <http://www.jamestown.org/terrorism/news/article.php?articleid=2370117>.

⁷⁹ Tariq Dilwani, "Hamas wa-al-Ikhwan wa-Iran," (Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=402>.

which they describe as a Wahhabi, Takfiri, terroristic, exploiter and hostile toward the Shi'a. According to Shahada, in the aftermath of the assassinations of Sheikh Yasin and his deputy Dr. 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Rantisi, in the spring of 2004, some Shiite websites congratulated Israel's then PM, Ariel Sharon, for successful operations.⁸⁰ Dilwani adds that while the MB in Jordan and Egypt do not object to the erection of Shiite *husayniyyas* in these countries, the Iranians refuse to allow the building of Sunni mosques in the country. This is how the Iranians manage to expand their Shiite creed in the Arab region with no apparent objection coming from the very movements and organizations that should have been the spearheads of the struggle against the Shiites' aspirations.⁸¹

Dilwani maintains that neither the MB nor Hamas should keep on ignoring the dogmatic differences between them and Shiite Iran in all sorts of excuses, mainly the desire to avoid *fitna* in the Muslim world. Dilwani maintains that there is a great difference between the Islamic governance' perception of the Shi'a and the Sunna. While the former espouse a state that is ruled by the principle of the Imamate and the anticipation to the return of the Hidden Imam, the latter strives for the reestablishment of the Caliphate. Iran and the Shi'a rule out the Caliphate, because according to their belief whoever ruled after 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib was an illegitimate ruler that must not be recognized. Another difference between Sunna and Shi'a is expressed in their attitude toward communism vs. Western capitalism. Whereas the MB consider communism to be far more dangerous than capitalism, since the former is a school of thought that clashes with religion, Iran considers the capitalist West its greatest danger in light of the fact that it has been occupied by Western imperialism, occurrences which have become part of the Iranians' national consciousness.⁸²

Despite these differences there have been in the past few years certain examples of the blurring of boundaries between Sunna and Shi'a in the manner of prayer. The Islamic framework provides room for both a Sunni and a Shiite prayer, each having its unique characteristics. However, according to Rashid al-Khayyun, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat's* publicist, this perception has changed with the intensification of political conflicts and the formation of Sunni-Shiite diverse alliances, such as the one struck between Iran and Hamas, or that between Hizballah and its Sunni partners. Thus, one could see Isma'il Haniyya praying inside a Shiite mosque in Tehran, and former MB leader, Fathi Yakan, leading a prayer of Hizballah supporters in Beirut. The difference between the manner of prayers among Sunnis and Shiites was created after the canonization of the *madhahib*, based upon the dogmatic differences (e.g. the Imam as a fundamental principle in the Shi'a is absent from the Sunni dogma). That is when Sunnis and Shiites were split in matters of both prayer in mosques and burial in separate cemeteries. Still, there is no legal principle, either among the Shiites or the Sunnis, that prohibits a joint prayer, or a Shiite prayer led by a Sunni imam and vice versa. Regarding the Friday prayer, the Shiites maintain that in the absence of the Hidden Imam every ruler is a usurper; hence the right to perform the prayer lies solely in the hands of the Imam. Khomeini turned that prayer into a weekly event, where religious preaching gets a clear political character, and includes settling personal accounts. Al-Khayyun claims that there has been a politicization of prayer and religion among Shiite communities, especially in Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.⁸³

In any case, Iran has made tremendous efforts in disseminating the Shi'a throughout the Muslim world as another tool to expand its influence, in addition to its political, economic and military levers. These activities have been aimed in recent years at Palestinian audiences as well. There are many examples for this on websites and online forums that deal with the Shi'a and its spread among the Palestinians.

⁸⁰ Usama Shahada, "Mawqif al-Shi'a wa-Iran min Jama'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin," (Iran's and the Shi'a's Viewpoint toward the Muslim Brotherhood Movement) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=400

⁸¹ Tariq Dilwani, "Hamas wa-al-Ikhwan wa-Iran," (Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=402>.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Rashid al-Khayyun, "Al-Salat al-Siyasiyya ma bayna Baghdad wa-Tahran wa-Bayrut," (Political Prayer in Baghdad, Beirut and Tehran) *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 10, 2006.

Thus, for example, there is an anonymous website that presents the Shiite discourse and ideology as a propaganda material on a daily basis to the average Palestinian. It seems that this is done with Iran's full backing and supervision. The website *Omat al-Zahraa* (www.omat-alzahraa.org), appears to be operating from Gaza. Its content covers the Islamic Revolution, the Palestinian resistance and the messianic future expected with the return of the Imam. The website also maintains that Gaza is the gate from which the Imam will return, via the south. Nevertheless the website opposes any curses or slanders against the Prophet's Companions (*sabb al-Sahaba*), and claims it represents neither the Shi'a nor the Sunna, but the real *Ahl al-Bayt* (literally: the people of the house, which means the family of the Prophet). The anti-Shiite *Al-Haqiqa*, which exposed the Shiite website, warns that the Iranian invasion of Palestine is in its advanced stages, and therefore necessitates awareness and caution on behalf of all the Palestinian factions, and first of all Hamas.⁸⁴ Another forum that deals with the proselytizing for the Shi'a is Muntada Shi'at Filastin.⁸⁵ Some of these Shiite websites give examples of Sunnis who turned into Shiites (names like Sa'id Ya'qub and As'ad Wahid Qasim), and present their writings on the subject. These websites' language may be Arabic; however, their URL addresses contain Persian words that indicate that there might be some Iranian elements operating behind the scenes.⁸⁶

Regarding the scope of conversion to Shi'a in Palestine, it seems that the actual numbers are rather small and marginal. On the website islam4u.com it is claimed that the total number of Palestinians living in Palestine (Israel and the Palestinian diasporas are not included) is more than 1,150,000 people, while the rate of Shiites is about 2%, i.e. 2300 people.⁸⁷ Another source reports that there are some ten Palestinians living in Gaza who have turned Shiite and who operate under the *taqiyya* method (act of dissimulation that has been used by the Shiites for hundreds of years, since they were a persecuted minority among the Sunnis and therefore had to conceal their beliefs and traditions). In addition, there are dozens of other newly converted Shiites in the northern part of the West Bank. This phenomenon is vastly condemned in harsh expressions in these internet forums.⁸⁸

Several sources, Palestinians and others, count several reasons for the conversion to Shi'a (*tashayyu'*, *tashyyi'*) among Palestinians. Sheikh Salih al-Karbasi, a Shiite himself, mentions a few of them: the Shiites' genealogy that links them with the Prophet's family (*Ahl al-Rasul*), which strengthens their legitimacy; the fact that the Shiite creed goes back chronologically to the early days of Islam, which enables the Shiites to claim that *tashayyu'* and Islam are the same thing; the fact that there were Shiite Imams living among the Muslims for more than 260 years (according to a Hijri calculation); the authorities' despise of the Shiites which has often made them more zealous to their creed; the Shiites always having carried the banner of opposition to an oppressive regime, and so forth.⁸⁹

Iran-Hamas

1. Is It Simply a "Political *Tashayyu'*" or Is Hamas Khomeini's "Spiritual Son"?

It seems that since many of Hamas's exiled leaders were formerly affiliated with the Palestinian MB activists living in Kuwait, the organization's activists are much closer to the Jihadi-Salafi trend in radical Islam, and hence are more aware of the dogmatic conflict between Sunna and Shi'a. Therefore, Hamas activists are more cautious regarding the PIJ men's attempts to convert people to Shi'a in Palestine, in cooperation with Iran and Hizballah. Yet, it seems that

⁸⁴ "Muhawala li-Nashr al-Madhab al-Shi'i," (An Attempt to Spread the Shiite *Madhab*) *Al-Haqiqa*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.haqeega.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=514>; <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, December 18, 2007; http://classic.omeia.co.il/Show_Article_Print.asp?DynamicContentId=3399.

⁸⁵ <http://www.pas-shia.com/forum/forumdisplay.php?f=3>; http://groups.yahoo.com/group/palestine_shia/

⁸⁶ <http://www.aqaed.com/mostabser/shenasname/2mw/2mw17.html>;

<http://www.aqaed.com/mostabser/mosahemat/index.php?part=view4site&vid=528>; <http://www.aqaed.com/mostabser/fehr-iame/alef-ba/01/0028.html>; <http://site.aqaed.com/khadhraa/top.html>; <http://www.14masom.com/mostabsiron/f018.htm>;

<http://www.aqaed.com/shialib/books/03/azmah/index.html>.

⁸⁷ http://www.islam4u.com/almojib_show.php?rid=796.

⁸⁸ <http://www.paldf.net/forum/archive/index.php-121894.html>.

⁸⁹ http://www.islam4u.com/almojib_show.php?rid=796

due to the undermined relations between Hamas and leading Sunni states, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan, the Iran-Syria-Hamas axis has been strengthened and intensified. The anti-Shiite *Al-Rasid* accuses Hamas of being aware of the Shiite activity among the Palestinian refugee camps' population in Syria and Lebanon. The magazine also claims that Hamas's leadership knows about the massacres that the Shiite militias led by Muqtada al-Sadr are carrying out against Palestinian refugees living in Iraq. Hamas is also aware of Hizballah's cooperation with these Shiite militias. Still, according to *Al-Rasid*, Hamas is compromising vis-à-vis Iran and the Shi'a, because of the organization's dependence upon Syria and Iran.⁹⁰ The anti-Shiite website *Al-Haqiqa* says that the Shiite falsely claim that 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam (who was a Palestinian nationalist fighter who was killed in 1935 in a battle against British forces) was actually a convert to Shi'a. According to *Al-Haqiqa*, this is a desperate Iranian and Shiite attempt to win the support of the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades and the resistance fighters, and convince them to support the Iranian political and dogmatic line.⁹¹

In addition, there seems to be a certain Shiite-Iranian influence on Hamas, on the rhetorical level and beyond. Khalid Mash'al traditionally attends 'Ashura ceremonies held by Hizballah in Lebanon. Hamas officials, such as 'Imad al-'Alami, member of the Political Bureau and formerly the organization's representative to Tehran, often talk about a strategic alliance between Hamas and Iran. Furthermore, it was reported that Usama Hamdan, formerly Hamas's representative to Lebanon and later on to Iran, has converted to Shi'a, after he had been deeply affected by its dogmatic principles. On February 22, 2006, during a meeting in Cairo with Khomeini's grandson Hasan, Khalid Mash'al declared that Hamas is Khomeini's "spiritual son" (*al-ibn al-ruhi*). Mash'al spoke about the commitment and devotion to the struggle as the common ground for Iran and the Palestinian Islamic resistance, adding that both the Palestinian and the Iranian peoples have proved their capability to face the occupiers' threats and their willingness to keep operating until martyrdom.⁹²

In an article he wrote in memory of Khomeini for the Iranian newspaper *Al-Intiqad* (no date), Mash'al defines Khomeini as the man by whom Allah has revived the Islamic nation and removed the infidels from their seat, a man who was shining like the sun in order to cast aside the oppressors' darkness and light up the defeated and the oppressed. Mash'al praised Khomeini's devotion to Palestine and its abused people, and his consistent calling upon the Iranian youth to join the ranks of the Palestinian revolution. Khomeini was the one who used to warn the Muslims of the cancer called Israel, says Mash'al, reminding that the first thing Khomeini did after the Revolution's triumph was to set up the Palestinian Embassy at the very place where the "Zionist enemy's embassy" had been situated previously, and from which the enemy's diplomats had run away like mice. Khomeini was the one who declared an international day for the sake of Jerusalem and the liberation of Palestine, recalls Mash'al. The Iranian father of the Revolution called upon the Muslims to unite in order to vanquish Israel, the oppressor, and America, the Great Satan, both of which take advantage of the divisions among the Muslims. Mash'al recalls Khomeini's ambition to destroy Israel, and get the Muslims back to Jerusalem, which is after all an Islamic land.⁹³

Despite all these references, even anti-Shiite sources maintain that Mash'al's declarations do not exceed the boundaries of "political *tashayyu*", as it was also manifested in Jordanian and Egyptian MB leaders' statements expressing their sympathy with Hizballah as a political gesture, not out of ideological or dogmatic identification.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaq al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56.

⁹¹ "Muhawala li-Nashr al-Madhab al-Shi'i," (An Attempt to Spread the Shiite *Madhhab*) *Al-Haqiqa*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=514>.

⁹² "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaq al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; "Alaqat Hamas ma'a Tahrān: Man al-Rabih wa-Man al-Khasir," (The Hamas-Tehran Relations: Who is the Winner and who is the Loser) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=420>; "Muhawala li-Nashr al-Madhab al-Shi'i," (An Attempt to Spread the Shiite *Madhhab*) *Al-Haqiqa*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=514>.

⁹³ Ibid.
⁹⁴ Ibid.

Nevertheless, Sheikh 'Abd al-Rahman Dimashqiyya, a popular Saudi Islamic intellectual (Salafi-Jihadi trend), writing for the anti-Hamas website *Hamasgaza*, claims that many Hamas members have started to convert to Shi'a, among other things due to Mash'al's giving up on his religious worldview for the sake of politics. Dimashqiyya says that Khomeini defined Fatima, the daughter of Muhammad and the wife of 'Ali, as a powerful divine creature that was revealed on earth in the image of a woman. Furthermore, according to Dimashqiyya, Khomeini interpreted the phrase "your God" (*rabbukum*) as referring to the Hidden Imam. Dimashqiyya further claims that Khomeini defined God as the whole man that unites with the Muhammadan truth, which in turn unites with 'Ali. Dimashqiyya also says that Khomeini declared that Muhammad had failed in educating his Companions (the *Sahaba*), and that only the Hidden Imam will be able to educate humanity once he returns. In light of Mash'al's statements regarding Hamas being Khomeini's spiritual son, Hamas's leader is blamed for denying his religious principles. Dimashqiyya defines the Islamic Revolution as worse than the Bolshevik Revolution, since the former came out of Islam with the intention of destroying it. The pictures of the removal of the Shah in favor of the Revolution have just repeated themselves with Hamas, a Sunni organization in the outside that operates according to Khomeini's ideology in the inside, takes over the rule in Gaza and ousts the secular rule of Fatah. Dimashqiyya challenges Mash'al by asking him whether he intends to give up his beliefs for a piece of land or for a position in the name of Palestine. Dimashqiyya expresses his resentment regarding Mash'al's promises to regard every attack on his beloved Iran an attack against Hamas and him personally. Dimashqiyya metaphorically says that the Iranian lioness was preparing Palestine to become the place where it would raise its cubs. He calls upon the Muslims to wake up and realize how deep the corrupting influence of the Shiite *madhhab* is.⁹⁵

Dimashqiyya also blames the MB for never sticking to its dogma and for wooing the Shiites, thus enabling Iran to invade the Sunni world. Hamas praises the Shiites, believing they would help it regain the lands of Palestine. However, Hamas's leaders keep forgetting that some *'ulama* claimed it was forbidden even to pray behind a Shiite. They also need to remember that the Shiites believe the Qur'an is flawed and that they curse the *Sahaba*. Mash'al is paying the price of Palestine, and the price is a visit to the tomb of Khomeini, Hamas's spiritual father, says Dimashqiyya, who claims that this proves Mash'al's commitment to the Shi'a, to an ideology of death and submission to death. Dimashqiyya blames Mash'al for convening Shiite conferences in Palestine, thus helping the Shi'a invade that land, in a way that serves Israel and the West, like Hizballah is doing in Israel's northern border. While Hizballah pretends to be threatening Israel, it actually defends their mutual border, and the mere existence of this organization is an utter sham, maintains Dimashqiyya, who concludes by calling Mash'al to stay away from the Shiites immediately.⁹⁶

2. "Shi'a, Shi'a, Shi'a": Hamas on the Defense

Based upon the claims mentioned above, it is important to note that in recent years it has been more and more common among the Palestinian public to use the term "Shi'a" as a disgrace toward some Islamic movements, foremost of which has been Hamas. It seems therefore that the Shiite identity is perceived negatively in public discourse among the Palestinians, among other things because what is described as massacres and acts of group rape carried out by the Shiite militias in Iraq against Palestinians living in the country. During a festival organized by Fatah in the Yarmuk Stadium in Gaza in January 2007, about 200,000 people raised banners against Hamas in reaction to the assassination of one of the counter-security commanders. One of the most outstanding slogans was: "Shi'a, Shi'a, Shi'a". Another incident took place in March 2007, when riots broke out between Hamas and Fatah in Tall al-Sultan in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip. Five people were wounded in the incident, after a senior commander in the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades of Fatah had accused a Hamas Tanfidhiyya man of *tashayyu'* as an act of dishonor. The Tanfidhiyya man became furious and shot at his rival. The *Al-Haqiqa* website maintains that the

⁹⁵ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, October 31, 2007.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

nickname "Shi'a" carries political consequences, and that the Palestinian people has started to harshly criticize the cooperation between the Palestinian organizations and Shiite Iran, whose mullahs curse the Prophet's Companions and 'A'isha, the Prophet's wife and the daughter of Abu Bakr, the first Caliph.⁹⁷

These anti-Shiite statements and accusations aroused diverse reactions among the Hamas leadership. Ahmad Yusuf, Haniyya's political adviser, defended the Shi'a and Iran, and said he did not understand why it was considered such a shame to be Shiite. He added that the Shiite are the current era's heroes, claiming they had challenged the US' and Israel's global imperialism and stood next to the oppressed people of Palestine since the very first moment of the carrying out of the Islamic Revolution. He said the demonstrators who shouted the "Shi'a" slogans are ignorant and full of hatred and bitterness. Yusuf maintained that the Palestinian people boast of their relations with Iran as much as they are proud of their relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt.⁹⁸

On the other hand, some of the organization's leaders spoke harshly against those anti-Shiite calls against Hamas, in a mixture of apologetics and a defensive tone. Dr. Salih al-Raqab, Deputy Minister of Religious Endowments in the Hamas government, said in September 2007 that Hamas is a Sunni movement that has not given up its Sunni dogma even for a second. According to al-Raqab, Fatah's purpose is to accuse Hamas of cooperation with Iran and Syria. Dr. Marwan Abu Ra's, Head of Palestine's 'Ulama Association (Rabitat 'Ulama Filastin) and a Hamas MP, said the organization adheres to its Sunni essence more than any Islamic movement. He blamed Fatah for a provocation that was meant to create destabilization and stir a domestic crisis. Abu Ra's also denied any *tashayyu'* phenomenon under Hamas's rule and said nobody from Hamas's younger generation will be allowed to become influenced by the Shiite ideology. He claimed that it was under Fatah's rule in the West Bank and not in Gaza that preaching for conversion to Shi'a had first taken place. Dr. Mahir al-Huli, Head of the Ifta' (religious ruling) Committee of the Islamic University and a Hamas senior, comprehensively denied that any of Hamas's leaders or activists has converted to Shi'a, neither in Palestine nor out of it or in the Israeli prisons.⁹⁹

Abu Ra's also denied that Iran had asked Hamas to erect a *husayniyya* in Gaza, and said Hamas's relations with Iran are no more special than its relations with Saudi Arabia or Qatar. He defined the organization's relations with Iran as a political affiliation that does not come at the expense of the Sunni fundamentals. He also said he had written several books on the Shi'a in order to expose its misleading and the abomination it tries to spread, and in order to clarify things regarding the Shi'a to the youths of Palestine. According to Abu Ra's these books have become more important in light of the Shiite satellite channels that have invaded the Muslim world and brainwash the minds of young Sunnis, in addition to declarations and speeches of Shiite leaders who enthuse these youngsters, who are easy to influence.¹⁰⁰

Despite these anti-Shiite statements, Hamas's monthly *Filastin al-Muslima* dedicated a significant portion of its September 2007 volume to Iran, and the magazine's reporter went to Tehran in order to discuss the relations between Iran and Hamas with a few Iranian officials. One of the interviewed was Dr. Mohammad 'Ali Sabhani, formerly Iran's Ambassador to Lebanon and currently Head of the Committee for the Support of Jerusalem, who emphasized the massive governmental support of Palestine. Another interviewee was Dr. Abu Usama 'Abd al-Mu'ti, Hamas's Representative in Iran, who was described as a very busy man, who travels around Iran's various districts

⁹⁷ "Madha Ta'ni Kalimat 'Shi'a' fi Ghazza?" (What is the Meaning of the Word 'Shi'a' in Gaza?) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=445>; "Alaqaq Hamas ma'a Tahrān: Man al-Rabih wa-Man al-Khasir," (The Hamas-Tehran Relations: Who is the Winner and who is the Loser) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=420>; "Tuhmat Hamas bi-al-Tashayyu': Tasrihat Mas'ulin," (Hamas's Accused of Tashayyu': The Organization's Leaders' Statements) *Al-Haqiqa*, September 8, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=523>.

⁹⁸ <http://hamasgaza.wordpress.com/>, November 24, 2007.

⁹⁹ "Tuhmat Hamas bi-al-Tashayyu': Tasrihat Mas'ulin," (Hamas's Accused of Tashayyu': The Organization's Leaders' Statements) *Al-Haqiqa*, September 8, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=523>.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

for lectures and propaganda in front of citizens. Hamas's Liaison Office also runs political and diplomatic relations with many formal and informal elements in the country, including civil society institutions and universities, and participates in cultural events and exhibitions. 'Abd al-Mu'ti emphasized the Liaison Office's high profile in the Iranian media, and said Hamas was irregularly publishing a magazine titled *Filastin* in addition to a weekly report. *Filastin al-Muslima* praises the scholarships given to Palestinian students for studies in Iran and the financial aid given directly to the families of the *shuhada* (martyrs) and the wounded. According to the magazine, hundreds of wounded were brought to Iran for treatment, with Iranian funding, in addition to the fact that Iran has been paying the salaries of the Palestinian government's workers in order to break the international boycott over Gaza.¹⁰¹

Iran-PIJ

PIJ's conduct in recent years illustrates the depth of the organization's relations with Iran. This was well portrayed in Husayn Shubakshi's January 2007 article in *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*. He maintains that a thorough examination of the PIJ's history reveals terrifying facts regarding Iran's unbelievable penetration into the organization. The PIJ's moving away from participation in the Palestinian political sphere, while withdrawing into its own affairs, seems to be an attempt to imitate Hizballah's conduct in Lebanon. Shubakshi maintains that despite the Hamas leadership's pro-Iranian statements Iran is well aware of the fact that Hamas is deeply connected to the Sunni world and dogma, and therefore permeating the organization would be very complicated and difficult. Therefore, Iran has chosen to rely more on the PIJ in order to disseminate its Shiite agenda in Palestine, the most important theater on the Arab world's agenda. Shubakshi warns against a hidden, secretive and missionary plan to expand the Shiite Crescent.¹⁰²

According to anti-Shiite sources, Iran managed to invade deep into the Palestinian society via the PIJ already under Fathi Shiqaqi's leadership. As we have mentioned previously, some of the PIJ's leaders converted to Shi'a while they were staying at the Marj al-Zuhur refugee camp in Southern Lebanon, where they had encountered Hizballah men from whom they had secretly learnt the enigmatic elements of the Shi'a. As a result of this *tashayyu'* process, several Shiite institutions were established in the Palestinian Territories. Usama Shahada counts these Shiite associations that have been operating in Palestine since the end of the 1990s, and which, according to him, spread the Shiite creed, belong to Iran, get financial support from it, are closely linked with the office of Iran's Supreme Leader, and are directly connected to the PIJ. This clandestine Shiite activity was revealed back in the first days of the second Intifada, when the PIJ took advantage of the Palestinians' preoccupation with the struggle against Israel and the massive support all those who fought against the IDF enjoyed in order to publicly display its Shiite inclinations. This activity became more obvious after the 2006 Lebanon War, in light of Hizballah's popularity during the war and later on.¹⁰³

The PIJ is often accused of taking advantage of the poverty and the siege over the Gaza Strip in the past two years in order to recruit young men to its cadres through financial support and other temptations. It also seems that the PIJ's absence from the intra-Palestinian political game and its abstention from taking part in the Hamas-Fatah fighting have made it more popular. Many PIJ members visit Iran and Lebanon on a regular basis, and operate rather freely, something that was not possible before Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. Despite all its warnings against the linkage between the PIJ and the "Safavi Project", as Iran is referred to, the *Al-Haqiqa* website restricts its criticism and claims that the PIJ leadership is very much aware of the Palestinian society's character and its Sunni affiliation, and therefore the organization has not given any unequivocal statement on a formal conversion to the Ja'fari *madhhab*.

¹⁰¹ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 9, September 2007.

¹⁰² Husayn Shubakshi, "Fasil Jadid min al-Tarwiji al-Qawmi li-al-Hilal lyyah," (A New Phase in the Preaching for the Crescent) *Al-Ayam / Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, January 24, 2007, quoted in *Al-Haqiqa*, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=383>.

¹⁰³ Usama Shahada, "Al-Ikhwan, Hamas wa-Iran wa-al-Su'al al-Ha'ir," (The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Iran, and the Embarrassing Question) *Majallat al-Asr*, March 10, 2007, quoted in *Al-Bayyina*, <http://www.albainah.net/index.aspx?function=Printable&id=15429⟨> <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-24703.html>, March 19, 2007; http://shiaunion.com/rabita/shia_world/filisteen/filisteen.htm; <http://www.m-ahuda.com/showthread.php?t=1800>.

Still, the website warns, the Sunni discourse in Gaza has weakened and has no organized plan to deal with the Shiite danger, since there are currently no brilliant minds or extraordinary personas among the graduates of the Sunni religious institutions.¹⁰⁴

1. Shiite Institutions in Palestine under PIJ Patronage and their Activities

These are some of the Shiite institutions that operate in the Palestinian Territories, especially in the Gaza Strip, under PIJ custody.¹⁰⁵

1. The Al-Ihsan Charity Association, which is located in Gaza City and has branches all over the Strip.
2. The Ghadir Association, which is located in Bayt Lahiya in the northern part of the Gaza Strip, and is headed by Hisham Salim. According to rumors, the association is funded directly by Iran.¹⁰⁶
3. The Riyad al-Salihin Association, located in Gaza City and headed by Sheikh 'Umar 'Abdallah Shalah. The association seems to be providing social and health services, mainly to orphans and needy school children.
4. The Ard al-Ribat Association is located in Gaza City and headed by 'Abdallah al-Shami, one of PIJ's leaders in Gaza. The association provides treatment for the Intifada's wounded and financial assistance to orphans of the *shuhada* (martyrs).
5. The Ahl al-Bayt Association was founded in March 2007. According to Shahada, there are intentions to establish the Ahl al-Bayt University in Gaza.
6. The Al-Sabil Clinic.
7. The Al-Dawha Surgical Clinic, supplemented by a gynecology clinic and a school.

According to Usama Shahada, there are Shiite missionary institutions operating in the West Bank as well. One example is the Association of Islamic Youth (Ittihad al-Shabab al-Islami), which is located in Bethlehem and in the framework of which a youth club has been constructed. It has been reported lately that the PIJ has purchased a 300,000 dollar building in Bethlehem for an unclear purpose. It has been claimed that the new center of *tashayyu'* is located in Bethlehem, where there are several active institutions. In the city itself there are about 60 Shiites, whose numbers are apparently rapidly growing. It is also said they express deep hatred toward the Sunna, especially its Salafi trend, and that they threaten anyone who wants to insult the Shi'a or slander it.¹⁰⁷ Shahada stresses that all the above mentioned activities have taken place around Palestine for several years.¹⁰⁸ Other such activities include the following:

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-24703.html>, March 19, 2007; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghhalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamirran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>; 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Gharib, "Zahirat al-Rafida fi Filastin – Taqir Maydani," (The Shiite Phenomenon in Palestine: A Field Report), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=79>; "Muhawala li-Nashr al-Madhab al-Shi'i," (An Attempt to Spread the Shiite *Madhhab*) *Al-Haqiqa*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=514>.

¹⁰⁵ Usama Shahada, "Al-Ikhwan, Hamas wa-Iran wa-al-Su'al al-Ha'ir," (The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Iran, and the Embarrassing Question) *Majallat al-'Asr*, March 10, 2007, quoted in *Al-Bayyina*, <http://www.albainah.net/index.aspx?function=Printable&id=15429⟨> <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-24703.html>, March 19, 2007; http://shiaunion.com/rabita/shia_world/filisteen.htm.

¹⁰⁶ www.paldt/forum/archive/index.php/t-147011.html.

¹⁰⁷ 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Gharib, "Zahirat al-Rafida fi Filastin – Taqir Maydani," (The Shiite Phenomenon in Palestine: A Field Report), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=79>.

¹⁰⁸ Usama Shahada, "Al-Ikhwan, Hamas wa-Iran wa-al-Su'al al-Ha'ir," (The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Iran, and the Embarrassing Question) *Majallat al-'Asr*, March 10, 2007, quoted in *Al-Bayyina*,

1. Sending people who were wounded during the second Intifada to Iran, where they spend time in the company of religious scholars in both Tehran and Qomm. Shahada claims he bases his reports upon testimonies of wounded who returned from Iran. In another report, the institutions that help the wounded embark on these travels are blamed for selling their souls and consciousness to Iran. The report says that most of the wounded belong to the PIJ. Their details are registered through these institutions in order to send a formal application for treatment in Iran, after which the wounded person travels to Damascus and then to Tehran. In Tehran he is not allowed to walk around freely, only in the hospital's surroundings. He is visited by Shiite religious scholars, and he is taken for a visit in Qomm, where he is allegedly goes through a brainwashing process from Shiite *maraji'* (religious authorities), who tempt him to enlist for the Iranian cause. The wounded receives many presents and a relatively large sum of money. University graduates receive scholarships for studies in Tehran, where they are enlisted for missionary work. Back in Palestine, the returnee enthusiastically tells his relatives and friends about the warm treatment he got in Iran, and tries to convince other people to make the same journey he has just come back from. It appears that some religious sciences' students organize visitations to Iran for anyone interested.¹⁰⁹
2. Giving financial support for many students and choosing those among them who are most worthy of becoming missionaries for the Shi'a. These students pass courses inside Palestine on ways to disseminate the Shi'a, and it is claimed that they are taught how to raise doubts regarding the morality of the Prophet's Companions, for example.
3. Awarding scholarships for studies in Iran for students who then travel to Iran on a regular basis.
4. Organizing festivals carrying the names of Jerusalem and the *shuhada*, while actually these gatherings mostly commemorate Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution.
5. Organizing conferences that call for unity in Islam, with the purpose of blurring the differences between Sunna and Shi'a.
6. Enlisting preachers for spreading the Shiite ideology for money.
7. Distributing books dealing with the Shi'a and the Revolution, translated to Arabic, free-of-charge.
8. Publishing the *Al-Istiqlal* newspaper, where many Shiite and PIJ senior activists praise Iran and Hizballah (we shall elaborate on this later on).
9. The PIJ runs a local radio station from Gaza, called The Voice of Jerusalem (*Sawt al-Quds*), which is utilized for spreading pro-Shiite and pro-Iranian ideas.¹¹⁰

<http://www.albainah.net/index.aspx?function=Printable&id=15429&lang>; "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghawz al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56.

¹⁰⁹ Usama Shahada, "Al-Ikhwan, Hamas wa-Iran wa-al-Su'al al-Ha'ir," (The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Iran, and the Embarrassing Question) *Majallat al-'Asr*, March 10, 2007, quoted in *Al-Bayyina*, <http://www.albainah.net/index.aspx?function=Printable&id=15429&lang>; "Iran Tabtazz Jarha Filastin," (Iran Exploits the Wounded People of Palestine) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=346>.

¹¹⁰ <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-24703.html>, March 19, 2007; 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Gharib, "Zahirat al-Rafida fi Filastin – Taqrir Maydani," (The Shiite Phenomenon in Palestine: A Field Report), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=79>.

2. Prominent PIJ Converts to Shi'a

Anti-Shiite websites, such as *Al-Rasid*, *Al-Haqiqa* and *Al-Huda*, have written several reports dealing with those among PIJ members (and others not affiliated with the organization), who have allegedly converted to Shi'a.¹¹¹

1. 'Abdallah al-Shami, one of the leaders of the PIJ in Gaza and Head of the Ard al-Ribat Association that was mentioned above.
2. Hisham Salim, Head of the Ghadir Association.
3. 'Umar 'Abdallah Shalah, Head of the Riyad al-Salihin Association and brother of Ramadan Shalah, Secretary General of the PIJ.
4. Dr. 'Abd al-'Aziz 'Awda, a lecturer in the Islamic Education College at the Al-Azhar University in Gaza.
5. Nafidh 'Azzam, PIJ's spokesman in Gaza. He is said to be a staunch supporter of Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution.
6. Muhammad al-Bayyumi, a PIJ leader, responsible for spreading the Shiite doctrine in Rafah, the southern city of the Gaza Strip. While the article in this matter was published (March 2007), al-Bayyumi was reportedly staying in Iran.
7. Muhammad Shahada al-Ta'amri, from Bethlehem, who was a senior activist in the PIJ in the West Bank, and who was killed by the IDF in March 2008. Shahada first became a Fatah activist back in the 1970s, and was arrested after having injured an IDF soldier. He was released as part of the Ahmad Jibril deal in 1985. He left Fatah in the first Intifada to join the PIJ, and became one of its prominent activists in the West Bank. He was one of the 415 deportees to Marj al-Zuhur in 1992. Upon his return to the Territories Shahada resumed his terror activity, especially after the outbreak of the second Intifada. He was highly influenced by the *mujahidin* (holy warriors) of the IRGC and Hizballah. He was committed to disseminating the Shi'a in Palestine, and indeed turned Bethlehem into a Shiite center. He was nominated for the Palestinian Legislative Council on behalf of the PIJ, but eventually had to decline his nomination since his being a Shiite was unbearable for many of the PIJ members. He said in the past that the most important outcome of the deportation to Lebanon was that many of the Islamic activists got closer to the Shi'a and started to spread it later on in Palestine. In one of his interviews (to *Al-Minbar*) he said that the Shi'a might be in its cradle in Palestine, but he was committed to spreading it among his friends. After he had been killed, his son approved the fact that his father had joined the Shi'a in Lebanon in light of the comparisons he had been making between the Shiites' oppression in Lebanon and the Palestinians' oppression. Shahada's son also said that his father was spiritually sympathized with Hizballah, and that Nasrallah's office had promised to give Shahada's family financial support. At his funeral, Shahada's body was covered by Hizballah's flag.¹¹²
8. Muhammad Abu Samra, Head of the Islamic National Movement (Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Wataniyya), who was married to a Shiite. He is linked to senior figures in the PA and to Shiite religious authorities outside Palestine. He also heads the Al-Quds Research Center (Markaz al-Quds li-al-Dirasat wa-al-Buhuth) which publishes Shiite books.

¹¹¹ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite IncurSION of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; <http://www.aljazeeraatalk.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-24703.html>, March 19, 2007; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamirran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>; http://shiaunion.com/rabita/shia_world/filisteen/filisteen.htm; <http://www.aqaed.com/mostabser/shenasname/2mw/2mw06.html>.

¹¹² Ha'aretz, March 18, 2008; An interview with Muhammad Shahada from a report on the "Palestinian *mutashayyi'* leader, Muhammad Shahada," <http://www.14masom.com/mostabsiron/f039.htm>.

9. Ashraf Amuna, who lives in Daburiyya, northern Israel, and heads the Ja'fari Association (Al-Jam'iyya al-Ja'fariyya). The association holds an Israeli license, and it has founded the Prophet's Husayniyya (Husayniyyat al-Rasul al-A'zam) and the Al-Zahra' Library (Maktabat al-Zahra'), in addition to a publication, *Al-Sabil*.
10. Muhammad 'Abd al-Fattah al-Ghawanma, formerly a senior official in the PIJ. He served as Fathi Shiqaqi's aide for four years, and currently heads the Supreme Shiite Council in Palestine (Al-Majlis al-Shi'i al-A'la fi Filastin), which will be discussed later. He is said to have been influenced by the Shi'a as a result of his contacts with Hizballah prisoners while he was staying in an Israeli prison. Al-Ghawanma lives in the Jilazun refugee camp in Ramallah, and has declared that he intends to build a Shiite *husayniyya* in the city.
11. Engineer Mu'tasam Zaki, formerly a member of the radical organization Hizb al-Tahrir. He claims that between the years 2004-2007 the Shi'a was spread in several places in the Gaza Strip, and to a lesser extent in the West Bank. He says there are a few dozen Shiites in the West Bank cities Qalqilya, Nablus and Tulkarm, which Zaki considers an achievement. He thinks most of the new converts were influenced by Nasrallah's triumphs against Israel.
12. Dr. As'ad Wahid al-Qasim, a former MB member. He turned Shiite while he was studying in the Philippines, thanks to Iranian missionary activity in the country. He has written several books on the Shi'a and maintains that the *tashayyu'* in Palestine can hardly be considered a phenomenon, and is certainly not even close to the situation in Egypt, Sudan or Syria. His positive view of the *mut'a* (pleasure) marriage that is approved in the Shi'a has been quite controversial.¹¹³
13. Dr. Zuhayr Ghazawi, who has written about Islamic and Shiite issues.¹¹⁴
14. Dr. Dalal Mahmud al-Salti, who was going through a gradual process of *tashayyu'*, which was accelerated in 1986. She is said to be exploited by Shiite elements in order to draw new believers.¹¹⁵

According to Ulfat 'Abd Rabbuh from *Al-Haqiqa*, PIJ members get promoted in the organization's rank structure only by their affiliation to the Shi'a. The Sunni members reportedly suffer from exclusion, and sometimes scores are settled with them through violence and use of weapons. There has been at least one incident during which a PIJ member was murdered by his Shiite comrades.¹¹⁶

3. The Supreme Shiite Council in Palestine: A Phenomenon or an Ephemeral Body?

In spring 2006 it was reported that Muhammad 'Abd al-Fattah al-Ghawanma, a former PIJ activist, was going to found a new body called The Supreme Shiite Council in Palestine (Al-Majlis al-Shi'i al-A'la fi Filastin). Al-Ghawanma said that the new organization will invest its efforts in tightening the relations with Iran, Hizballah and the Iraqi Shiites, and that he was cooperating with the Shiites in Egypt. He denied any rumors regarding the Iranian funding of this council. In a pamphlet that was distributed in Ramallah it was said that in the framework of the global Islamic plan Iran's ambition is to establish an Islamic Caliphate with Jerusalem as its capital. The new organization is defined as a new Islamic missionary project (*mashru' Islami da'awi*) that will be carried out inside Palestine, among its government and people. According to Sabah al-Musawi, Head of the Political Bureau of the Ahwaz Arab Renaissance Party (AARP), this council was established by the PIJ, an organization loyal to Iran and whose leader, Ramadan Shalah, had converted to Shi'a even before he was appointed as Shiqaqi's successor. Regarding al-Ghawanma, al-Musawi claims that the former turned Shiite back in 1979. Al-Musawi maintains that al-Ghawanma's missionary project is the Iranian plan for Palestine that was already published in 1998 by Ramadan Shalah, and that in fact the new council was calling for an Imamate rather than Caliphate, information that reinforces the assumptions regarding a clear

¹¹³ <http://www.alasr.ws/index.cfm?method=home.com&contentID=8891>.

¹¹⁴ <http://islamicfeqh.com/al-menhaj/dalilmen/almen/02.htm>.

¹¹⁵ <http://www.althqin.net/forum/archive/index.php/t-5251.htm>; http://classic.omeedia.co.il/Show_Article_Print.asp?DynamicContentID=3399.

¹¹⁶ Ulfat 'Abd Rabbuh, "Influanza al-Tashayyu' al-Farisi fi Filastin," (The Iranian Conversion to Shi'a's Influenza in Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, April 3, 2006, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=81>.

Iranian influence. According to al-Musawi, Hamas was furious about this council's pamphlet, saying that any attempt by this group to establish a power base in Gaza and the West Bank would be thwarted. Hamas resented al-Ghwanma's attacks against al-Qa'ida and his calls for improving relations with the Iraqi Shiites. Al-Musawi claims that there is no precedence for an organization that tries to inflame a sectarian *fitna* in Palestine, and he blames Iran for these moves.¹¹⁷

Al-Haqiqa's Tariq Dilwani claims that whoever deals with the Shiite expansion in the Muslim world can hardly find the establishment of the Shiite Council an innovation or a surprise, in light of Iran's long lasting investment in disseminating the Shiite *madhhab* in the Arab and Muslim world, including Palestine, through support of jihad and the Palestinian resistance. Dilwani recalls other eras in Palestine's history when the Shiite creed was spread among the country's inhabitants, e.g. in the eleventh century, under the 'Ubaydi Shiite-Isma'ili state that ruled the greater Syria (al-Sham), and during the eighteenth century, under Ahmad Basha al-Jazzar, the local warlord that ruled parts of Palestine on behalf of the Ottomans, in light of the economic distress people had suffered at the time.¹¹⁸

Anti-Shiite sources regard al-Ghwanma to be a fifth column.¹¹⁹ *Al-Rasid* claims the council is a Shiite missionary attempt to spread its deviant dogma and harm the Sunni religious symbols and beliefs, especially with Palestine being a Sunni land. On the one hand, the Shiites' reputation in the Arab and Muslim world is quite bad in light of their conspired cooperation with the Americans in Iraq, the destruction of Lebanon by Hizballah and what seems to be the Shiites' accumulation of power throughout the region. On the other hand, this so-called "phenomenon" is rather marginal in Palestine. Those who establish organizations such as the Shiite Council use bombastic names in order to make the impression that the number of Shiites is much higher than it is in reality. *Al-Rasid* claims that on the surface there is no room for concern since the number of actual converts and Shiites is negligible. Still, people must be cautious since the aim of spreading the Shi'a in Palestine and in the Lebanese refugee camps is to incite a Palestinian civil war that will shove aside the struggle against Israel.¹²⁰ Dr. Salim Salama, a Palestinian MP and former Head of Palestine's 'Ulama Association (Rabitat 'Ulama Filastin), says one has to wonder regarding the existence of a group that deviates from the Palestinian Sunni consensus. He believes this is a conspiracy linked to the Israeli intelligence, since past history shows that the Israeli Mossad has been recruiting undercover agents who used nationalistic names to cover for their treason.¹²¹

4. The Curse of the Prophet's Companions and the PIJ (January 2007)

In January 2007 it was reported that the Palestinian newspaper *Al-Istiqala*, which is affiliated with the PIJ, had published in its literature column an article full of incitement against a member of the Prophet's *Sahaba*, Abu Sufyan Ibn Harb. The article blames Abu Sufyan for bribing a poet called al-A'sha with a hundred camels, thus preventing that supposedly great poet from joining Islam. Abu Sufyan, head of the Quraysh tribe, had done this before he

¹¹⁷ Sabah al-Musawi, "Al-Majlis al-Shi'i al-A'la: Fitnat Iran al-Jadida fi Filastin," (The Supreme Shiite Council: The New Iranian-Instigated Civil War in Palestine) *Al-Haqiqa*, March 9, 2006, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=82>; *Al-Ayyam*, March 3, 2006, quoted in *Al-Haqiqa*, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=80>; Tariq Dilwani, "Hamas wa-al-Ikhwan wa-Iran," (Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=402>; <http://elaph.com/ElaphWeb/AsdaElaph/2006/3/133677.htm>; Khaled Abu Toameh, "New Shiite Group Worries Hamas, PA," *Jerusalem Post*, March 6, 2006, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&cid=1139395542566>.

¹¹⁸ Tariq Dilwani, "Hamas wa-al-Ikhwan wa-Iran," (Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood and Iran) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=402>.

¹¹⁹ Ulfat 'Abd Rabbuh, "Influwanza al-Tashayyu' al-Farisi fi Filastin," (The Iranian Conversion to Shi'a's Influenza in Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, April 3, 2006, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=81>.

¹²⁰ "Al-Tajammu'at al-Shi'iyya fi al-Mintaqa al-'Arabiyya: al-Ghazw al-Shi'i li-Filastin," (Shiite Populations in the Arab Theater: The Shiite Incursion of Palestine) *Al-Rasid*, No. 53, (Dhu al-Qa'da 1428 H; November 2007), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=56; 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Ramli, "Al-Taghalghul al-Shi'i fi Filastin," (The Shiite Penetration of Palestine), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=50>; Hamid 'Abd al-Rahman, "Al-Shi'a wa-Filastin: Ma Zala al-Ikhtiraq Mustamirran," (The Shi'a and Palestine: The Invasion Continues), *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=90>; "Muhawala li-Nashr al-Madhhab al-Shi'i," (An Attempt to Spread the Shiite *Madhhab*) *Al-Haqiqa*, August 21, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=514>.

¹²¹ *Al-Ayyam*, March 3, 2006, quoted in *Al-Haqiqa*, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=80>.

converted to Islam. According to *Al-Haqiqa*, a man's wrong deeds are annulled as soon as he converts to Islam, and therefore *Al-Istiqlal* should not have slandered Abu Sufyan's reputation. Furthermore, the website claims that any vilification against a *Sahaba* member turns the curser into a person who has abandoned his faith (*kharaja min al-din*) and denied his belonging to the Islamic community (*maraqa min millat al-Islam*). *Al-Haqiqa* claims that in one of his speeches Hasan Nasrallah (defined here as leader of the Party of Satan, Hizb al-Shaytan, a term that is used in order to slander a man who claims he is the leader of the Party of God, Hizballah) cursed Abu Sufyan and claimed he had been one of the Hypocrites (*Al-Munafiqun*), since he had only converted to Islam outwardly, but as a matter of fact he had been an infidel who wanted to destroy Islam, according to Nasrallah.¹²²

In what seems to be a Hamas attempt to distinguish itself from the PIJ, Dr. Salih al-Raqab, Deputy Minister of Religious Endowments in the Hamas government, said that dishonoring the *Sahaba* is forbidden and that all of the Prophet's Companions deserve to be treated with full respect. Furthermore, said al-Raqab, slandering the *Sahaba* equals vilifying Islam, since the Prophet's Companions were raised and educated by the Prophet himself. He said that those who were responsible for these harmful words would be severely punished. He recalled that the Ministry of Endowments had dismissed a preacher who had dishonored Mu'awiyya Ibn Abu Sufyan's (the first Caliph of the Umayyad Dynasty, ruled in 661-680 AD, after the assassination of 'Ali) name, and promised to put on trial anyone who would defame the Prophet's Companions in the future.¹²³

In order to summarize the chapter that deals with Iran's religious and cultural influence upon the Sunni radical organizations, one should read the blunt column of the Syrian intellectual and *Al-Sharq al-Awsat's* columnist, Ghassan al-Imam. He blames Iran for exploiting the Arab regimes' limpness in order to invade deep into the Arab world, while utilizing the Shiite principle of *taqiyya* (dissimulation). According to al-Imam, Iran's far-reaching goal is to destroy the Arab regimes while concealing the Iranian regime's true intentions. And so, both in the West Bank and Gaza and in Syria, Iran is funding Sunni Jihadi organizations in order to turn the armed resistance from a means to end Israeli occupation to a permanent goal. In Lebanon, Hizballah serves as a Shiite spearhead in the midst of the Sunni world, while Iran is enforcing the armed organization's dictatorship upon the Sunni-Christian majority, thus delaying any vital political activity in the country. Throughout the Arab world there have been Iranian attempts to spread the Shiite *madhhab* in order to tear into pieces the religious and social peace, through Shiite educational institutions and clandestine societies that disseminate the Shi'a in Palestine, Egypt and the Maghreb, masking it all splendidly by talking about religious fraternity and good neighboring. Al-Imam does not wish to declare a *takfir* (declare someone as an unbeliever) against the Shiite *madhhab*; however, he does complain against the lack of any Arab comprehensive strategy to deal with the danger of Iran's penetration into the Arab theatre.¹²⁴

One way or the other, it seems that the religious and political affiliations of some of the PIJ (and to a much lesser extent of Hamas) leaders with the Shi'a and Iran are integrated into one another and nurture each other. The mere discussion on conversion to Shi'a and that creed's place in Islam raise awareness regarding the Shiite world, and somehow it may legitimize the Shiite-Iranian activity in the Arab and Muslim world as a whole.

¹²² "Sahifa Mahaliyya Talmuz wa-Tu'arrad bi-al-Sahabi al-Jalil Abi Sufyan, Radi Allah 'anhu," (A Local Newspaper Slanders Abu Sufya, May God's Will Rest upon Him) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=349>.
"Tuhmat Hamas bi-al-Tashayyu': Tasrihat Mas'ulin," (Hamas's Accused of Tashayyu': The Organization's Leaders' Statements) *Al-Haqiqa*, September 8, 2007, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=523>.

¹²⁴ Ghassan al-Imam, "Ayna al-Istratijiyya al-'Arabiyya fi Muwajahat al-Ikhtiraq al-Irani?" (Where is the Arab Strategy vis-à-vis the Iranian Invasion?) *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 26, 2006.

F. Iran's Economic Aid to the Organizations

Iran-Hamas

The primary stimulus with which Iran influences Hamas is through money transfers to the organization's leadership in Damascus and its government in the Palestinian Territories (first it was the Hamas government immediately after the 2006 elections and after the collapse of the Mecca Agreement and Hamas's takeover Gaza it has been Isma'il Haniyya's government in the Strip that has continued to enjoy Iran's financial support). Iran is Hamas's main financial backrest, even though it is not the sole source of support, since Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Kuwait also take an important role in this. As we have mentioned above, since 1993 Hamas was receiving an annual 30 million dollars in aid from Iran, in addition to military training. In the passing of years, this economic support has increased further and further.¹²⁵

Speaking at an event organized by the World Islamic Movement and the Association for Defending the Palestinian Nation in honor of the *shuhada* in April 2006, Abu Usama 'Abd al-Mu'ti, Hamas's Representative in Iran, said the organization got an empty treasury when it took control over the PA. He said the governmental deficit had been higher than two billion dollars (in June 2006 Mahmud al-Zahar reported it had been 1.3 billion dollars), and that the new government had to feed and support about 160,000 civil servants, 30,000 of which had started to work in government offices only a short while after the elections by the order of the Palestinian Presidency that was allegedly trying to overpower the Hamas government financially.¹²⁶ As a result of the economic distress on which 'Abd al-Mu'ti had reported, Khamene'i decided to transfer emergency aid to the Hamas government of 50 million dollars.¹²⁷

Hamas received more breathing space a short while afterwards when in the aftermath of his June 2006 visit in Tehran the Hamas government's Foreign Minister, Mahmud al-Zahar, announced that the visit resulted in bilateral agreements between Iran and the Palestinian government on political and economic cooperation. Iran also promised to erect two hospitals and four clinics for the Palestinians, in addition to assistance in providing health services in the West Bank and Gaza. The Iranians said they would help supply electricity to the PA, and promised to send 300 different kinds of vehicles to the local municipalities.¹²⁸ They Iranians expressed a commitment to erect a new port in Gaza, carry out an agricultural land irrigation project, fix aircrafts that were out of order and supply the PA with two brand new ones. Iran also promised to grant scholarships to Palestinian students.¹²⁹ According to a Hamas spokesman in the West Bank, Iran promised it would pay off the Palestinian government's budget deficits on a regular basis.¹³⁰

In November 2006 Foreign Minister al-Zahar announced that Tehran had given the Hamas government more than 120 million dollars in cash, and that the Iranians intended to give the Palestinian government an even greater sum of money in the near future.¹³¹ Most of the money was smuggled to the Territories in suitcases carried by Hamas officials or via tunnels from both sides of the city of Rafah (divided between Egypt and the Gaza Strip). These money

¹²⁵ Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servevelocity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

¹²⁶ *Mehr News Agency*, April 19, 2006.

¹²⁷ *Baztab News Agency* (Iran), April 20, 2006.

¹²⁸ During the Palestinian Transportation Minister's visit to Tehran, those 300 Iran-made vehicles were indeed handed over to the Palestinians.

ILNA News Agency (Iran), June 10, 2006.

¹²⁹ http://www.palestine-info.com/arabic/palestoday/dailynews/2006/june2006/14_6/details6.htm#7, June 14, 2006.

¹³⁰ *ILNA News Agency*, June 10, 2006; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servevelocity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

¹³¹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, November 17, 2006; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 3, 2006; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servevelocity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

transfers started in April 2006 after the economic blockade was enforced upon the Hamas-led PA, with an initial Iranian grant of 50 million dollars.¹³²

Upon his return from visiting several Arab and Muslim countries, primarily Iran, in December 2006, Israel did not allow PM Haniyya to enter the PA territory while he was carrying suitcases that were loaded with money he had successfully fundraised for Hamas. It seems that Haniyya arrived at the Rafah passageway with approximately 35 million dollars in cash, although throughout his 16-day journey he managed to raise about 300 million dollars, a quarter of which was given to him by Iran, which announced that the money was compensation for the Western embargo over the PA (in fact, the Iranians promised Hamas 100 million dollars in the year 2007 alone). The Iranian financial aid was given to Hamas in order to pay a six-month salary to government employees, Hamas's security forces and families of prisoners – a total amount of 45 million dollars for these purposes; 60 million dollars were to be given to 100,000 unemployed through monthly stipends of a hundred dollars each month for half a year; 15 million dollars were allocated to the reconstruction of the government buildings and offices that were destroyed in Israeli attacks; some money was also given for the construction of training camps to the Hamas forces and for compensating families whose houses were destroyed by the Israeli Air Force. After prolonged negotiations mediated by the Egyptians Haniyya was allowed to enter the Gaza Strip, provided he did not carry with him the cash money he was holding in the suitcases. The money was left in the hands of two other members of the Palestinian delegation that came with Haniyya that remained at the Egyptian side of the border.¹³³

Hamas's boasting of the Iranian economic aid despite the international embargo has been criticized and mocked by anti-Shiite sources and religious scholars. The former maintained that the annual Arab aid to the organization significantly surpasses the Iranian aid, and that between mid-2006 and mid-2007 Hamas received half a billion dollars from the Arab states that have traditionally supported it. These countries, especially the Gulf States, are extremely sensitive to Hamas's relations with Tehran, and maintain that there is an essential fault in the organization's conduct, since the latter has always been regarded as the defender of Arab dignity. The Hamas-Tehran relations also upset clerics and religious authorities, who despise what they perceive as the Iranian "fox" who was gaining more and more benefits from the current situation.¹³⁴

In the aftermath of President Ahmadinejad's visit to Damascus at the end of July 2007, more than a month after Hamas's takeover in Gaza, an anonymous Iranian source reported that in the year 2007 alone Hamas received approximately 340 million dollars from Iran.¹³⁵ It seems that despite the tightened embargo over Gaza after the June 2007 events, Iranian money kept flowing to Hamas in cunning, twisted ways. Mahmud al-Zahar himself revealed that he managed to carry with him 42 million dollars in cash he had received from the Iranians into the Gaza Strip via the border with Egypt.¹³⁶

Iran-PIJ

It is difficult to estimate what exactly is the extent of Iran's current aid that goes directly and obliquely to the PIJ. It is possible to assume that some of the Iranian aid to the Hamas government is intended, as far as Tehran is concerned,

¹³² *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 17, 2006.

¹³³ According to Iranian sources, during Haniyya's visit to Tehran he was promised a grant of a quarter billion dollars. It was also reported that the Basij forces handed over to Haniyya five billion rial (over half a million dollars in the May 2008 exchange rate). <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/12/D02813B2-0E99-4C9B-8DCD-E4D28A2FD915.html>; <http://www.ima.ir/en/news/view/line-17/0612137821115003.htm>; *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, December 15, 2006; *Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 15, 2006.

¹³⁴ "Alaqaat Hamas ma'a Tahrān: Man al-Rabih wa-Man al-Khasir," (The Hamas-Tehran Relations: Who is the Winner and who is the Loser) *Al-Haqiqa*, no date, <http://www.haqeeqa.com/index.aspx?status=prodetail&aid=420>.

¹³⁵ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 21, 2007.

¹³⁶ Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servevelocity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

for the PIJ. However, due to its desire to keep the money under its own control, Hamas restricts the allocations of money to the PIJ. According to an anonymous Iranian source, Iran annually gives the PIJ about 90 million dollars.¹³⁷ In an interview to *Al-Sharq* (published by *Al-Jihad*) in July 2007, PIJ Secretary General Salah admitted that Iran was financially supporting the Palestinian people with its various organizations and its government. However, he stressed that out of hundreds of millions of dollars that were given to the Hamas government nothing was allocated to the PIJ. Nevertheless, it is indicated from the interview that the PIJ gets money directly from Iran for the sake of families of *shuhada* and prisoners or those families whose homes were ruined in Israeli air strikes.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 21, 2007.

¹³⁸ *Al-Jihad*, No. 33, July 2007.

G. Iran's Military Support of the Organizations

All the matters of Hamas's armed wing, the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, are handled by its charismatic, dominant commander Ahmad al-Ja'bari, who until recently was considered to be Hamas's omnipotent chief of staff. He has been in charge of decision-making and has controlled money transfers to the armed wing, in addition to giving the operative orders regarding the launching of Qassam rockets at Israel. He used to be very close to the more radical faction inside Hamas's political leadership, and especially to former foreign minister Mahmud al-Zahar and Sa'id Siyam, who used to be interior minister in the first Hamas government. When al-Zahar returned in the summer of 2006 from a fundraising tour abroad, a great share of the money al-Zahar had brought with him reached directly to al-Ja'bari. One of the assumptions is that al-Ja'bari and his comrades have been reluctant to adhere to directives coming from Damascus, and have also tended to exclude Isma'il Haniyya from participating in the decision-making process. As we have mentioned above, it seems that al-Ja'bari has been able to enforce his opinion on Mash'al and others in the matter of the Shalit deal. He was also in charge of the setting up of the Murabitun unit, another Hamas armed militia that turned into the Tanfidhiyya after Hamas's rise to power. Under al-Ja'bari's command Hamas has been striving to reach the military capabilities of Hizballah, under tight supervision and guidance from Iran and Lebanon.¹³⁹ It has been reported lately that relations between al-Zahar and al-Ja'bari have become tense in light of what seems to be the former's revulsion at the latter's continuous disobedience to the political leadership's provisions. It also appears that al-Ja'bari authoritarian rule over the armed wing has been challenged by other elements inside 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam, headed by 'Imad 'Aql.¹⁴⁰

In the aftermath of the 2006 Lebanon War Hamas and Iran became much closer, both openly and clandestinely, especially in the military spectrum, so much so that it seems the organization is becoming more and more identical with the IRGC, and has turned, in terms of intelligence and military affairs, into a full-fledged operative arm of Iran, similarly to Hizballah. The latter has also been operating Unit 1800 that carries out terror attacks in the Territories and inside the Green Line (i.e. Israel in its pre-1967 borders). At the same time, Iran has been recruiting wounded Palestinians, who went to Iran to get treated, in order to collect intelligence on Israel and the situation in the Territories. Iran has also set up an infrastructure of informers and collaborators to facilitate the activity of its terror network and smuggle weapons to the Palestinian organizations. There have also been some Palestinians who have been recruited via Hizballah when they reach Lebanon to visit their families in the refugee camps.¹⁴¹

In October 2006 Tehran hosted the Palestinian Interior Minister and a Hamas official, Sa'id Siyam. In addition to his assistants and advisers, he was accompanied by Abu Usama 'Abd al-Mu'ti, Hamas's Representative in Iran, and Abu 'Ubayda al-Jarrah, Commander of the Tanfidhiyya Forces. Siyam met with Khamene'i and Ahmadinejad and was promised generous military and financial support in order to improve the armed wing's operational capability. The Tanfidhiyya Forces were also promised that Iran would train its security personnel in the Iranian Police's training camps and facilities.¹⁴² According to one of the sources, Iran pledged to train a rapid deployment force of 6,500 Hamas men in Hizballah's warfare tactics, including the use of missiles, especially AT missiles with destruction capabilities that were used in the 2006 War against Israel. The Hamas force was intended to go to Iran for a six-week training course in the IRGC facilities. Iran even said at the time it would allocate 60 million dollars for training and weapons.¹⁴³ Accusations of this kind were hurled against Hamas by 'Azzam al-Ahmad, a Fatah official and Deputy PM in the national unity government, after the June 2007 events. He claimed that Siyam had signed a security

¹³⁹ *Ma'ariv*, June 1, 2007; *Ha'aretz*, October 19, 2007; *Ha'aretz*, November 13, 2007.

¹⁴⁰ See footnote 65.

¹⁴¹ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, March 14, 2007; *Ma'ariv*, March 13, 2008.

¹⁴² www.palestine-info.com, October 13, 2006; Meyrav Wurmser, "Iran-Hamas Relations: The Growing Threat of a Radical Religious Coalition," September 19, 2007, http://zope06.v.servecity.net/hjs/sections/middleeast/iran_hamas_relations.

¹⁴³ <http://english.farsnews/printable.php?nn+8507200246>; <http://www.iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/printarticle.pl?l=en&y=2006&m=10&d=19&a=6>.

cooperation pact with Tehran, and that Hamas was actually a mercenary force, operating according to regional powers' directives, primarily under Iranian orders to be exact.¹⁴⁴

According to a European intelligence report from October 2006, Iran and Syria demanded that the Hamas leadership give a clear order to its security forces to oppress any rebellion among the PA security forces loyal to Fatah that demanded their paychecks at the time. Hamas took to the street rallies in support of Siyam, a move that resulted in clashes between Hamas and Fatah forces. Iran offered Hamas's exiled leadership money and weapons in exchange for continuing the oppression of the Fatah demonstrations. The offer was rejected by the Gaza leadership, especially by Haniyya. Still, some of Hamas's armed wings commanders started to carry out this mission, until Haniyya ordered a withdrawal of all Tanfidhiyya Forces. The report also indicated that Iran offered Mash'al hundreds of submachine guns, rifles and explosives, in addition to sending Iranian experts on setting up bunkers and tunnels and training Hamas forces in special camps in Syria. Iran sent an IRGC anonymous official to meet with Mash'al to discuss plans to arm Hamas in the presence of a Syrian intelligence official. The report assumed that it was in Iran's best interests to encourage a Palestinian civil war, since a unity government and intra-Palestinian tranquility would harm Tehran's interests in the region. The report also stressed that tension among the Palestinian factions would take the pressure off Iran's nuclear program, and also make it easier on Syria, which was preoccupied with domestic crises.¹⁴⁵

It is assumed that Khalid Mash'al admires Hasan Nasrallah's modes of action, and has been trying to persuade the Shiite organization to cooperate with Hamas in carrying out terror attacks against Israeli targets. However, Nasrallah has been dissuaded from such cooperation, fearing it might jeopardize Hizballah's position vis-à-vis its Iranian patron. On the other hand, according to another assumption it is actually Hamas that is not very content with a possible interference by Hizballah in its affairs, especially as far as the Shalit deal is concerned, trying to prevent the Shiite organization from getting a foothold in Palestine.¹⁴⁶ In any case, in January 2007 a senior Palestinian intelligence official and one of President Mahmud 'Abbas's confidants claimed that Hamas activists were going to Iran and Lebanon for advanced military training under IRGC and Hizballah auspices, preparing for an armed struggle against both Israel and Fatah forces in the Gaza Strip. In an interview to the World Net Daily website (January 2007), Abu 'Abdallah, one of the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam commanders, said that Hamas was importing missiles and the knowhow to launch them, in order to prepare for a war against Israel. He said that months of a ceasefire with Israel had enabled Hamas to profoundly upgrade its military capabilities. Other activists claimed that Hizballah was helping to export long-range missiles and in guerrilla warfare training. In addition, these activists reported that Hizballah was holding operational cells in Sinai, since the peninsula is an excellent locus for training, exchanging knowledge and meeting with the Palestinian organizations' counterparts. They said Hizballah was teaching them how to build underground bunkers inside Gaza, similar to those that had been built in Southern Lebanon before the war and were exposed during the fighting with Hizballah forces.¹⁴⁷

According to an Iranian source, in the beginning of February 2007, Fatah's security forces arrested seven Iranian weapons' experts during a raid on the Islamic University, Hamas's stronghold in Gaza.¹⁴⁸ According to a Shin-Bet (Israel's General Security Service) report, since the beginning of 2007 Iran has had a leading role in financing and assisting the Hamas government and the organization's operational units, especially via Hizballah agents that have been taking advantage of the fact that Israel was no longer controlling the Rafah passageway in order to get into

¹⁴⁴ An interview with 'Azzam al-Ahmad, *Jordan TV*, June 16, 2007, quoted in <http://www.mideastwire.com/search.php>.

¹⁴⁵ "Sinariohat al-Harb al-Ahliyya fi Filastin," (Palestinian Civil War Scenarios) *Al-Watan al-'Arabi*, October 11, 2006, quoted in *Al-Rasid*, No. 40, (Shawwal 1427 H; October 2006), http://www.alrased.net/print_topic.php?topic_id=466.

¹⁴⁶ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, June 30, 2006; *Ha'aretz*, October 19, 2007.

¹⁴⁷ www.worldnetdaily.com, January 3, 2007.

¹⁴⁸ <http://iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/news.pl?l=en&y=2007&m=02&d=02&a=12>.

Gaza and train local terror cells. Hamas activists have adopted Hizballah's operational patterns, as these were implemented in Lebanon during the war in 2006.¹⁴⁹

Major-General Yoav Galant, Commander of the Southern Command in the IDF, said in March 2007 that Iran was supporting Hamas in Gaza by supplying it with technology, money and direct military training in several arenas in the Middle East, especially in Gaza. In March 2007 Yuval Diskin, Head of the Shin-Bet, said Iran was providing Hamas activists with advanced military training, which was a "strategic danger" to Israel's national security. He added that Hamas was sending dozens of its fighters from Gaza to Iran for prolonged training periods, promising to send additional hundreds of men. According to Diskin, Iran was supplying Hamas with missiles, and the IRGC were involved in improving the rockets' ranges.¹⁵⁰

An interview given by Abu al-'Abbas, who was defined as one of Hizballah's field commanders, to *Filastin al-Muslima* in August 2007, can be perceived as a short guidebook for a guerrilla organization fighting Israel on the methods it should use against the IDF. As part of Abu al-'Abbas's psychological warfare attempts, he expresses his utter contempt for the Israeli soldier as opposed to a glorification of Hizballah's fighters, in addition to stressing the organization's size advantage compared with the clumsy, cumbersome IDF. He brags about Hizballah's creating a new school of warfare that combines guerrilla and regular warfare with an immobile defense.¹⁵¹

During the months after Hamas's takeover in Gaza, the results of Iran's and Hizballah's efforts to upgrade Hamas's military power were already discernible, not only because of the improved weapons, but also thanks to a thorough study of the lessons of the Lebanon War's. The presence in Gaza of terror experts, who had been trained in Lebanon and Iran, helped Hamas in setting up its command and control system. In every sector of activity against the IDF, Hamas has set up a chain of command that operated observation posts, infantry and AT units, just like Hizballah had done in Lebanon during the war.¹⁵²

Hamas employs some 20,000 armed persons in the Gaza Strip; half of them are police and internal security forces and the rest are Tanfidhiyya and the 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (the armed wing). The quantity of rifles is ten times larger than the amount of fighters. The organization possesses machine guns, RPG missile launchers with high penetration, Concourse AT-10 advanced missiles that were used by Hizballah in Lebanon, and Sagger missiles. Hamas also holds large quantities of explosives for its charges industry. Hamas's military organization operates similarly to an infantry division combined with AT capability, ready both for attacking its adversary and for a defense battle with trenches. The division is made up of six territorial brigades that cover the entire Gaza Strip, with each brigade having its own battalions, companies and Special Forces for destruction, sniping, signaling, intelligence collection and observation units. Hamas holds a wide-range network of fortifications, with all the diggings carried out underneath the buildings in the midst of a dense population. Hamas has prepared underground pit-traps loaded with explosives and a surface obstacles' network with charges, AT ambushes, soil embankments and so forth.¹⁵³

In addition to that, the similarity between Hamas's and Hizballah's conduct with Iranian assistance has been manifest in terms of communications intelligence (COMINT), i.e. surveillance and eavesdropping to the enemy's radio networks. Hamas's intelligence infrastructure has grown rapidly in recent years. The organization's armed wing does not settle for specific operational intelligence (e.g. for a terror attack). Instead, it has set up a professional intelligence

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.ict.org.il/apage/9927.php>; <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0.7340.L-3369523.00.html>.

¹⁵⁰ <http://www.iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/printarticle.pl?l=en&y=2007&m=03&d=06&a=3>; <http://www.iranvajahan.net/cgi-bin/printarticle.pl?l=en&y=2007&m=03&d=07&a=7>; Ha'aretz, March 8, 2007.

¹⁵¹ *Filastin al-Muslima*, No. 8, August 2007.

¹⁵² *Ha'aretz*, October 30, 2007.

¹⁵³ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, December 14, 2007.

unit that includes observation posts along the border and the use of encrypted eavesdropping and communications facilities, some of which remained in Hamas's hands after the Fatah forces' escape from the Gaza Strip. Other than that, it is important to note that so far it was Hizballah that provided the Iranians with Hebrew speakers for their signals intelligence (SIGINT) and COMINT units. Now, Tehran can take advantage of the fact that there are plenty of Hebrew speakers among the Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza. The reward can be provided with more knowhow, equipment and technology made in Iran, thus turning Hamas into Iran's spearhead in terms of intelligence collection along Israel's borders (together with Hizballah).¹⁵⁴

In an interview to *The Sunday Times* in March 2008, one of 'Izz al-Din al-Qassam's most senior commanders revealed that hundreds of Hamas's fighters were training in Iran while the interview was taking place. He said that these fighters usually leave via Egypt and then Syria, from where they get to Tehran. On their way back from Iran their passports are not stamped for security reasons. According to that commander, approximately 300 men, the most brilliant minds in the organization, have been sent in the past two years to Iran. Half of them were still there during the interview, trained in the IRGC facilities, where they were learning how to make explosives and Qassam rockets from daily-used ingredients, and how to improve the destruction capability of the rockets that were launched at Israel. The other half of Hamas's fighters were back in Gaza after they had been trained for warfare on the battlefield, laying mines (Hamas managed to develop the Shawas 4 mine, based on Iranian knowhow), and high-level arms technology. They were also qualified to become snipers, and some of them even learned how to use trenches for warfare. All of this training has been identical in both level and equality to the training offered by Iran to Hizballah's fighters. The latter proved during the 2006 War their capability of digging tunnels and sneaking out of them at the Israeli forces' rear, attacking them successfully from behind while preserving the element of surprise. It comes up from the interview that since the implementation of the Disengagement Plan in the summer of 2005 Hamas's fighters have started their training in Iran. The latter has so far absorbed seven groups of fighters, each spending six months in the IRGC compounds. The most talented and qualified trainees remain in Iran for more training, and go back afterwards to Gaza to become trainers themselves. These trainers have so far trained more than 700 Hamas fighters in a compound in Syria (650 had already returned at the time of the interview, while 62 others were still in training), although the training that takes place in Syria are of a more basic level. Those among the 150 Hamas men that were staying in Iran, and who would have been found unqualified for fighting, were intended to become integrated into the organization's research units. According to the interviewed Hamas commander, the fighters who go to Iran solemnly swear not to reveal any details about their training over there, not even to their relatives. He boasted of the fact that 15,000 Hamas fighters were operating according to the Hizballah model, as street fighters, using no tanks or aircrafts.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Yedioth Ahronoth, January 11, 2008.

¹⁵⁵ Marie Colvin, "Hamas Wages Iran's Proxy War on Israel," *The Sunday Times*, March 9, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article3512014.ece.

H. Summary and Recommendations

The tightening of relations between Iran and Hamas, especially in the past two years, reflects a meeting of interests on both sides. On the one hand, the alliance with Hamas serves the interests of Iran, which strives to tighten its grip over another arena (besides Lebanon) where it may act both directly and indirectly against Israel, through Palestinian terrorism and the utilization of Palestinian radicalization not only against Israel and its interests, but also against any tendency for resolving conflicts in the region under American mediation. Iran has also been taking advantage of what it pretends to be its constant concern over the fate of Jerusalem and its involvement in the Palestinian issue in order to taunt the Arab regimes that have joined the embargo on Hamas and refused to back the organization. This way, Iran can claim that it is better than all the Sunni countries in its concern for Jerusalem and Palestine, thus legitimizing its pretentious aspiration to become the leader of the Muslim world, and blurring the differences between Sunnis and Shiites.

On the other hand, Hamas regards Iran as an ally, the support and political backing of which are tremendously important in light of the international isolation under which the organization and its Gaza-based government have been operating in the past two years. We have seen how the Iranian hug can have a restricting effect upon Hamas's moves. After each visit of the organization's officials to Tehran or meeting with Iranian leaders in Damascus Hamas's leaders tend to come up with a harsher tone and even more radical statements against Israel, not only in peace process issues but in specific matters such as the Gilad Shalit deal.

Furthermore, in the economic field Iran has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in Hamas (especially since the latter's rise to power in 2006), both with cash money and through financing civilian and military projects that were intended to help the Hamas government survive. Iran considers this support as a long term investment for the sake of mobilizing Hamas as an ally that will operate under its custody and patronage, thus serving Tehran's interests and adhering to its demands, especially where the Iranian policy vis-à-vis the US and Israel is concerned. As far as Hamas is concerned, Iranian aid is extremely vital due to the Gaza-based government's severe condition, the need to expand its armament efforts, the collapsing civilian infrastructure and the international siege. Hamas is therefore willing to pay in Israeli currency, which is usually in line with the organization's ideology that calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and denounce its very existence.

Militarily speaking, Iran's support of Hamas has not cost the former too much money or efforts. The Iranians focus mainly on military training in various facilities in Iran, Syria and Lebanon, and supplying the organizations with advanced weapons, including different kinds of rockets with upgraded ranges, explosives, etc. A part of this military support is carried out through Hizballah, which serves Iranian interests but also operates the Palestinian organizations out of its own internal interests. However, the value of Iran's and Hizballah's support for Hamas is enormous. The organization has profoundly upgraded its operational capabilities against Israel, and it has been proven in recent months, especially since the ousting of Fatah from Gaza in June 2007 and the intensification of battles between Hamas and the IDF in the months that followed, at least up until the recent ceasefire (June 2008).

As for the religious-cultural aspect, the Iranian "soft *tashayyu*" activity in the Palestinian arena has brought a few hundreds of Palestinians to convert to Shi'a in recent years. Other than Iran's active role in encouraging this phenomenon, there were other factors leading people to sympathize with the Shi'a so much so as to make them convert. One reason is Iran's strengthening position in the Arab and Muslim world in light of what is perceived to be the Islamic Revolution's victory and Iran's leading the anti-Western and anti-American camps, due to its ambition to achieve regional hegemony that will position it on the first line of world powers. Another reason for the Shiite and Iranian religious-cultural influence stems from the perception in Arab and Muslim public opinion, according to which Hizballah had made Israel withdraw from Southern Lebanon in the year 2000, and defeated it in the 2006 War.

It is important to note, however, that manifestations of *tashayyu'* among Palestinians in the refugee camps in Lebanon and the Territories, whether it be individuals, organizations' leaders or groups, have been harshly criticized both in the Arab world and by the Palestinians themselves, especially Hamas's rivals in Fatah and radical Islamic elements. Therefore, Hamas's formal position regarding the organization's links with Shiite Iran has been quite apologetic. Hamas's leaders have emphasized their allegiance to the Sunni dogma and denied any religious dimensions linked to the organization's alliance with Iran. The controversy on this issue has aroused heated religious polemics. It seems that in this framework the Palestinian public has been exposed to the Shiite belief, and this very exposure might, under certain circumstances, encourage some of them to convert to Shi'a.

As for the PIJ, this organization's status is a bit different. It seems that Iran has put most of its financial and military efforts in Hamas's basket, among other things due to the fact that the latter is the strongest and most important organization in the Palestinian theatre, but also because the PIJ's support of Iran is somewhat taken for granted, contrary to Hamas, which is perceived as an independent body that at the very best is ideologically identified with the MB. In addition to that, the PIJ's bonds with Iran and the Shiite Islamic Revolution preceded Iran's becoming close to Hamas, and date back to the early days of the Revolution. In many ways, the PIJ has been the avant-garde force in its support for the Iranian revolution and in some of its' activists' joining the Shiite creed. The PIJ leaders may admit that there are theological differences of opinion between Sunnis and Shiites, but they also point to the fact that even the strictest religious scholars have not excluded the Shiites from the Islamic nation. Furthermore, the PIJ's affiliation with Iran is very strong, ideologically, culturally, politically and militarily. The organization's leaders contact the Iranian regime's leadership on a daily basis, and quite frequently tend to join the meetings of Hamas's leaders with the Iranians. The PIJ receives financial aid, a part of which is transferred to families of members of the organization who were killed and families of prisoners. Similarly to Hamas, PIJ activists also take part in military training courses held by Iran and Hizballah, and receive military equipment and weapons.

The Iran-Syria-Hizballah-Hamas-PIJ axis sometimes seems like a religiously impossible set of alliances: Hamas, a Sunni Islamic organization associates itself with Shiite Hizballah and operates as a proxy of Shiite Iran and the secular Ba'th regime of Syria that oppressed its local MB movement in a merciless operation. Shiite Iran, striving to become a regional superpower, is not discouraged by any ally – be it Shiite, Sunni or secular – that can be utilized as its surrogate or proxy, in order to help it fight against its multiple adversaries – the US, Israel, Saudi Arabia (Iran's primary rival in the region since both aspire to lead the Muslim world) – and destabilize them. It is possible therefore to conclude that Iran's affinity with the various Palestinian organizations and other regional elements represents a Shiite patron's success in spinning a web of multifaceted alliances with an 'Alawite regime (Syria), a Shiite organization (Hizballah) and Palestinian (Islamic) Sunni organizations that also operate as national liberation movements, the way they perceive themselves.

As a part of this network of alliances, Hamas represents a client that helps its Iranian patron to undermine the legitimacy of governments throughout the region, and is therefore a major threat not only for the PA government in the West Bank, but for the regimes in Egypt and Jordan as well, with these countries deeply influenced by Hamas's triumphs that may serve as a signal for the Islamic forces in Cairo and Amman that there is a worthy role model of a Sunni Islamic government they could emulate if they only wanted to.

Future Scenarios

Has Hamas chosen or will it choose to abandon the Saudi Arabia-Egypt-Jordan-Qatar axis in favor of the Iran-Syria-Hizballah axis in a clear and decisive manner? It seems that neither in the short-term nor in the medium-term will it be realistic to predict a severance of Hamas's relations with the axis of the more moderate Arab states. Hamas considers itself to be first and foremost a struggling national liberation movement that runs its battles inside Palestine, not in the ideological sphere of relations between Sunna and Shi'a. Hence the organization's policies can be perceived as opportunistic, aiming at establishing good relations with whoever can help it politically, militarily and economically. On the one hand, the desire to get financial support is not the sole aspiration of Hamas, but is also shared by Fatah and other organizations. On the other hand, whoever hands over the money wants to control the policies of its client, which makes the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia for regional hegemony much more understandable in this context, with both being the primary financiers of Hamas.

Generally speaking, the safer Hamas feels from Israeli operations against it, the more forceful it gets and the more belligerent and aggressive its statements become. Under these circumstances Hamas may claim it could make Israel cave in and succumb to the will of the "resistance", which makes the organization's leaders' self confidence and self esteem grow much stronger. Moreover, when Hamas feels the international embargo over its rule in Gaza loosened to a certain extent, its satisfaction is usually expressed in radicalizing its positions vis-à-vis Israel, the US and the West. The more Hamas's standing improves, the more radicalized it might get. The Shalit deal is a good example: with Iran's tailwind and in the context of the termination of the Goldwasser-Regev deal between Hizballah and Israel (July 2008), Hamas has only recently declared it will not be willing to compromise on the prisoners it demands that Israel release in the framework of the Egyptian-mediated negotiations, thus admitting that Hizballah's intransigence has inspired it to follow suit until it gets all its demands.

Isolation and economic bankruptcy already pushed Hamas into the corner in the past (October 2006), and made many of its leaders think that the organization would not last much longer in power. It is an important case to recall while trying to analyze whether or not Hamas's willpower can be broken despite its extremist ideology and the unwillingness to compromise among some of its factions, especially in the armed wing and the exiled leadership in Damascus.

In the case of an American attack on Iran, which might cause an Iranian counter offensive in the Persian Gulf and result in an image of an Iranian success (especially if the regime survives the American attack), there might be a spillover of the conflict to the Israeli-Palestinian theatre, since Iran is likely to demand that its allies – Hizballah, Hamas and the PIJ – attack Israel in a pincer movement both from the north and the south, in order to create a clear balance of terror vis-à-vis the US and Israel. Even if there is no such escalation into an all-out war between Israel and Iran's proxies, we assume that the terrorist organizations might try to pinch Israel's tail through terror attacks inside the country and along its borders, in order to destabilize the region. If it is Israel that attacks Iran, it is possible to assume that Hizballah and Hamas will respond immediately and harshly in order to confine Israel north-wise (Hizballah) and south-wise (Hamas and the PIJ; they are also likely to attack targets on the West Bank). The situation might deteriorate to a full-scale showdown on both fronts with Iranian guidance and behind-the-scenes support.

A Hizballah coup d'état in Lebanon, or a civil war that ends with the Shiite organization's rise to power might spillover to the Palestinian Territories and lead to an intra-Palestinian strife initiated by Hamas and the PIJ, which will try to seize control over the West Bank, thus creating a new balance of terror and deterrence vis-à-vis Israel throughout the PA territories. Under such circumstances, if Hamas takes control over the West Bank there may be a third round of Intifada against Israel. This new round of violence will no doubt exceed the previous two Intifadas in every possible parameter.

In case another war erupts between Israel and Hizballah, it seems the linkage with the Gaza Strip front will be inevitable this time as well, and in an even more serious manner than the previous round. It is possible to estimate that Hamas and the PIJ will try to help Hizballah repel the IDF from Lebanon through a pincer movement, only this time Hamas will operate according to Hizballah's 2006 model, which will make the situation much worse than the previous war. If, as a result of an Israeli-Lebanese war both Lebanon and Syria agree to a massive presence of IRGC men in their countries, Hamas and the PIJ may welcome such a move in the short-run, but in the longer-run they might be intimidated by an Iranian over-meddling with their affairs.

As far as Iran is concerned, the harder the pressure on it regarding its nuclear program and the imposition of sanctions, the more it is likely to use its coalition, i.e. Syria, Hizballah, Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi forces, Hamas and the PIJ, in order to ease the international pressure and divert it to other theatres.

Iran has proven its willingness and capability to cooperate with Sunni Islamists (Sudan's Hasan al-Turabi, Al-Qa'ida before and after 9/11, Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq) in order to fulfill its goals. It now seems that Iran wishes to set up a radical Islamic transnational network, not necessarily Shiite, and it intends to be the spearhead of such a force in its struggle against the West. Iran may wish to be today what the Soviet Union used to be during the Cold War era, i.e. a superpower that challenges the US.

And as Ghassan Charbel, editor of the Lebanese *Al-Hayat*, maintains, Iran will see to it that without it there will be no stability in the Middle East – neither in Lebanon and Iraq, nor in Palestine. There will be no Palestinian national unity government without it. The kidnapped Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, will not be released without its approval. It will continue to have a permanent presence on Israel's border through Hizballah. It reminds the US (and Israel) that it can thwart any move in the region using its emissaries in Iraq, Southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.¹⁵⁶

Recommendations for Action

What, then, can be done? One needs to remember that the US, Israel and the West, as well as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and other countries that are considered to be part of the moderate axis in the Arab world – all have a key role in future developments in the region, hence the following suggestions:

1. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States can use their "oil weapon" in order to diminish Iran's income from oil, by producing more oil barrels of their own oilfields, which would lower the prices of oil. However, since this is an artificial step it should only be used carefully in order to threaten Iran, which seems to be striving to co-exist with Saudi Arabia and might be intimidated by such maneuvers.
2. Strengthening the support of Fuad al-Siniora's government that strives for an intra-Lebanese balance against Hizballah and Iran, especially in light of the Arab (primarily Saudi) support for the formation of an international tribunal to investigate the assassination of the late Lebanese PM, Rafiq al-Hariri. The events of May 2008 indicate an aggravation of the internal struggle in Lebanon, with the pendulum moving more and more towards Hizballah's direction, while at the same time the March 14 Coalition only gets weaker. Without Arab and international sweeping support, not only in words but also in deeds, this coalition might break into pieces. It looks like the involvement of Qatar and other Arab countries in resolving the last crisis and the election of Michel Suleiman as President will only temporarily stabilize the ever so fragile Lebanese political system, in light of the

¹⁵⁶ Ghassan Charbel, "Iran wa-al-Thulth al-Mu'attil," (Iran and the Thwarting Third) *Al-Hayat*, December 12, 2006.

Doha Agreement, in which the anti-Hizballah forces accepted almost every demand the Shiite organization had made throughout the crisis.

3. Strengthening the support of PA President, Mahmud 'Abbas, and Fatah in order to create a reliable balance of power against Hamas. The Saudis can especially operate all their leverages in order to pressure Hamas, being the balancing power that hands massive financial support to Hamas parallel to Iran. It is unacceptable and unreasonable, therefore, to maintain the status quo that enables Hamas to enjoy financial dividends from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States without demanding that in return the organization disengage itself from the Iranian bosom.
4. The current situation on the Israeli-Egyptian border and inside the Sinai Peninsula - the smuggling of weapons and terrorists and the Peninsula's turning into a refuge for Hamas activists and a passageway en route to Iran, back and forth –must change fundamentally. Parallel to the construction of a border fence that will encompass the border with Egypt in its entirety and will be built according to the same model that was used in the West Bank, Israel will have to demand that Egypt take full responsibility for everything that takes place in its territory. The Egyptians should also realize how dangerous the current situation is to the region's stability and to the survival of the Egyptian regime itself. First and foremost, Egypt must inspect very thoroughly the entry of Palestinians to Sinai (via the passageways), especially if these people might be on their way to or coming back from Tehran. A firmer cooperation between Western (primarily Israel and the US) and Arab security services (Syria should be a part of this effort) based upon the Interpol model might help tracking such Islamist activists in advance.