



A HAMAS PERSPECTIVE ON THE MOVEMENT'S EVOLVING ROLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH KHALID MISHAL: PART II

MOUIN RABBANI

In this second installment of his interview for JPS, Khalid Mishal, Hamas politburo chief since 1996 and head of the movement since the assassination of Shaykh Ahmad Yasin in 2004, continues his discussion of Hamas's evolution and strategy. Whereas the focus of part I was Mishal's personal background, political formation, and the founding of the movement, here Hamas's more recent history is foregrounded. From the unfolding conflict and troubled relations with Fatah since the mid-1990s, Mishal recounts the thinking behind the decision formally to integrate into the Palestinian political system born of Oslo by participating the 2006 legislative elections and joining the Palestinian Authority government. He also delves into the ongoing repercussions of these decisions, including the splits within the Palestinian movement culminating in Hamas's seizure of power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007. In the course of the more than three-hour interview, Mishal's straightforward manner is on display, as well as his willingness to be challenged on matters as sensitive as Hamas's suicide bombings and the targeting of Israeli civilians, the utility of armed resistance, and the morality of the struggle.

Two themes underlying the interview were Mishal's preoccupation with the need to repair the intra-Palestinian split ("our greatest priority") and the devastating impact of the ongoing siege of the Gaza. Since our interview in early March 2008, two potentially significant developments with relevance to these concerns have taken place. On the internal Palestinian front, Mishal repeatedly emphasized the need for intra-Palestinian dialogue without preconditions, with all subjects on the table including controversial topics like early elections. A first step toward reconciliation was made on 24 March 2008, when Hamas and Fatah representatives signed the "Sana'a Declaration," negotiated in the Yemeni capital, which outlined points of consensus on various

MOUIN RABBANI, IPS senior fellow, is an independent analyst and writer based in Amman, Jordan. He conducted this interview in Damascus on 8–9 March and translated it from Arabic into English. Part I appeared in *JPS* 147 and is available online at www.palestine-studies.org.

domestic issues including security and political institutions. Though the declaration quickly ran aground, with Fatah demanding that Hamas immediately cede control of Gaza before implementation of other aspects would be discussed, by June 2008, Hamas and Fatah were once again considering national unity talks on the basis of the Yemeni initiative. As for alleviating the extreme external pressures on the Hamas-led Gaza Strip, indirect negotiations between Hamas and Israel mediated by Egypt produced a bilateral cease-fire that went into effect on 18 June. Though initially confined to Gaza, the understandings also call for a gradual reversal of the siege as well as renewed negotiations on a prisoner exchange, including the release of captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit.

Hovering over both Hamas-Israel and Hamas-Fatah relations is Washington, which remains opposed to any deals through which the Palestinian Islamists can emerge from their enforced isolation. Yet whatever the ultimate success of either development, the reality is that Mishal and Hamas are increasingly central players in the intra-Palestinian, Israeli-Palestinian, and broader regional equations. Indeed, it was Mishal, not Abbas, whose movement reached an agreement with Israel before the expiration of the Bush administration.

I would like to ask about your personal role in Hamas and its leadership since it was established.

As I have already mentioned, I was a member of the movement's first clandestine leadership formed in the early 1980s, which was made up of members from the various geographical areas [Kuwait, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip]. Even after the formal announcement of Hamas's existence in 1987, for security reasons the names of the members of the leadership were not made public. But in 1992 we announced the leadership of the organization, as represented by the newly created politburo in exile, which was in constant communication with the leaders in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. I was from the outset a member of this politburo and the deputy to its leader, Dr. Musa Abu Marzuq. He was imprisoned in the United States in 1995, but the movement's regular elections were slated to be held the following year, which they were, and on the basis of those elections I was appointed head of the politburo and have held this post ever since. The movement also has a Consultative Council [*majlis shura*] in addition to the political leadership represented by the politburo, and both of these are elected bodies.

Where were you living during this period?

I lived in Kuwait until the Iraqi invasion in [August] 1990. I was in Amman on summer holiday at the time. I returned to Kuwait several days later, settled my affairs in about a week, and returned to Amman before the 1991 Gulf War was launched. It was not possible for me or others, as responsible officials in

Hamas, to remain in Kuwait in the unnatural conditions produced by the Iraqi invasion and occupation. So we moved to Jordan and continued working from there.

Was there harassment from the Iraqi authorities in Kuwait, or attempts to elicit your cooperation?

No. My role in the movement wasn't widely known at that time. My profile was like that of any other Palestinian in Kuwait.

Would you say that what distinguished Hamas's position on the crisis from other Palestinian organizations was its clear condemnation of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait?

Yes. First of all, we are a movement that seeks to examine issues from every angle. We oppose the politics of axes and alliances. This has been part of our culture and policy from the very outset and, God willing, will remain so. We were against the invasion of Kuwait, but at the same time, we opposed the coalition's attack on Iraq. Others, who aligned themselves clearly with one side or the other, perhaps found this balanced position strange. But it was consistent with our principles, namely our opposition to any attack on any Arab state, including an attack by another Arab state. At the same time, we believe that even if an Arab state commits an error it is unacceptable to mobilize the entire world against it.

During the mid-1990s, Hamas played a leading role in opposing the Oslo accords. Its operations in Israeli cities almost destroyed Oslo, after which the Palestinian Authority (PA) almost destroyed Hamas. With the 2000 uprising, Hamas again became an increasingly prominent force. What would you say about that period?

First of all, it is not true that Hamas sought to destroy the peace process during the 1990s. Hamas was against the Oslo accords, which we considered an unjust agreement that would not lead to a state or to independence or to restoration of the rights of our people. But the operations we carried out were for other reasons, not to target the political process, because we were convinced that it contained the seeds of its own destruction and had no future. This was our belief and stance from the outset of the Oslo process in 1993.

When we held discussions with our brothers in the PA in Cairo in December 1995, we asked them if they thought they could achieve their ambitions under Oslo without any pressure or instruments of leverage against the enemy. At the time they were having difficulties even with the first phase of the agreement, and we pointed out that if things were difficult now, how much more difficult would they be when they reached the final status phase and had to deal with issues like Jerusalem, the right of return, borders, and so on? We told them that without the continuation of resistance they would be unable to compel Israel

to respect the rights of our people . . . I told them that despite our opposition to Oslo, we would not object to anything they were able to achieve from it so long as they did not stand in the way of the resistance. But Oslo's character as a security agreement imposed—under Israeli and American pressure—a role on the PA that involved confronting Hamas and the other resistance movements and their weapons.

The PA did not destroy Hamas. It no doubt weakened us, and many of our members were imprisoned during that period, but we saw this as a temporary and exceptional phase. Any movement recoils when subjected to pressure, but only temporarily. Hamas is not a movement that can be broken or expelled from the arena. Hamas is a broad movement with a big project; it has deep popular roots, and it has Arab and Islamic depth.

We recognized the realities of Oslo from the outset, but unfortunately those who implemented security measures against us did not. They thought the wind was in their sails and that the march of history was with them.

But you were targeted in repeated campaigns, by both the PA and Israel.

Yes, of course. There was severe security harassment, a number of our brothers were assassinated or killed in prison, and a hidden fifth column collaborated with the Israelis to eliminate some of our leaders, like The Engineer, Yahya Ayyash, Izzedin Sharif, Adel and Imad Awadallah, and others, particularly military leaders.

The impression at the time was that the PA was quite successful in eliminating the Hamas military infrastructure within the occupied territories, to the point that it was disintegrating during the 1990s.

It was not disintegrating, but it was hemorrhaging, which was only natural. The history of the Palestinian Revolution has developed in what I call waves. It is a history of ebb and flow, a cycle of struggle, like farming. You prepare the soil, sow the seed, reap the crop, then prepare the soil and sow again to reap a new harvest. It is not a continuum of consistent intensity, but cyclical.

[Shimon] Peres himself credited our operations in 1996 with ending his premiership and ensuring his defeat in the May 1996 Israeli elections. But the question is: What was the background to these martyrdom [*istishhadi*] operations? They came as a response to the assassination of Yahya Ayyash and more generally within the context of resisting occupation. They were a response to aggression and to massacres, not a campaign that targeted the political process. It's only natural to resist an occupier in any circumstances, to say nothing of when the occupier escalates with massacres like at the al-Aqsa Mosque in 1990, the Ibrahimi Mosque in 1994, and other places, or when the occupier kills a leader of the stature of Yahya Ayyash, may he rest in peace. This is what led to the martyrdom operations in 1994, 1995, and 1996.

Taking the case of Yahya Ayyash as an example, many people would ask how Hamas justifies the fact that in response to the assassination of one of its military leaders, it targeted civilians rather than soldiers or leaders.

First of all, it was the enemy that transformed our conflict into an open battle. During the first uprising and up until the second uprising, our focus was on Israeli soldiers and settlers. But when Israel broadened the conflict, we did as well. To respond in kind is a right. I always say that our martyrdom operations that caused Israeli civilian casualties—or what are termed civilians, because unfortunately most of Israeli society is armed and militarized, but despite this I do say “Israeli civilians”—only began after the 1994 Ibrahim Mosque massacre in Hebron. Our response was the operations in Afula and Hadera. The enemy’s resort to massacres of Palestinian civilians, even worshippers praying at a sacred mosque, elicited this response. It was Israel, not us, that initiated the broadening of the conflict to include civilians.

Secondly, and I will use this interview to state for the record that since 1996 we have repeatedly expressed our willingness and readiness to remove civilians on both sides as targets. Israel refused.

Yet some—not just Americans and Europeans, but also Palestinians and Arabs—would say that while you are correct that it was Israel that introduced massacres and the targeting of civilians into the equation, and while it is true that you have consistently expressed readiness for a reciprocal end to attacks on civilians, what should distinguish the Palestinian struggle is the morality of its struggle. They would say that attacking civilians in response to attacks against civilians is a descent to the same level of the Israelis.

When you have sufficient power and parity with your enemy, when you’re a state like Israel and possess planes, missiles, tanks, and such an extensive military capability, you can focus on military targets and nothing else. But when you are a people living under occupation without anything approaching parity, effectively disarmed and of only modest capabilities, and Israel exposes you to the full range of its military strength and advanced weaponry carrying out massacres and terror attacks, it then becomes illogical to demand that the victim conduct the conflict according to such exacting standards. This is not an equal struggle. It is not a war between two states or two armies.

Some argue that it is not just a question of right and wrong, but also of political wisdom: The weaker party has an obligation to secure the broadest possible global public support and therefore has an obligation to conduct the struggle in a manner that facilitates this. Such people argue that attacks against civilians give Israel the opportunity to claim itself, rather than the Palestinians, as the victim.

That would be an excellent point if the world appreciated things properly. Let me give you an example. Abu ‘Ammar [Yasir Arafat], may he rest in peace,

reconciled with the Israelis and signed an agreement with them. He accepted the peace process and even received a Nobel Peace Prize for it. He succeeded in gaining international and public support and sympathy. He was welcomed in numerous Western capitals, including Washington, DC. Yet despite this, what did they do for him? They didn't respect their agreements with him; they didn't give him what they said they would; they didn't conclude a permanent status agreement with him or even implement the interim accords that they signed; they did not reward him in any way. In other words, the choice that Yasir Arafat made not only did not lead to his objective, but in the end they sought his removal, and the Israelis poisoned him.* That's the experience of Yasir Arafat.

Some argue that there's a third way. They would say that while Arafat capitulated, Hamas focuses on the most radical types of attacks without investing seriously in political and popular forms of struggle.

But Hamas *does* undertake political activity. As I explained, ours is a comprehensive movement, which has fused military and political activity. Our vision is to combine them without focusing exclusively on either. Resistance is a fundamental part of our strategy to end the occupation and reclaim our land and rights, but this strategy also includes political and popular action, media work, and diplomacy. We support a program that mobilizes all our capabilities in a coherent and comprehensive way.

Another criticism to which I would like to bear your response is that your military actions play into Israel's hands by perpetuating the military conflict, which is the arena in which it enjoys the greatest advantage and where the Palestinians have the weakest hand.

This is a beautiful way of putting things, but it masks the reality. Who says we are stronger than Israel in the political arena? The political arena is a reflection of the military one. It is not true that politics is the art of cleverness and creativity, or that diplomacy exists in isolation from the realities of power. Politics is a reflection of reality on the ground. Therefore those who enter the political arena thinking that they have the advantage over Israel are wrong.

You could see this as a critical comparison of the methods used in the first uprising and those of the second.

Even the first uprising began with popular demonstrations and stones but ended with guns. If Israel would confront popular demonstrations with only

* For a discussion of the belief, widespread in Palestinian circles, that Arafat was poisoned to death, see Uri Avnery, "If Arafat Were Still Alive," *The Guardian*, 31 January 2007; Danny Rubenstein, "Arafat's Doctor: There Was HIV in His Blood, but Poison Killed Him," *Ha'aretz*, 12 August 2007; and "Cause of Arafat Death 'Unknown,'" BBC, 8 September 2005.

roadblocks and perhaps batons, rather than the type of violence they routinely use, the resistance would have remained popular in character. But when the masses realized that when they threw stones the soldiers responded first with rubber-coated steel bullets, next with live ammunition, then with artillery, and finally with Apache helicopters, at that point the need to develop armed resistance was imposed upon the popular resistance.

Was it a necessity that imposed itself, or one that Israel succeeded in imposing?

I don't want to get into word games. What happened when the PLO entered the political arena, where it supposedly enjoyed an advantage? Did its engagement with politics and negotiation lead to its overpowering Israel? Did it secure our rights? It did not.

When you look at the U.S.-Soviet arms and technology race in the 1950s and 1960s, would you have said that the Soviets were entrapped into this race by the Americans, or that the Americans had been entrapped by the Soviets? There is a natural logic to these things. Economic, military, and security competition are today part of the order of things. Living organisms rise to such challenges. Those who do not are dead organisms, such as, unfortunately, our Arab world today. The language of the world today is unfortunately the language of interests and power, not the language of morals and proper conduct.

Turning to our experience, in 2003 we announced a unilateral cease-fire [*tabdi'a*]. In 2005 and 2006 we did the same. How did the international community respond? It did not respond. Nothing. When we repeatedly offered to exclude all civilians from the conflict, the world said nothing. Unfortunately, we are confronting a world that respects only power and strength.

The point of such criticism is not that military activity should be categorically excluded. Rather, comparisons are, for example, between the Palestinian and South African experiences or of Hamas and Hizballah. When Hizballah would attack Israeli civilian targets with Katyusha rockets from southern Lebanon, Israeli society was aware that it was a direct reprisal for a particularly egregious Israeli attack on Lebanese civilians and therefore an exceptional measure provoked by the conduct of their own government, rather than a habitual act within the framework of a regular resistance program. But Palestinian conduct during the second uprising has seemed to be to launch attacks at the first opportunity, irrespective of the circumstances.

Each experience has its specificities. Palestine, South Africa, Vietnam, Lebanon, Iraq, all have their own experiences. As for Lebanon, Israel occupied only the south. Hizballah had strategic depth in the rest of the country, in Syria, Iran, and so on, and was supported by all kinds of military technology. Plus, Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon consisted exclusively of soldiers, so Hizballah was able to focus all its efforts on them. In Palestine, the case is different—you have the Israeli soldier, the settler, and the civilian.

This reality dictates the form of the battle. You cannot judge the Palestinian experience on the basis of comparisons with others. You cannot blame the Palestinians, who are effectively unarmed, for defending themselves with everything at their disposal, especially as they are under siege, including along the borders with Arab countries, and cannot bring in weapons. We have to manufacture our own weapons or buy them on the [black] market in 1948 Palestine [i.e., Israel proper]. This is a people that is exposed to every Israeli method of occupation, oppression, aggression, and killing, and at the same time does not enjoy strategic depth in the sense of formal support resulting in military supplies that would allow it to pursue the battle differently. Even so, we have repeatedly stated that if others are prepared to remove civilians from the conflict, we are ready to do so. But no one has the right to restrict the conduct of the Palestinian resistance while Israel conducts itself with no restrictions at all.

Hamas no doubt felt that the absence of Arafat represented a historical turning point that opened new opportunities, especially because the political weakness of his successor was evident from the start. Without getting into the details of relations with Abbas, the PA, and Fatah, what is your assessment of Hamas's experience between 2005 and 2007? Do you have regrets about the decision to engage in political participation in the PA, the 2006 electoral victory, or participation in government?

There is no doubt that the absence of Yasir Arafat—or, to put it more accurately, his absenting [by Israel]—brought new conditions and confronted the Palestinians with a new situation, particularly in the domestic arena. But in my view, the status that Hamas has achieved in the Palestinian arena was bound to happen even if Arafat had lived. It may have taken longer, but it could not have been prevented . . .

We had our differences with Yasir Arafat when he was at the peak of his power. We agreed on some things and disagreed on others, especially on his handling of Oslo and the political process. But particularly after the 2000 Camp David conference and in his way of dealing with the uprising, his approach was to combine negotiation and resistance. Arafat was different [from others in the Palestinian arena] in that regard, and that is to his credit. And whatever our disagreements, when he was under Israeli and American siege we stood with him. This is the logic of national priorities. It is inconceivable to be with your enemy against one of your people, even if you have differences with him. Others, however, who had benefited politically and financially from Arafat, turned against him as soon as they perceived American encouragement and saw American dollars.

But to get back to your question, in domestic matters Arafat had a method that did not allow for change or reforms or expanding democracy. These changes took place after him, and were introduced by Abu Mazen—to his credit—early in his presidency, even if they have not yet been completed.

Some have suggested that Abbas's objective in encouraging Hamas to participate in the political system was to weaken Fatah so that he could control it.

No. I'll get to that. But as a general background, the new phase that unfolded in the absence of Arafat's experience, methods of rule, and administration of internal affairs was no doubt conducive to implementing a number of reforms in administration, democratization, and the holding of local and parliamentary elections. This has doubtlessly been positive. But at the same time, the Palestinian leadership—by which I mean the leadership of the PLO—sought to confine its external approach exclusively to diplomacy and negotiation, reflecting the convictions of this leadership and particularly of Abu Mazen. This has been a negative development. The focus has become solely on politics and negotiations, far removed from resistance and the uprising in any way, shape, or form. This is a new trend that differed from Arafat's, and in my view has had negative repercussions on the Palestinians' ability to deal with the challenges of the conflict [*idarat al-sira'*, literally "conflict management"] and weakened the Palestinian situation.

Additionally—and this is a sensitive point that needs to be said, and I want to express it accurately—the new phase that began in 2005 has been marked by a fragility of the Palestinian situation, which facilitated outside interventions, both Arab and foreign. We wish that there were positive Arab and Islamic interventions, but unfortunately, some of these were negative.

You asked about Abu Mazen's objectives in allowing the elections to take place. I don't want to speculate about his intentions but will instead discuss facts and realities relevant to conduct on the ground, and by this I mean the conduct of all parties concerned.

When the elections issue arose, a number of parties subscribed to America's belief that "democratizing the region" would lead to the elimination of what it terms "extremism." The Americans, ignoring the circumstances and causes that produce extremism, considered resistance—Palestinian, Iraqi, or Arab in general—to be solely a reaction to domestic crises and dictatorship rather than part of a national project to confront occupation. This reflects the superficial manner in which the Americans deal with the regional situation and its issues. Hamas, which was then outside the Palestinian political system, had become influential in the decision-making process of this system because of its importance on the ground resulting from its military activities and popular support. But though it had influence on the system, it was not part of it and bore no responsibility for it. Thus, the Americans, as well as some Arab and Palestinian parties, assumed that Hamas could be contained by integrating it into the Palestinian political system and formalizing its responsibilities.

This hypothesis was premised on the belief that Hamas would receive only a limited proportion of the votes and would therefore be a minority within a system that would continue to be ruled by those then in power.

The elections were therefore permitted as a necessary mechanism for Hamas's containment.

Another objective was to create the sense that there was a new post-Arafat era characterized by reforms. The Americans felt that a Palestinian political and financial reform agenda would redirect Palestinian energies away from resistance. Palestinian finances would be brought under control and would no longer underwrite armed movements, as Arafat was accused of doing, and the people would be kept too busy with the political reform agenda to pursue resistance.

As for Hamas, we decided that the time was ripe for our integration into the Palestinian political system. We had already been advocating putting the Palestinian house in order and rebuilding the PLO during Arafat's time, but there had been no response.

As I explained, in 2005 these issues were put on the table. Despite our conviction that the Palestinian situation is not normal because we are not a state but under occupation, and despite the fact that the PA is a self-governing institution without sovereignty, and despite our continuing opposition to Oslo, we nevertheless concluded that our participation in the legislative elections of this Authority had become necessary for several reasons:

First, corruption had become a real burden on the people, so reform and changing this terrible reality had become a popular Palestinian demand that Hamas could not afford to ignore. Our participation was by popular demand, because the people had no confidence that those responsible for the corruption were capable of fighting it. The people demanded that just as we had assumed our responsibility to resist the occupation with them, so should we bear our responsibility in participating in the administration of our internal affairs and in implementing reform. This was an essential motivation for us.

Second, despite the fact that the PA has no sovereignty, it nonetheless governs people's lives. Given its poor performance in all spheres—the political arena, daily administration, defending the national cause and Palestinian rights—leaving things as they were was not an option.

There was an additional motive, which was the PA's negative attitude toward resistance, its call for disarming the resistance. We were not dealing with an authority that protected us, that defended our program, our weapons, and our activities. It was therefore necessary to participate in this authority through the ballot box to defend the resistance program, prevent the loss of Palestinian rights, and reduce the burdens on the people in their daily lives. We were confronted with a reality that could not have been avoided.

Hamas as a movement had reached a point where it could no longer avoid the electoral experience. It is not a marginal movement. To be honest, our model here was perhaps Hizballah in Lebanon, where the state had given Hizballah's program political cover, allowing it throughout the 1990s and beyond to devote its energies to resistance and serving the people. But Hizballah, too, felt compelled to enter the political process in order to defend itself as a result of changes in Lebanon.

But Islamic Jihad, for example, refused political participation.

Islamic Jihad [PIJ] has its own considerations. But compare our size to that of PIJ. With all due respect to our brothers in PIJ, our responsibilities are considerably larger than theirs, and the Palestinian people demand more of us than of them, much as the older brother has greater responsibilities than the younger ones.

We knew it would be a difficult challenge, and because some saw our participation as a means to contain us, we also feared electoral fraud. But our strong presence on the ground succeeded in preventing all but minor such instances.

I should think that another consideration might have been that your participation would reduce the international pressure on you, but the opposite turned out to be the case, with the siege imposed on Hamas and the government [in Gaza] becoming much more severe since the elections. Given the way things turned out, do you regret your decision to contest the elections?

No. Despite all that has happened, we do not regret participating in the elections, nor in the government. Of course we have assessed and evaluated this entire experience, and we do so in an honest and transparent way. The movement's institutions examine where we succeeded and where we were in error. I am not going to claim that the experience has been all positive, but it also cannot be claimed to have been all negative, and at the end of the day we do not regret the experience.

When you have assessed the political circumstances and chosen to respond to national requirements and the demands of your people, you don't regret it even if you experience difficulties and pain as a result. You don't regret jumping into a lake to save a drowning person. When you act out of national responsibility, and not out of adventurism or personal motives, you don't feel regret. Also, our decision was the product of intensive discussion and study by the movement and its institutions, which took more than four months to conclude. It was a calculated decision taken by a clear majority within the movement's institutions rather than an impulsive or individualistic decision.

We are now confronted with the repercussions of our participation, but we haven't examined the possible repercussions of a decision *not* to participate. Who can say that things would have been better, that there would not have been international, regional, or even Palestinian pressures on us if we had refused?

In my view, if Hamas had not participated, things would perhaps have been even worse. There would definitely have been at least as much American pressure, for example, with Hamas being [additionally] denounced as a movement operating outside the framework of legitimacy. Today we have an elected parliamentary majority that is considered illegitimate, so what would things be like if we had not participated in the elections?

The circumstances in which we operate today are not the product of our participation in elections. Our present circumstances result from the fact that we have an enemy that wants to eliminate us, that wants to organize the

Palestinian arena according to its designs and will. The United States, too, wants a Palestinian arena without resistance and with a lowered ceiling of political expectations and a willingness to accept even less than international legitimacy, even less than the 1967 boundaries. Sharon and then Olmert sought to veto the right of return, a return to the 1967 borders, [Palestinian sovereignty over] Jerusalem, the evacuation of settlements, and other issues, and Bush has been trying to get the Palestinian leadership to accept these demands.

So the real problem is that we are confronted by an international reality led by the American administration that does not want the Palestinians to insist on their rights and organize themselves properly to attain those rights. And, like Israel, [the United States] wants to ensure that the main role of the PA—whether or not Hamas is part of it—is to protect Israel's security.

So I would say that our participation exposed, rather than caused, the disease. Hamas's surprise attainment of a parliamentary majority—against the expectations and calculations of the Americans, the predictions of public opinion polls, the assessment of regional, international, and Israeli intelligence services, and the expectations of the Palestinians themselves—led to impulsive and irrational conduct by the Americans and regional parties. The article recently published in *Vanity Fair** confirms everything I have been saying, which is that the United States planned and began implementing a coup against Palestinian democracy from the very day that it was surprised by the election results. This campaign began with money, weapons, and sponsorship of PA security agencies and continued with activities that violated even U.S. laws in the effort to produce a corrupt reality in Palestine, just as they have done in Latin America and other countries. That's the source of this war against us.

Despite all that has happened, Hamas remains a reality that neither the U.S. administration nor its regional allies, nor its allies in the Palestinian arena, can get rid of.

The Palestinian schism was caused by a Palestinian party determined to stay in power and retain its privileges, unwilling to accept the results of Palestinian democracy and the ballot box. It is also the result of American, Israeli, and regional parties' intervening through the agency and with the cooperation of a Palestinian faction to precipitate a coup in the Palestinian arena. This schism could have happened even if Hamas did not take part in the elections, because this faction exists and foreign intervention exists. But it would have played out differently.

What do you mean by this?

What I mean is that even if Hamas had not been in the PA, those in power still would have wanted an end to the resistance, or the weapons of the resistance, and would still have wanted to conduct negotiations as they see fit. The United States still would have wanted the Palestinians to engage with the road map

* David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair*, April 2008. Available online at www.vanityfair.com/politics.

and its security provisions. All this could have led to a political confrontation between this faction and the people, between this faction and other political forces—because many of the Palestinian organizations are against this approach. So if this party had decided to disarm the resistance, it would have produced a schism, but in a different way.

You repeatedly speak of a “Palestinian faction” but don’t identify it as Fatah. Are you distinguishing between this “faction” and the Fatah movement generally?

Of course I am not generalizing. Fatah is a movement that has militants and honorable people. It is a militant movement with a long history. But it has been hijacked by the faction identified in the *Vanity Fair* article. Everyone knows who they are. I receive visits from many Europeans and they, too, know this. This faction is prepared to ride on the back of an Israeli tank, accept American money and foreign intervention in order to serve its interests, even if the people and the Palestinian cause are destroyed in the process. This is the real crisis within the Palestinian arena.

Let’s turn now to the events of June 2007.

Before doing so, it is important to discuss how Hamas conducted itself before June 2007, how it conducted itself after the death of Yasir Arafat and during the Abbas period. It acted during this period with the utmost wisdom [*bikma*] and realism.

In early 2005, at the beginning of Abbas’s reign, America and Israel demanded that he do what Arafat had not done: disarm the resistance factions and confront their armed wings. In order to avoid the crisis that would have resulted, and to make sure that the ball was returned to the Israeli court, our response was to reach agreement on a unilateral cease-fire [*tabdi'a*] with Mr. Abbas, without any illusions that the Israelis would reciprocate. Our aim was to prevent internal Palestinian friction and to make it clear that it was not because of us that opportunities were lost. We observed the cease-fire for a whole year. We had done the same in 2003, when Mahmud Abbas was prime minister. Israel responded by increasing the number of Palestinian prisoners from 8,000 to nearly 12,000. The prisoners were not released and Israeli aggression continued.

In 2005 we concluded the Cairo agreement with Abu Mazen.* The talks focused on finding the common denominator between the political programs

* On 17 March 2005 all twelve Palestinian factions in Gaza agreed to a unilateral *tabdi'a* (period of calm) proposal by Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulayman (cf. Quarterly Update in *JPS* 136). Included in the agreement were stipulations that PA Pres. Abbas would amend the PA's electoral law prior to the July 2005 elections such that half the seats in the legislative council would be assigned proportionally and half by voting district. It was also agreed that PLO structures would be reformed to allow for participation based on the forthcoming elections. The Cairo agreement marked the first time that Hamas sought to participate in institutions that resulted from the Oslo process.

of the various movements so as to achieve a consensus and unified vision concerning Palestinian rights. These were specified in the first article of the agreement, which also spelled out a common vision on putting the Palestinian house in order, whether relating to local and legislative elections or the PLO. Negotiations with Israel were not discussed—this item was addressed in the [2006] National Reconciliation Document concluded the following year.

My point is that Hamas had been acting wisely and responsibly even before the elections. So had the other factions. But neither the cease-fire nor the national consensus, nor the election results, nor Palestinian democracy were respected. I therefore say that the United States, and unfortunately, many other Western states, too, acted in contradiction to their own political and democratic values.

You weren't expecting this response to your election victory?

There's a difference between expecting something and declining to take certain measures because you fear the consequences. For example, given the double standards of Israel, the United States, and the international community—their condemnation of Palestinian acts of resistance while failing to condemn Israeli crimes—we know how they respond to our resistance. But despite this knowledge, we have not ceased resisting. We take the international attitude into consideration, and try to deal with it, but not at the expense of our rights or options.

The bottom line is that the international community has not accepted Hamas, whether in government or in resistance, and each time tailors new conditions and demands.

But were you expecting the severity of the sanctions that were imposed after the elections?

We perhaps did not anticipate the level of severity of the U.S. and international reaction, which violates known norms and values. We knew that democracy ultimately is not a serious issue for the Americans, that in Bush's greater Middle East scheme, democracy is only an instrument for maintaining control of the region. The proof is that regional leaders are not dealt with on the basis of whether or not they are democratic, but according to whether they are with or against [the United States]. If it's a dictator who supports U.S. policy, there's no problem, but if it's a democratic leader who's against U.S. policy, he's treated as an enemy.

I'd now like to turn now to Hamas's seizure of power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007 and the schism between the two authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. How do you interpret these events?

The events of June 2007 were the inevitable outcome of the preceding events. The United States worked ceaselessly—through Dayton,* interventions in the Palestinian arena, and other means—to overturn the 2006 election results. The details of this are no secret and have been published.

The U.S. administration and some regional and Palestinian parties figured that Hamas would buckle under the pressure, that by imposing siege and starvation and terminating salaries, the Palestinian people would conclude that the movement's victory had been a disaster for them. They also proposed early elections. Imagine: The elections had been in January 2006, and in six months there were already calls for new elections. This revealed their intentions: starve the people and then hold new elections to oust Hamas.

When this failed, and the crisis was absorbed by the National Reconciliation Document in May 2006,[†] the United States was furious. Supported, unfortunately, by several regional parties, the United States resorted to pushing the Palestinian security forces and their Palestinian clients, who were supplied with money and weapons (including Israeli weapons), into a military confrontation. So from summer 2006 we experienced waves of internal clashes. This was phase II of the plan to confront Hamas: a Palestinian-on-Palestinian military confrontation led by warlords, particularly in the Gaza Strip, their main theater of operations.

During this period there were numerous unsuccessful attempts to resolve the crisis. Then, at the height of the implementation of the scheme, the Mecca Agreement of February 2007[‡] was reached, sponsored by the Saudis, taking the Americans by surprise. We had responded favorably to the Saudi initiative to prevent further Palestinian bloodshed. But the agreement did not satisfy either the Americans or the various security factions, both Palestinian and regional.

* Lt. Gen. Keith Dayton was appointed by Pres. George W. Bush to be U.S. security coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority in November 2005. His main assignment has been training and arming the PA security forces, particularly those loyal to Pres. Mahmud Abbas, in conjunction with Jordan and Egypt.

[†] Initiated by jailed Fatah *tanzim* leader Marwan Barghouti and senior Hamas official 'Abd al-Khalil Natsheh, this document (Doc. B8 in *JPS* 140), known as the prisoners' initiative, was worded with enough ambiguity to allow for a margin of interpretation and provide a basis of compromise between the international community and Hamas on recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence that would allow an easing of aid restrictions. It was also signed by prison leaders of the Democratic and Popular Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine and Islamic Jihad.

[‡] Under the auspices of the Saudi government, talks in Mecca between Hamas and Fatah resulted in an agreement to create a national unity government, a necessary feat after months of deadly violence between the two parties. Through the accords, PA Pres. Abbas asked PM Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas to form the government, which would then be voted on by the Palestinian Council. Hamas would hold nine cabinet posts and the position of prime minister and would name an independent for interior minister, perhaps the most contentious post; Fatah would hold six seats, and other parties would hold four. Previous agreements between the PLO and Israel were to be honored as well. See Doc. B2 in *JPS* 143.

Within about a month of the agreement and the formation of the national unity government, clashes began anew. Some of our partners in the national unity government and in the security forces began their efforts to overturn the Mecca Agreement. They did so with U.S. and Israeli support, because America does not want Palestinian reconciliation, nor does it want Hamas to remain within the PA in accordance with the election results.

According to the information I received at the time, Washington's Palestinian clients were given three months to achieve victory. People received training in Arab and non-Arab countries, and received American money and weapons, and the escalation began.

Hamas, which headed the national unity government and had a majority in the legislative council had no choice but to defend its legitimacy. Some say Hamas "conducted a coup." How? Coups are carried out against others, not against oneself. Hamas was not an opposition party planning a coup against the PA. Hamas was *part* of the PA, heading the government and holding a parliamentary majority.

Was the seizure of the Gaza Strip your objective, or was it the result of the weakness of your adversaries?

Taking control of the Gaza Strip was not our objective. We were confronted with a large conspiracy, even after the Mecca Agreement. The proof is that the siege continued unabated after Mecca. Except for a few countries, Arab and international [financial] support to the PA did not resume after the agreement, and the support that did come arrived late. The Palestinian people saw that the siege was not being lifted.

So our objective was not to control the Strip but to defend ourselves and protect our legitimacy against the corrupt security forces that were implementing the U.S.-Israeli agenda, who were perpetuating the chaos as a sword on our necks and disintegrating the political system which had been virtually frozen after Israel's mass arrest of many of our elected parliamentarians and government ministers.* Our need to defend ourselves led to a series of actions and reactions that culminated in the collapse of these security forces.

It is said that Hamas was surprised by the speed with which these forces collapsed.

Yes, we were definitely surprised. They were, too. Many of them had been recruited with money. They did not have a vision or a program. Their leaders escaped, so they had nothing to fight for.

But it is also said that the June 2007 events produced serious differences within Hamas, for example between leadership elements in Damascus and

* On Thursday, 29 June 2006, Israeli forces arrested some 60 Hamas government ministers, parliamentarians, and activists in Ramallah, Nablus, Qalqilya, Jenin, and Jerusalem. Among those arrested were Deputy Prime Minister Nasser al-Shaer, Labor Minister Muhammad Barghouti, and Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Khalid Abu Arfa. See "Israel Detains Senior Hamas Officials," *Ynetnews*, 29 June 2006.

Gaza. It is said that you didn't appear in public for at least twenty-four hours after the clashes ended.

The reality of schism and division is no doubt difficult, and no one likes it. Do you think Hamas is satisfied with the current situation? It is not natural, and it pains us. But it was imposed on us, and we were compelled to deal with the reality in a way that minimized losses.

What distinguishes Hamas is that it has leadership institutions. Various views are represented within this leadership, but ultimately everyone respects the decisions of the institutions. It is not true that what happened produced divisions within the movement. Of course, different members had different views, although not regarding the fundamentals of the situation. We are a movement that encourages freedom of opinion, and we practice internal democracy, and we have the courage to conduct self-evaluation.

As for my own response, I was the first to hold a press conference, here in Damascus, on Friday, 15 June [2007], immediately after the events in Gaza. I discussed what had happened and placed these events in their objective context, despite the pain that all of us felt.

I remember that at this press conference you talked about the pain that was felt and offered apologies for some of the actions that had been taken, while other leaders in the movement expressed relief and satisfaction about the same events.

These are two sides of the same coin. Of course there was satisfaction and relief at being rid of the corrupt elements and warlords responsible for the chaos in the Gaza Strip. But at the same time, there was pain and frustration at the schism that resulted. There is no contradiction here—both responses were part of the same picture.

I did say that *individual* mistakes were made. I said that every army, every group makes mistakes, and I apologized for these. But the mistake was not the measures themselves; the mistake was not our determination to defend ourselves against corrupt putschists in league with the Americans and Israelis seeking to overturn the results of democratic Palestinian elections.

So what now? In addition to the Quartet conditions, now there are also Abbas's conditions. There is also the impression that Hamas, which previously seemed very interested in resuming the intra-Palestinian dialogue—provided there were no preconditions—is much less interested in this since the January 2008 breach of the Gaza-Egyptian border. It seems that your current priorities are an agreement with Egypt on Rafah and an agreement*

* After Hamas's January 2006 electoral victory, the Quartet (EU, Russia, UN, and U.S.) conditioned the continuation of aid to and contact with the PA on Hamas's recognition of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, renunciation of violence, and acceptance of past PLO/PA-Israel agreements. Abbas's conditions are that Hamas return Gaza to its status prior to June 2007.

with Israel concerning a cease-fire, and that you see Abbas as increasingly irrelevant.

Unlike the U.S. administration, we do not distribute certificates of relevancy. We are not going to contradict our principles or the logic of the Palestinian reality. Despite our differences with Abu Mazen, we are not going to call his legitimacy into question. He is the elected president and we respect the office. He assumed his position through the ballot box. The Fayyad government, by contrast, was not elected and was not ratified by the legislative council and is therefore unconstitutional, and came about through American sponsorship.

We do not want a separation between the Gaza Strip and West Bank or a separate authority. To the contrary, we want a single authority, a single government, and a unified political system. What we want is a reform of the Palestinian situation and a solution to the internal Palestinian crisis, most importantly the security file. This was not properly resolved in Mecca—we wanted to address the issue but the other side refused. So we expressed our clear interest in renewed dialogue, because these issues can only be resolved through direct and unconditional dialogue without preconditions.

Some would add that not only the security file but also the political program was not sufficiently spelled out at Mecca.

What was in the Mecca Agreement was what we held in common. After the June events, the other side refused the principle of dialogue, viewing the schism as a golden opportunity to suffocate and delegitimize Hamas, gambling that time would work in their favor. They thought that Hamas could be ejected from the political system through a variety of means. First, by maintaining the siege on Gaza, the closure, starvation of the people, and so on; second, by striking at Hamas in the West Bank to dismantle its infrastructure there, closing charitable institutions, carrying out mass arrests, cooperating with the Israelis to weaken the movement, and so on. Third, they expected they could build an economic model in the West Bank that would provide a contrast to the starvation and deprivation in the Gaza Strip. This began before the December 2007 Paris donor conference, which was a result of this strategy. Fourth, they gambled on security chaos in the Gaza Strip. The same corrupt warlords and putschists who escaped to Ramallah have begun to try to undermine security in the Strip through corruption, explosions, and assassinations—including an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh.*

It is said this campaign overall is proving quite successful.

That's what they're counting on. It is not the first such campaign—it's been going on since 1994. But they know that at the end of the day Hamas is not a movement that can be contained or broken, God willing.

* Mishal's reference is to a shooting attack on Haniyeh's convoy on 20 October 2006 as it was leaving a mosque. Haniyeh escaped unharmed, but at least one security vehicle was destroyed. See "Gunmen Open Fire at Haniyeh's Convoy in Gaza," *Ha'aretz*, 21 October 2006.

They also gambled on a breakthrough in negotiations with Israel that would give the PA president a significant political achievement to present to the people, which could be used to besiege Hamas politically. The title of this was "Annapolis." But all these failed, the year 2007 came to an end, and Hamas remained steadfast. So at this point they gambled on Israeli military escalation against the Gaza Strip, which took a quantum leap in 2008, including more and deeper incursions into the Gaza Strip.

Do you expect a full-scale invasion of the Gaza Strip?

Not necessarily. The Gaza Strip involves different calculations. Israel is confronted by two primary questions: the costs of such an invasion, and what to do after it. Israel may therefore opt for gradual escalation, proceeding according to the achievements of each step. They are trying this now in the northern Gaza Strip. They might seek to divide the Gaza Strip into three sectors, or engage in a prolonged war of attrition and perhaps proceed with a general invasion. This will also be determined by Israel's other conflicts with Hizballah or with Iran. So the question of an invasion hinges on numerous calculations.

At all events, the Authority of Abbas and the Fayyad government have failed to achieve their objectives. They're the ones who have been losing support, while our popularity is increasing. We have recouped much of the support we lost as a result of the schism and the intra-Palestinian conflicts. Furthermore, the connections with the American agenda are being revealed. They are also beginning to fear the possibility that Israel will reach understandings with Hamas [and] that their role will be taken from them. The most important thing for them is to remain the political address of the Palestinian people. But this is a role we are not at all interested in.

For these reasons, their tone regarding intra-Palestinian dialogue has begun to change. Not the substance, but the tone. They now say that they are prepared for dialogue but subject to conditions, and, like a snowball, the list of these conditions is increasing. It began with reversing what they termed the coup, to which they added various political conditions and early elections. Nevertheless, they have not responded positively to the various Arab and Palestinian mediation attempts. Unfortunately, this is because such a decision is no longer a Palestinian decision alone but is subject to American and Israeli vetoes.

Our own view has not changed; intra-Palestinian dialogue to reunify our ranks is today the key priority. We have emphasized that everything the others want to discuss is on the table. We are prepared to meet anywhere, any time, and to discuss anything, but without preconditions, because a dialogue with preconditions is meaningless.

We are pursuing a balanced approach on several tracks. Aside from intra-Palestinian dialogue, which for us is the priority, we are managing the conflict with the occupation to defend our people in the Gaza Strip and West Bank. A third track is relieving the siege of the Gaza Strip. The mass breach of the Rafah border in January came as a natural response to the months of siege, deprivation, and starvation.

In this respect we have made clear that we are prepared to reach an agreement with the Egyptian authorities and even with the Palestinian presidency on the border crossings, particularly Rafah. We have no objection to a role for the presidency in Rafah. We informed the Egyptians of this. This is an Egyptian-Palestinian crossing, and it is natural for the Egyptians to be concerned, for us in the Gaza Strip to be concerned, and for the Palestinian presidency, as an elected presidency, also to be concerned. Unfortunately, the presidency wants to control the crossings and rejects any amendment to the existing agreements concerning Rafah, which were concluded without reference to Palestinian legitimacy.*

An important point is that we do not object to a continued role for EU monitors, provided they are stationed in al-Arish and transit to Rafah through Egyptian rather than Israeli territory. We will not permit an Israeli role at Rafah, because Israel has deprived our people of the use of this crossing.

There is the impression that all of these issues have become intertwined—the crossings, the prisoner exchange, the cease-fire—and that you reject any agreement that does not resolve all these issues.

No. The soldier[†] is a separate case and is tied only to a prisoner exchange. Concerning the cease-fire, this was proposed to us by Arab and European parties. We told them that the problem is not with us but with the Israeli enemy. We have previously declared unilateral cease-fires without any Israeli response. The rockets of the resistance in Gaza are a response to, not a cause of, the violence. But we responded that we have been and remain prepared for a cease-fire. Until today, no one has been able to provide us with an Israeli proposal on the issue or a proposal to which Israel will commit. Hamas and the other resistance factions are prepared to respond positively regarding a cease-fire if Israel comprehensively ceases its aggression, in terms of incursions, killings, and arrests in both the Gaza Strip and West Bank, and commits to ending the siege and opening the crossings. Linking these issues is entirely logical. The siege is, after all, one of the methods of warfare against the Palestinian people. Regarding the cease-fire and ending the siege, the basic obstacles are Israel and the United States.

* The Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA; see Doc. A4 in *JPS* 138) between Israel and the PA was signed on 15 November 2005. It aimed to facilitate the flow of goods and people throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, specifically at the Rafah crossing and seaport in Gaza, between Gaza and the West Bank, and within the West Bank. The issue of Palestinian legitimacy referred to by Mishal stems from the AMA agreement that stipulated all goods and people would temporarily move through Kerem Shalom crossing under Israeli oversight and in Israeli territory until the Rafah crossing was ready to function as an international crossing.

† Reference is to IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit, who was captured by members of Palestinian factions in an operation on 25 June 2006.

You said it would be essential to revisit the security file in any new agreement among Palestinians.

Yes, because security problems are what caused the explosion between us. Our view is that the security forces should be rebuilt on a professional and national basis, not on the basis of quotas and factionalism. We do not want factional security agencies. We want a Palestinian security force that discharges its responsibilities in the service of the Palestinian people, controlled by neither Hamas nor Fatah, and rebuilt according to a detailed agreement. I told the Arabs that we are prepared to accept any Arab assistance to achieve this objective.

Would this include, for example, an agreement between Fatah and Hamas on the identity of individual security commanders?

Of course, naturally. Not just between Hamas and Fatah, but agreement among all national forces.

Is it a matter of agreeing on a new minister of interior?

That would not be enough. We agreed on a minister of interior at Mecca, but the warlords wouldn't allow him to perform his job, and he was forced to resign after a month. Therefore, we must agree on everything this time: Which security agencies will we have? What will be their mandates, responsibilities, and roles? How will they be reorganized? Who will command them? How will commanders be selected? The security forces were either directly accountable to the presidency, or indirectly, through warlords. It doesn't make sense that the government is responsible for security but that the security forces are not under its authority.

When you look at the achievements of the PA in the West Bank, for example its security campaign in Nablus, this might be a limited achievement, but there is nevertheless clear improvement.

There is not clear improvement. While there was chaos in Nablus, and while the PA has prevented some forms of chaos, it has at the same time persecuted militants, disarmed them, arrested people, cooperated with Israel against the people, killed people inside prisons—like Shaykh Majid Barghouti* and others. Despite all of this, Israel has not left the PA in charge of security in Nablus. They operate during the day and then Israel comes in at night. This is not Palestinian security. It is security tied to the priorities of Israel and the United States.

* Forty-four-year-old Barghouti, a Hamas-affiliated imam, was arrested by the PA in Ramallah 14 February 2008 and died in PA General Intelligence custody 22 February. See Chronology for details.

The recent operation in [the southern Israeli town of] Dimona marked the first time in more than a year that Hamas claimed responsibility for an operation. What led Hamas to resume operations within Israel—was it to compel Israel to accept a cease-fire?*

I would wish that those who follow the Palestinian situation not complicate things by reading more into events than can be read into them. Quite simply, so long as there is occupation, it is natural that there will be resistance.

So you are saying that the Dimona operation was not the result of a political decision to resume attacks within Israel?

No. Our resistance activities are not subordinate to political considerations. They are tied to conditions in the field. The issue is left to the people in the field, who assess matters and act on the basis of the situation. The resistance expresses itself whenever it has an opportunity.

Some observers suggest that after Hamas saw it was capable of imposing a new reality through the breach of the Rafah crossing, it decided to undertake the Dimona operation, believing that it could also impose decisions on Israel, specifically a cease-fire.

Regarding the Rafah breach, this was a popular action, not an attempt by Hamas to impose a fait accompli. To the contrary, its goal was to breach the fait accompli that has been imposed upon us. Besides, our real political objective is not a cease-fire but rather ending the occupation. We do not use our struggle for cheap tactical objectives. We do not play games with the blood of our people. Hamas sacrifices not the sons of its people, but its own sons, and the sons of its leaders.

As a final question, do you think there is a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian and Arab-Israeli conflicts?

There is an opportunity to deal with this conflict in a manner different from the way Israel and, behind it, the United States are dealing with it today. There is an opportunity to achieve a Palestinian national consensus on a political program based on the 1967 borders, and this is an exceptional circumstance, in which most Palestinian forces, including Hamas, accept a state. This was specified in the National Conciliation Document. A state *on*, and not *within*, the 1967 borders. On the borders of 4 June 1967, including Jerusalem, [and] the right of return, with full sovereignty, and without settlements.

There is also an Arab consensus on this demand, and this is a historic situation. But no one is taking advantage of this opportunity. Even this minimum, which has been accepted by the Palestinians and the Arabs, has been rejected by Israel and the United States.

* On 4 February 2008, a Palestinian suicide bomber detonated a device in a Dimona mall, killing one Israeli and injuring 11. For details, see the Chronology and Quarterly Update of *JPS* 147.

If anyone thinks that the conflict can be ended, and that calm, stability, and security can be achieved in the region at the expense of Palestinian rights, they are deluded. The Palestinian and Arab people have already proved that whatever their internal divisions and the power imbalance, Israel and America are not capable of imposing their agenda upon us. They failed in Iraq, they failed in Lebanon, and they failed in Palestine. If they want to deal with this conflict differently, they have only one alternative, which is to accept Palestinian and Arab rights.



Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, 16 April 2006. (Behrouz Mehri/AFP/Getty Images)