

The Evolution of the Military Action of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades

How Hamas Established its Army in Gaza⁽¹⁾

Ahmed Qasem Hussein⁽²⁾

Abstract: This study traces the evolution of Hamas's military activities from its launch in 1987 to the development of its military wing (the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades) after 1992, drawing on the memoirs and testimonies of the movement's political and military leaders in Palestine and on available data regarding military confrontations with the Israeli occupation. Having begun as a scattering of modestly armed and equipped groups – a form it still takes today in the West Bank – it has since evolved in Gaza into something resembling a regular army. It proceeds from the assumption that Hamas' military activities have developed in accordance with the changing nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and of the movement's political thought (itself shaped by shifting relationships with the regional and international structures). This has given the movement a rather fluid identity which its interests and role in the region have led it to define primarily in terms of its military strength.

Palestine

Hamas

Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades

Israel

Military Action

"Without jihad there can be no solution to the Palestinian issue; international 'initiatives' and conferences are a waste of time."

(Article 13, Hamas Charter 1988)

Introduction

Since the year 1967, military action, or "armed struggle," has been a mainstay of the thought and practice of the various divisions and factions that make up the Palestinian national movement. Groups across the spectrum have stressed the importance of military action as a means of effecting the liberation of Palestinian lands from Israeli occupation and restoring the Palestinian people's rights. Whatever their ideological inclinations, virtually all Palestinian factions make mention in their political and military literature of the importance of armed struggle in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Accordingly, it is not possible to study the contemporary Palestinian national movement without addressing the topic

of military action, its importance, its purpose, and its impact on these forces' relationships with their regional and international environment. Military action launched from Arab countries surrounding Israel (Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon) has had clearly negative impacts on the Palestinian national project and the Palestinians residing in these countries.

The same most certainly applies to the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, whose thought, practices, and strategy have all given prominence to military action. However, unlike other forces in the region, Hamas has limited its military operations against the Israeli occupation to the occupied Palestinian territories, a fact which has gained

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2 Researcher, Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies.

it significant popularity both inside and outside Palestine, while serving as a source of political legitimacy in the Palestinian arena.

Consequently, this study will discuss and analyze the evolution of Hamas's military activities from its launch in 1987 to the development of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the movement's military wing, from 1992 onwards. The study draws on the memoirs and testimonies of the movement's political and military leaders in Palestine and on available data regarding military confrontations with the Israeli occupation.

I proceed from the assumption that Hamas' military activities have developed in accordance with the changing nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and of the movement's political thought (itself shaped by shifting relationships with the regional and international structures). This has given the movement a rather fluid identity which its interests and role in the region have led it to define primarily in terms of its military strength. Having begun as a

scattering of modestly armed and equipped groups – a form it still takes today in the West Bank – it has since evolved in Gaza into something resembling a regular army. I trace this evolution through Hamas's various confrontations with the Israeli occupiers during the attacks on Gaza in 2008-2009, 2012 and 2014.

To better trace these different recent phases of the conflict, the study is organized into four sections. The first discusses the history of the Islamist movement in Palestine and early attempts at military activity after the June 1967 war. The second deals with the attempts of the Islamist movement to institutionalize military action, especially on the eve of the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987. The third describes the launch of the Islamist Resistance Movement (Hamas) in 1987 followed by the formation of its military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, in 1992. The fourth and final section discusses the stages in the development of the Qassam Brigades' military activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, specifically after the second intifada of 2000 and until the 2014 war.

First: The Islamist Movement in Palestine: Faltering Steps Toward Military Action

The Islamist movement in Palestine is an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood founded by Hassan Al-Banna (1906-1949) in Egypt.⁽³⁾ After the 1948 occupation of Palestine and the declaration of the State of Israel, the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine underwent a series of transformations encompassing its activities, mission, and organizational structure. When the West Bank was annexed to Jordan in 1950, the West Bank and Jordan Brotherhood merged into a unified organization with their activity aimed principally at recruiting new members through civil associations engaged in political advocacy and educational work. The prevailing political climate facilitated these activities, as the Jordanian regime turned a blind eye to Brotherhood activities in

exchange for the movement's assistance in countering the increasingly popular and influential Nasserist and Baathist groupings.⁽⁴⁾ The Gaza Strip, for its part, was under Egyptian administration.

Due to the Brotherhood's political and military role and their stance on the Palestine War of 1948 and the greater strength of the religious current in that region, the Gaza Brotherhood was initially more effective than its West Bank counterpart. However, the Brotherhood's strength and influence in Egypt generally and Gaza in particular declined precipitously after successive confrontations with the regimes of King Farouk and subsequently Nasser, who ultimately banned the organization and drove it underground.⁽⁵⁾ Meanwhile,

3 The Muslim Brotherhood was founded by Hassan al-Banna and a small group of his companions in March 1928 in the city of Ismailia in Egypt. Organizationally speaking, the Muslim Brotherhood's relationships with Palestine began in 1935, at which time al-Banna sent two of the group's leaders, his brother Abd al-Rahman al-Banna, and Muhammad al-Hakim, with Tunisian leader Abd al-Aziz al-Tha'alibi, to spread the Brotherhood's message there. The three men met the Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini, Chairman of the Supreme Islamic Council. See: Ziad Abu Amr, *Uṣūl al-Ḥarakāt al-Siyāsiyya fī Qitā' Ghazza 1948-1967* (Acre: Dar Al-Aswar, 1987), pp. 61-63.

4 Khalid al-Hurub, *Ḥamās: al-Fikr wa'l-Mumārasa al-Siyāsiyya* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1996), p. 19.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

Brotherhood activity declined in the West Bank, where the National Guard, a popular force that spread over the West Bank along the armistice line, formed a spearhead for confronting Israel. The Brotherhood had a relatively limited capacity for mobilization and social base compared to the new armed factions emerging in the early 1960s. Members thus began to join up and fight alongside groups like the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah).

In the early 1950s, Gaza witnessed limited military activity which ended with the Brotherhood's dissolution in Egypt in 1954 and individual attempts to form military cells to challenge the Israeli occupation. One such attempt was made by a group of Brotherhood loyalists who were to have a major impact on the subsequent course of the Palestinian armed struggle, some of whom formed the first nucleus of Fatah in 1959. The most prominent of these secret military formations were the Avenging Generation (*Shabāb al-Tha'r*), which included among its members Salah Khalaf (1933-1991), Umar Abu al-Khair, Sa'id al-Muzayyin (1935-1991), and As'ad al-Saftawi (1934-1993), and the Truth Battalion (*Katībat al-Haqq*), which included Khalil al-Wazir (1935-1988), Hamad al-Ayidi, and Hassan Abdul Hamid.⁽⁶⁾ The latter group's first target was the Egyptian administration, which was tightening its grip on the Gaza Strip and fomenting corruption, brutality and theft. It then began considering military action against Israel. Khalil al-Wazir wrote in his pamphlet *The Beginnings*: "The direction of armed resistance against the enemy began to take shape as we commenced weapons training for groups of young Palestinians [...] and carried out more and more operations behind the armistice lines."⁽⁷⁾

From the 1948 war to the establishment of Fatah and the June 1967 war, however, there was no notable military activity by the Brotherhood itself against Israel either in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. There were

only attempts by Palestinian Brotherhood members to reorganize their ranks led by a younger generation of leaders, foremost among whom were Abdullah Abu Azzah and Abdul Badi' Sabir, who convened a meeting in the summer of 1962 in the Gaza Strip. The meeting was attended by 15 delegates, who elected Hani Bseiso as Comptroller-General of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine. This organization included Brotherhood groups from the Gaza Strip, the Gulf states and Syria. However, it excluded the Brotherhood in Jordan (then encompassing the West Bank), in view of the Brotherhood's presence in Jordan.⁽⁸⁾

It is important to note that the June 1967 war came as a huge blow to all Arab political currents. Israel had come to occupy territory three times its previous size, taking over command of the Sinai, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights. This defeat precipitated a veritable flood of books and essays attempting to explain it with reference to lack of education, widespread illiteracy, economic dependency or excessive religiosity. There was a plethora of ideological writings, some secular and some religious, each of which called the Arab regimes to account based on its particular slant. One would argue that if only the Arab regimes had followed scientific socialism, the defeat would not have occurred. Another would hold that if the regimes had been Islamist, their armies would not have routed; defeat had been divine punishment for Arab abandonment of the teachings and ways of Islam.⁽⁹⁾ A pamphlet published by the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan declared that one indirect cause of the defeat had been "distance from God, abandoning the Book of God and the Sunnah of His Messenger, celebration of other than God, enmity towards God, and rejection of Islamist governance, legislation and education."⁽¹⁰⁾

It was in this post-defeat political climate that the Brotherhood began to consider military action and armed struggle against Israel. This soon became the overriding Brotherhood preoccupation at meetings

6 Abu Amr, p. 78.

7 Khalil al-Wazir, "Ḥarakat Fath: al-Bidāyāt" (special document), *Dirāsāt Falisṭīniyya*, vol. 26, no. 104 (Fall 2015), p. 60.

8 Muhsin Salih, "al-Masār min al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn al-Filasṭīniyyīn ilā Ḥamās," *Al Jazeera Net*, 28/12/2016, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2vr4VDv>.

9 Azmi Bishara, "Mā Qabl Ḥarb Ḥuzayrān wa-Mā Ba'dahā: Kay La Yatajannab al-Naqd al-Naqd," *Siyāsāt 'Arabīyya*, no. 26 (May 2017), pp. 7-11.

10 Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood, *Al-Kāritha al-Falisṭīniyya wa-Ḥarb 5 Ḥuzayrān* (Amman: The Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, 1967). Source: Private Archive of Bilal Muhammad Shalash.

all over the Arab World, with many calling for the establishment of independent Brotherhood military encampments in Jordan.⁽¹¹⁾ At the same time, "classical" Brotherhood thought was dominant among the leadership and the base of the Palestinian Brotherhood itself, influencing the form that this military action took.

In 1967 the Brotherhood took its first steps towards military engagement against Israel. The Executive Office of the Brotherhood in Arab countries⁽¹²⁾ and Fatah (the PLO) agreed that the Jordanian Brotherhood would operate militarily as part of Fatah, with the Brotherhood at large procuring financial support from members in the Gulf.⁽¹³⁾ And for a period, Brothers were trained at camps in Jerash, Azraq and al-Alouk under commanders who included Abdullah Azzam. But this experiment was brought to a halt by the dramatic end of Palestinian military activity in Jordan in 1970.⁽¹⁴⁾

All this coincided with the emergence of a new reformist-activist current among the younger members of the Brotherhood, a current which emphasized the concept of "practical" jihad and was deeply critical of the conduct of Brotherhood military activity under the existing leadership. Ibrahim Ghosheh (1936-), one of those young men, describes the "corrective movement" within the Brotherhood as a counter to mainstream Bannawi group-think: "now that the movement had expanded into Jordan, led by Tahsin Khreis among others, we wanted to address some of the negative points we'd noticed and to begin our project for jihad. We put out a secret internal newsletter focused on matters of organization and the groundwork required to get ready for jihad."⁽¹⁵⁾ This internal and undeclared contingent of some one hundred young affiliates remained active until Black September in 1970. But the Brotherhood leadership

in Jordan eventually became aware of the movement and suppressed it.⁽¹⁶⁾

The activities of the Brotherhood in Palestine after 1967 were thus largely limited to advocacy work. It engaged in no significant military activity and had no independent military arm. And in fact, much of its effort was dedicated to coming up with intellectual justifications for *not* engaging in immediate armed resistance: the need for the construction of a "genuine foundation" strong enough to form a Muslim generation committed to the Islamic faith and prepared to make sacrifices on its behalf by creating a Muslim individual with an Islamic doctrinal education.

The inability of the Palestinian Brotherhood to organize military action between 1948 and 1967 was linked on one hand to the group's self-definition as a political, economic and social reform movement, and on the other hand, to its perceptions of the social and political structures through which it operated, with which it was very much at odds. The Islamist community in Palestine was dominated by a "hard core" which saw an overriding need for empowerment and preparation prior to undertaking any military action, as opposed to the younger, more impulsive generation which demanded immediate military action against Israel. Acceptance of the duty to listen, obey, and avoid divisiveness within Brotherhood ranks initially helped to rein in this young Brotherhood cohort. By the early 1980s, however, this younger contingent would come to have a profound impact on political and military action following a systematic review of the earlier generation's principles. In other words, the generational struggle within the Islamist movement sheds important light on the context in which military action developed within Palestine's Islamist movement.

11 Abdullah Abu Azza, *Ma' al-Haraka al-Islāmiyya fī'l-Duwal al-'Arabiyya* (Kuwait: Dar Al-Qalam for Publishing and Distribution, 1986), p. 129.

12 The Executive Office of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Arab Countries, which forms the supreme command of the Muslim Brotherhood in Arab countries, is composed of a president, a vice-president, a secretary, a financial secretary, and members. Isam Al-Attar was elected President of the Executive Office, and Muhammad Abdul Rahman Khalifa as his Vice-President. For more, see: Abu Azza, p. 112; "Murāja'āt ma' al-Mufakkir al-Sūrī 'Iṣām 'Aṭṭār | Episode 7," *Al-Hiwar TV on Youtube*, 30/05/2009, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2FohwZO>, minutes 33-36.

13 Abu Azza, pp. 124-123.

14 Ghassan Du'ar, *Qawā'id al-Shuyūkh: Muqāwamat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn Didd al-Mashrū' al-Ṣahyūnī 1968-1970*, Muhsin Salih (rev. and ed.) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2018), p. 53.

15 Ibrahim Ghosheh, *al-Ma'dhina al-Ḥamrā': Sīra Dhātiyya* (Beirut: Al-Daytona Center for Studies and Consultations, 2008), p. 107.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Sheikh Ahmad Ismail Hasan Yasin (1 January 1937 – 22 March 2004), a member of one of the young Brotherhood groups in the period after the June 1967 war, maintains that "first generation" Muslim Brotherhood leaders were unconvinced of the utility of military initiatives from outside Palestine. They held that armed struggle would not affect the course of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and that its political and security establishment costs to Arab countries were far greater than the gains it would bring. Indeed, armed struggle from outside brought Palestinians into direct confrontation with Arab officialdom in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon.⁽¹⁷⁾ Abdullah Abu Azzah recalls listing some of the many obstacles to Brotherhood support for the armed struggle in a meeting with Yasin in Amman in 1968, including the prevailing hostility to Islamist thought and the alliances between nationalist Palestinian and Arab forces and anti-Islamist international forces.⁽¹⁸⁾

The Palestinian Brotherhood had no objection in principle to commencing military operations. They believed unreservedly that it was a "religious duty," but envisioned military action proceeding along two tracks.⁽¹⁹⁾ The first of these tracks was resistance to the Israeli occupation from within by residents of the West Bank and Gaza with the requisite supplies (weapons, ammunition, provisions). This was to become the military action strategy of the Islamist movement in Palestine: in effect limiting all combat operations against the Israeli occupation to the occupied territories, since the political and financial situation of the Brotherhood in Arab countries could not accommodate sustained military action. The second track was to proceed with strikes from an external base, attacking the enemy across the border with the aim of forcefully expelling it. However, Hamas in Palestine subsequently abandoned as

futile any such military operations launched from Arab countries surrounding occupied Palestine, as the Palestinian national movement had by this time incurred huge material, human and political costs in several Arab countries, a reality that imposed the necessity to limit the battleground with Israel to the Palestinian territories.

It is important to note that the ideas of Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966) influenced the Islamist movement in Palestine's second generation so thoroughly that by the 1970s it can be confidently described as "Qutbist." Throughout Arab countries and particularly in Palestine, a new generation of Brothers found Qutb's comparisons between the hostile environment faced by the early Muslims and the problems they faced in their own societies deeply compelling.⁽²⁰⁾ The Qutbist solution was to disregard ongoing political events to concentrate on raising a new generation of pious Muslims. But it also involved the creation of (defensive) guerrilla units capable of protecting the movement from external attack.⁽²¹⁾

Qutb's influence is attested to by many contemporary Islamists. Muhammad Abu Tair quit Fatah and joined the Brotherhood after reading Qutb's *Milestones on the Road*.⁽²²⁾ Adnan Maswadi (later a founder of Hamas) became a convert to Qutbism during his time as a medical student in Damascus, and returned to the West Bank in 1970 intent on making preparations to "establish an Islamic system and Islamic society, of which an Islamic government is a part."⁽²³⁾ At around the same time, Ahmad Yasin (another Hamas founder) was busy printing copies of Volume 30 of Qutb's *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, which he handed out freely to individuals, mosques and libraries in Gaza.⁽²⁴⁾ Ibrahim al-Maqadimah, one of Hamas's leading theorists, was later to title his magnum opus

17 "Aḥmad Yāsīn: Shāhid 'alā al-'Aṣr (Part III)," *Al-Jazeera TV on Youtube*, 01/05/1999, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2FyDUQI>, minutes 4-6.

18 "Murāja'āt ma' 'Abdullah Abu 'Azza | al-Ḥalaqa 3," *Al-Hiwar TV on Youtube*, 31/05/2010, accessed 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2N62Rqn>, minutes 24-28.

19 Abu Azzah, *Ma' al-Ḥaraka al-Islāmiyya*, pp. 129-130.

20 Sa'ud al-Mawla, *al-Jamā'āt al-Islāmiyya wa'l-'Unf: Mawsū'at al-Jihād wa'l-Jihādiyyīn* (Dubai: Misbar Center for Studies and Research, 2012), p. 245.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 246.

22 Muhammad Abu Tair, *Sīdī 'Umar: Dhikrayāt al-Shaykh Muḥammad Abū Ṭayr fī'l-Muqāwama wa-Thalātha wa-Thalāthīn 'Āman min al-'Itiqāl*, Bilal Shalash (ed.) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2017), p. 84.

23 Adnan Maswadi, *Ilāl-Muwājaha: Dhikrayāt al-Duktūr 'Adnān Maswadi 'an al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn fī'l-Ḍaffa al-Gharbiyya*, Bilal Muhammad (ed.) (Beirut, Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2013), p. 51.

24 "Aḥmad Yāsīn: Shāhid 'alā al-'Aṣr (Part III)."

Milestones on the Road to a Free Palestine, in clear homage to Qutb.⁽²⁵⁾

For the Islamist movement in Palestine, mosques and Islamist blocs in universities thus served as magnets that drew and mobilized young people through study groups, helping to inculcate a Muslim generation with perspectives inspired by Sayyid Qutb's thought. The number of mosques in the West Bank and Gaza Strip increased from 600 in 1967 to 1,350 in 1987.⁽²⁶⁾ At the same time, the number of charitable societies and zakat and "social integration committees" witnessed a steady increase.⁽²⁷⁾ Islamist student organizations took on a leading role in communicating with foreign student unions,⁽²⁸⁾ particularly in Kuwait, Britain,

Germany and the USA. In the Gaza strip, where Israel sought a counterweight to the PLO, Yasin was able to find multiple organizations like the Islamic Association of Palestine (which facilitated sporting activities and discussion groups for young people) and the Islamic Complex (which had a greater focus on missionary activity and education). In 1979, Muhammad Awwad founded the Islamic University in Gaza, whose administration was to provide the pretext for the first of many struggles for control of Palestinian institutions between the Islamists and the PLO (particularly Fatah) over the course of the 1980s. The visibility and social presence of the Islamist movement was growing rapidly.

Second: The Islamist Movement and the Institutionalization of Military Operations

Nonetheless, between 1978 and 1987, this social growth took place largely in isolation from Islamist military activity. In 1983, the Palestinian Brotherhood convened an internal conference to assess the status of the Palestinian cause and to discuss a possible start to military operations inside Palestine against the Israeli occupation. The meeting was chaired by the Jordan Brotherhood's Comptroller-General, Muhammad Abdul Rahman Khalifa (1919-2006), and was attended by Abdul Fattah Dukhan (1936-) from the Gaza Strip, Hassan al-Qiq (1940-2006) from the West Bank, and a number of Brothers from the Gulf states including, from Kuwait, Khalid Mish'al (1956-). Ibrahim Ghosheh presented a paper entitled "Points of Departure for Positive Action"⁽²⁹⁾ in reference

to military action against the Israeli occupation. Although Ghosheh secured agreement to fund the purchase of weapons by Brotherhood cadres in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, actual military operations were made contingent on objectively favorable conditions. A "Palestine Apparatus" bringing together a mixture of older members and younger radicals was set up to monitor political conditions in the occupied territories.⁽³⁰⁾

The newly established Gaza Military Operations Planning and Monitoring Committee duly made its first weapons purchase in 1983.⁽³¹⁾ By 1984 it had a stockpile of some 80 pieces, bought largely with external financial support (support which would continue to be key to Islamist armed action

25 Ibrahim al-Maqadimah, *Ma'ālim fi'l-Ṭarīq ilā Taḥrīr Falisṭīn* (Gaza: Al-Yamm Foundation, 1994).

26 Aql Salah, *Ḥarakat Ḥamās wa-Mumārasatuhā al-Siyāsīyya wa'l-Dimuqrāṭīyya 1992-2012* (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 2016), p. 72.

27 Muhsin Salih, *al-Ṭarīq ilā'l-Quds: Dirāsa Tārīkhīyya fī Raṣd al-Ṭajriba al-Islāmiyya 'alā Arḍ Falisṭīn mundhu 'Uṣūr al-Anbiyā' wa-Ḥattā Awākhir al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2012), p. 165.

28 Palestinian students at Kuwait University formed the Islamic Truth and Justice Bloc headed by Khalid Mish'al in 1976. After facing obstacles that prevented it from participating in elections, it was announced in 1980 that this list would be converted into the Islamic League of Palestinian Students, headed by Jawad al-Hamad. In the same period, Egyptian universities witnessed a mobilization of Palestinian students belonging to the Islamist movement, which was joined by Musa Abu Marzuq, Fathi Shikaki, Bashir Nafi' and Abdel Aziz Odeh. The Palestinian Muslim Youth League was established in Britain in 1979, while Canada and the United States saw the founding of the Islamic Union of Palestine in 1981. See: "Khālid Mish'al Wilāda 'alā Marāhil fi Ghazza wa'l-Ḍaffa wa'l-Shatāt Wahhalat Inbithāq Ḥamās min Raḥm al-Ikhwān (2)," *Al-Hayat*, interviewed by Ghassan Charbel, 05/12/2003, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <http://bit.ly/2SMQWQD>.

29 The term "positive" refers to *military* action, such that being involved in positive action indicates a current affiliation with Qassam Brigades today in the Gaza Strip.

30 Ghosheh, pp. 155-156.

31 Atif Adwan, *al-Shaykh Aḥmad Yāsīn: Ḥayātuhi wa-Jihāduhi* (Gaza: [n.p.], 1991), pp. 129-130.

throughout its evolution).⁽³²⁾ Perhaps owing to a sort of "beginners' naivete" – ideological zeal minus professionalism or expertise – the Israeli occupation authorities soon found out about this accumulation of weapons, and in 1984 Yasin was sentenced to 13 years in prison along with various companions. The Israeli indictment provides a full inventory of the weapons cache, shown in Figure 1:⁽³³⁾

Table 1
Inventory of weapons cache

Type	Quantity
Pistols of different types	20
M16 assault rifle	11
AK-47 Kalashnikov assault rifle	3
"Carlo" - Carlo Gustav submachine gun	1
IMI Galil rifle	1
Hand-grenade, inoperative	1
Bazooka machine gun, inoperative	1
Uzi submachine gun	5
Storage containers and ammunition for each weapon	

Source: Author.

One year later, however, Yasin was freed as part of a prisoner exchange between Israel and the PFLP. Out of an abundance of caution given the prevailing security conditions, and intent on avoiding re-arrest

and any possible exposure of other leaders then working underground in the Islamist movement, he stayed away from the movement's office in Gaza for a whole year following his release. In 1986, however, he became a member of Abdul Fattah Dukhan's Administrative Bureau.⁽³⁴⁾ Here he continued to make preparations for a future confrontation while avoiding further weapons purchases, relying instead on those caches which had remained undiscovered. The emphasis was on covert work and on avoiding security breaches within the first and second leadership tiers.

All this made it clear that the organization needed a coherent security apparatus, and in the same year Yasin spearheaded the creation of the Organization for Jihad and Mission or MAJD (*Munazzamat al-Jihād wa'l-Da'wa*), whose recruits were drawn from the younger members of the local Islamist movement. MAJD's primary task was to identify collaborators and associates of the occupation authorities. They produced literature on security issues and how to resist Israeli interrogation and coercion with titles like *The Mujāhid under Interrogation and Torture*.⁽³⁵⁾ They also kidnapped and interrogated a number of persons suspected of collaboration with the occupation authorities.⁽³⁶⁾

MAJD's activities ushered in a new phase in Islamist military operations. As the Gaza Strip was purged of agents and collaborators, the organization sought to recruit a reliable set of new cadres capable of conducting a more disciplined and coherent military campaign against the Israeli occupation. This same trajectory was witnessed in the West Bank with the establishment of Islamist units to assess the security situation fully prior to preparation for the commencement of military operations in conjunction with continuing political and social action.

32 "Aḥmad Yāsīn: Shāhid 'alā al-'Aṣr (Part IV)," *Al-Jazeera TV on Youtube*, 08/05/1999, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2usXF9D>, minutes 29-30, 35.

33 Adwan, p. 136.

34 Abu Marzuq, p. 138.

35 Ibid., p. 53.

36 Muhib Sulayman Ahmad al-Nawati, *Ḥamās min al-Dākhil* (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq for Publishing and Distribution, 2002), pp. 50-51.

Third: Hamas Launched and Izz al-Din al-Qassam Military Wing Established

By the 1980s the Islamist movement in Palestine enjoyed a soaring popularity among young people in the West Bank and Gaza. This was in part an outcome of the devastating first wave of Israeli occupation arrests and detentions in 1984, which had a galvanizing and transformative impact on the movement's political and military action. The regional context, charged with both Afghan jihad and Islamist revolution in Iran in 1979, gave the movement added impetus, and the 1985 institutionalization of the Palestine Apparatus provided a vehicle for integrating the Islamist movement's domestic and foreign roles: the "Apparatus" shouldered the responsibility of building the Islamist movement's relations regionally and internationally, garnering the movement financial support, and organizing its distribution to, and utilization in, the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

That the youth movement had reached fever pitch had long been plain to see, and especially within student groups. In December 1986, Israeli occupation authorities killed Birzeit University Islamic Bloc students Saeb Dhahab and Jawad Abu Salimah, prompting the Birzeit Bloc to release a statement mourning them as martyrs and warning Israel of "many others among our young people who will follow in their footsteps and who would be more than willing to sacrifice their lives to continue, with God's help, on the path of resistance."⁽³⁷⁾ One year later, the 8 December 1987 outbreak of the First Intifada's widespread agitation⁽³⁸⁾ throughout Palestine—accompanied by international and regional support—provided additional impetus for the Islamist movement to launch the Islamist

Resistance Movement HAMAS, based upon the preceding period of political and military activity.

It bears noting that the decision to stage direct military confrontations with the Israeli occupation had already been taken prior to the outbreak of the intifada. The West Bank Administrative Bureau⁽³⁹⁾ had elected to take military action following a 23 October 1987 meeting at the home of founding Hamas member Hasan al-Qiq's house in the southern West Bank's Hebron district of Dura; the upshot was that each city or locality would choose its own approach to military confrontation based on what appeared most appropriate to those with the most local knowledge available. For its part, the Gaza Administrative Bureau arrived at a similar decision on 17 November.⁽⁴⁰⁾ The outbreak in Gaza of the "Rock-Throwing Intifada" on 8 December 1987 effectively accorded priority to the Gaza Strip over the West Bank for any military operations. But within a month the Intifada had arrived in the West Bank as well.⁽⁴¹⁾

On 14 December 1987, a statement signed with the letters *ḥā'*, *mīm*, *sīn* formally announced the launch of Hamas, the Islamic Resistance Movement.⁽⁴²⁾ Present at the launch were Gaza administrative office members Abdul Fattah Dukhan, Ibrahim al-Yazuri (1940-), and Muhammad Hasan Shama (1935-2011), Ahmad Yasin, Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi (1947-2004), Isa al-Nashshar (1954-), and Salah Shehadeh (1953-2002). In the new year, Hamas issued its charter (*mīthāq*), which shaped the movement's identity in interaction with and perceptions of the ever-turbulent flux of domestic and foreign political structures. Article One defines method as being central to the

37 "Obituary of the Muslim Brotherhood's first martyrs, Jawad Abu Salimah and Saeb Dhahab," *Islamic Bloc*, 06/12/1986, accessed at the Islamic Bloc archive at Birzeit University.

38 "The Intifada of Stones": On 6 December 1987, a large Israeli transport vehicle rammed a small car carrying four workers from the city of Jabalia. The workers were killed, sparking outrage among the Palestinians in the Strip and leading to a mass storming of the Jabalia Police Station. The Intifada then spread from Jabalia camp to all the districts of the Gaza Strip, and by January 1988 to West Bank cities.

39 The Administrative Office managed Muslim Brotherhood activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the period 1969-1990, whereby each locality would choose its representative to the Administrative Office. At the founding of Hamas, the Administrative Office included two representatives from the Gaza Strip, a representative from the city of Ramallah, a representative from the city of Jerusalem, and two representatives from the city of Hebron; it also coordinated with the "Palestine Apparatus" abroad.

40 "Aḥmad Yāsīn, Shāhid 'alā al-'Asr (Part V)," *Al-Jazeera TV on Youtube*, 15/05/1999, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/35FU3Oo>, minutes 36-39.

41 Maswadi, p. 97.

42 "The First Launch Statement," *Official Website of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas*, 12/14/1987, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3gczdV>.

Islamist Resistance Movement: "Islam is its program, [Islam] from which it draws its ideas, ways of thinking and understanding of the universe, life and human beings. To this program it appeals for understanding and guidance in all its conduct." Article Two situates it in place and time: "The Islamic Resistance Movement is a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, the Muslim Brotherhood movement being a universal organization which constitutes the largest Islamic movement in modern times."⁽⁴³⁾ Article Nine delineates objectives: "fighting against and defeating falsehood so that justice may prevail, homelands may be retrieved, and the voice of the muezzin may reemerge from its mosques to proclaim the establishment of the state of Islam, thereby restoring people and things to their rightful places. And Allah is our helper." Article Eleven establishes that "the Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgment Day. Neither it, nor any part thereof, may be squandered. Neither it nor any part thereof shall be given up. Neither a single Arab country nor all Arab countries, neither a single monarch or president, nor all kings and presidents, neither a single organization nor all of them, be they Palestinian or Arab, may claim the right to do so. Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for Muslim generations until Judgment Day."⁽⁴⁴⁾

The "Palestinian Mujahidin" (Hamas's military command at the time, known by Code No. 101 in the Gaza Strip and headed by Salah Shehadeh) carried out their first combat operation via an affiliated squad led by Mohammed Yusuf al-Sharatha and including as members Muhammad Nassar and Mahmud al-Mabhuh (1960- 2010). The operation involved the capture and extrajudicial execution of two Israeli soldiers, Sergeant Avi Sasportas, who was kidnapped on 7 February 1989, and soldier Ilan Saadon, kidnapped on 3 May 1989. A security breach enabled Israeli occupation authorities to discover

the car used to transport Saadon and, along with it, the entire chain of command behind the operation, prompting most command members to flee the Gaza Strip via Sinai. Israel then conducted a campaign of arrests and seized many of Hamas' future Gaza Strip leaders. On 15 June 1989, Yasin was incarcerated with other subsequent Hamas leaders, and publicly acknowledged having founded Hamas as a movement in Gaza. It was a major blow which brought down the movement's command and exposed its security and military apparatuses.

Hamas thus found itself confronted with an existential crisis, with Israeli mass arrests rounding up anyone in Gaza and the West Bank with a demonstrable affiliation to the Islamist movement, in the aftermath of which Israel evidently believed that it had nipped the Islamist resistance in the bud.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Musa Mohammed Abu Marzuq minced no words in describing the impact of the Israeli response, stating: "The blow we sustained was so powerful that none of the movement's organs was still functioning: none of Gaza's structures of mass mobilization, military operations, security, organizational development, media and communications or political action. All the institutional machinery has been disabled and all operations have come to a halt. It is as if the movement had simply disappeared from the Gaza Strip."⁽⁴⁶⁾

Subsequently, Musa Mohammed Abu Marzuq, then residing in the USA, travelled to Gaza via Egypt and, under Sayyid Abu Samih, reconstituted a second and third tier administrative office with work that was centrally linked to the movement's West Bank office, then handled by Hassan al-Qiq. In the context of this reconstruction and restructuring, military operations were divorced from everything else. The first unit was given the moniker "Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades," although Abu Marzuq reported that "none of us apart from Dr. Khairi al-Agha was aware - until later - of the movement leadership's having formed a military unit that was called the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades,

43 For more, see: "The Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement Hamas (1988)," *Al Jazeera Net*, 18/08/1988, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <http://bit.ly/2SxBybC>.

44 Ibid.

45 Adnan Maswadi's memoirs describe the movement's difficulties in this period: "My arrest was after the distribution of Communiqué 42 [...] While we were in detention, we yearned to see a *Communiqué* 43 being issued, so as to lessen the intensity of the torture under interrogation. It would have served as evidence that we were not the leaders as they thought us to be." See: Maswadi, p. 199.

46 " Fī Riwayā Ukhrā: Mūsā Abū Marzūq (Part 1)," *Alaraby TV on Youtube*, 31/10/2018, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2OXRgLB>.

apparently to distinguish it from the Abdullah Azzam Brigades, a known entity at the time."⁽⁴⁷⁾ This is not surprising, especially since military statements had been issued after the outbreak of the Intifada to the effect that the Israeli occupation forces had been targeted by the Islamist Resistance under different names, including: the Martyrs Group in the northern Gaza Strip, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades in the West Bank, and al-Qassam Brigades in Rafah and Al-Wusta. Abd al-Hakim Hanini (1965-), one of the leaders of military action in the northern West Bank, indicated in his testimony that the military operations they were carrying out in the northern West Bank were under the name of the Martyr Abdullah Azzam Brigades.⁽⁴⁸⁾

In 1992, military action in the West Bank and Gaza Strip took place under the name of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Salih al-Aruri (1966-), who in charge of military action in the West Bank, supervised the formation of military cells resisting the Israeli occupation at the end of 1990, as conditions were favorable in the West Bank for the initiation of military action. This development coincided with the arrival of a number of Hamas members who were wanted by the authorities in the Gaza Strip. These men communicated with prior organizational coordination with Aruri in Hebron, who equipped them with weapons and transferred two of them, Talal Nassar and Bashir Hammad, to the northern West Bank, while keeping 'Aql (1971-1993) in Hebron to form the focal points of the military action, which grew in intensity in the West Bank after Operation Bisharat on 22 September 1992.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Zahir Jabarin (1968-), one of the founders of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank, wrote about the beginnings of contact with the Brigades in

Gaza, saying: "In August 1992, we began working on making contact with al-Qassam Brigades in Gaza, and we succeeded, thanks be to God [...]. Groups from the Gaza Brigades came to our area."⁽⁵⁰⁾ Salih al-Aruri coordinated with Adel Awadallah (1967-1998) and Ibrahim Hamid (1965-), the latter of whom secured \$100,000 in funding from members abroad. This sum "turned into weapons purchased from arms dealers, and from brothers who specialized in the trade. They even obtained some of these weapons from enemy soldiers in return for money, then distributed them to groups that were ready to operate [...]. Al-Qassam Brigades' first operation in the West Bank was carried out by Muhammad Bisharat in Jerusalem, after which the operations continued."⁽⁵¹⁾ The Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades' first statement was issued on 1 January 1992 after the killing of Jewish rabbi Doron Shoshan.⁽⁵²⁾

After Hamas kidnapped and killed Israeli soldier Nasim Toledano on 13 December 1992, the Israeli occupation authorities expelled a number of leaders of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to Marj al-Zuhur in south Lebanon. Hailing from various sectors of society in the West Bank and Gaza, the expelled activists and leaders numbered 415. Their expulsion was accompanied by a political and humanitarian movement, including statements of condemnation issued by various quarters. The UN Security Council issued Resolution No. 799, which denounced Israel's behavior and demanded that it guarantee the return of all the deportees, describing Israel as having breached its obligations under the 1948 Geneva Convention.⁽⁵³⁾

At this point it became necessary to establish a political office to manage the movement's affairs abroad in a public fashion. The need for this was clear given the escalation of the Intifada and the intensification of

47 Abu Marzuq, p. 143.

48 "Shāhid 'alā al-'Asr: Ḥanīnī Yakshif Tafāṣīl 'Amaliyyāt al-Muqāwama (Part II)," *Al-Jazeera TV on Youtube*, accessed 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2tUox2w>, minutes 37-38.

49 Bilal Shalash, "Taḥawwulāt al-Muqāwama al-Musallaḥa li-Ḥarakat Ḥamās fī'l-Daffa al-Gharbiyya fī Athnā' Intifādat al-Aqṣā min al-Markaziyya ilā al-Shazāyā al-Mutafajjira," in: Ahmad Jamil Azm et al., *Qaḍiyyat Falisṭīn wa-Mustaqbal al-Mashrū' al-Waṭanī al-Falisṭīnī fī'l-Huwwiyya wa'l-Muqāwama wa'l-Qānūn al-Duwalī*, Part 1 (Doha/Beirut: ACRPS, 2015), p. 424.

50 Zahir Jabarin, *Ḥikāyat al-Dam min Sharāyīn al-Qassām: Shahāda li'l-'Aṣr wa'l-Tārīkh* (Damascus: Palestine Foundation for Culture, 2012), p. 35.

51 Testimony of Salah al-Aruri concerning the beginning of military action in the West Bank. In: Abu Marzuq, pp. 159-162.

52 The first military communiqué of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades: "Qatl al-Ḥākhām al-Yahūdī 'Warōn Shōshān' [sic]: Raddunā 'alā Jarā'm al-Irhābī Rābīn," *Official Website of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades*, 01/01/1992, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2Ne2TN4>.

53 "Resolution 799 (1992): Adopted by the Security Council at its 3151st meeting on 18 December 1992," *United Nations Security Council*, 18/12/1992, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/37VhhBJ>.

the Israeli blockade, which prevented communication and movement between the cities and villages of the Arab West Bank itself, not to mention the Gaza Strip, and between the two administrative offices in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel had put pressure on the United States and Europe for harboring Hamas leaders and those affiliated with Hamas, who were raising funds and conducting political activities, thereby bolstering Hamas' military role in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁽⁵⁴⁾ The Political Bureau of Hamas, headed by Musa Abu Marzuq, and with the membership of Imad Al-Alami (1956-2018), Ibrahim Ghosheh, Muhammad Nazzal (1963-), Izzat al-Rishq (1960-), and Samih al-Ma'ayitah as Secretary, emerged following a request by Yasser Arafat to meet with the movement's leadership for a briefing on the repercussions of the issue of the deportees and their return to the interior, the nature of the emerging Palestinian force, its orientations and mechanisms for dealing with it, and how to integrate it within the framework of the PLO while supporting and escalating the Intifada.⁽⁵⁵⁾

The establishment of a political office⁽⁵⁶⁾ to manage Hamas' affairs, which coincided with the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, was a significant turning point in its political and military activities, strengthening the hand of an emergent Palestinian power viewed with suspicion by both Palestinians and other Arabs. The Oslo Accords had alarmed Jordan, which hosted several Hamas leaders and was wary of the strength of its own Brotherhood organization. Hamas's formation along with other Palestinian factions of the so-called "Ten-Faction Alliance" against the Madrid settlement – and its clear ability to mobilize within the Occupied Territories, which the PLO factions that had taken up residence

in Damascus lacked – also attracted Syria's attention, despite the Asad regime's antipathy to Islamists. The same applied to the Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and the UAE, which began to see Hamas as a way of supporting the Palestinian cause without affiliating themselves with the PLO (whose support for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 had alienated them).

Hamas' continuing use of military action post-Oslo meant that its relationship with the Palestinian Authority was placed under great strain. After every Hamas attack launched from the autonomous areas, Israel took out its anger on the PA, accusing it of allowing its territory to be used as a staging area. The PA hoped that it could draw Hamas into the government by political dialogue and negotiation.⁽⁵⁷⁾ But these "soft power" methods failed – as did the "hard power" tactics that followed them during the crackdown on Hamas in 1996.⁽⁵⁸⁾ The organization would neither abandon military action nor allow itself to be drawn into using violence against the PA, a decision which gave it mass popularity and strengthened its political legitimacy as a resistance movement.

The presence of a political office helped to introduce a measure of centralized control over military activity. At the same time, the movement consisted less in a coherent military institution with the ability to assess the military and security situations in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and make collective decisions than it did as individual cells that carried out individual *ad hoc* military operations. These cells could not withstand the blows leveled against them by the PA and Israeli occupation forces, both of which carried out arrest campaigns and liquidations of military leaders in the West Bank and Gaza. The situation

54 Abu Marzuq, p. 158.

55 Ghosheh, p. 199.

56 In the 1990s, Hamas' Political Bureau conducted a series of visits to Arab and foreign countries which resulted in agreements to open Hamas offices in places such as Jordan (though it was later closed after tension between the movement and the Jordanian regime), Qatar, Iran, Russia, Lebanon, Syria (which later cut ties with Hamas in 2012 over its stance on the Syrian revolution), South Africa, Algeria, Yemen and Sudan. Hamas also maintained undeclared relations with other countries, such as Saudi Arabia, though the position of the new Saudi leadership on the Muslim Brotherhood led to a break in said relations and the arrest of a number of Hamas cadres, including its representative, Muhammad al-Khudari.

57 In September 1994, Yasser Arafat visited the Islamic University in the Gaza Strip, where he met with Hamas leaders and prominent figures in their functional, as opposed to their political, capacity. The movement's military operational activity declined in the latter half of 1995 due to an unwritten agreement between it and the Authority stipulating that no military actions would be carried out. This gave the Authority an opportunity to revive the dialogue between the two parties, which led to a round of dialogue in Khartoum in October 1995, and in Cairo in late December 1995. For more, see: Al-Hurub, pp. 120-121.

58 Ibid, p. 123.

was exacerbated by the fact that most of the members of the Qassam Brigades, including the commanders, lacked both military and security experience,⁽⁵⁹⁾ and cells faced a serious shortage of equipment and funds.⁽⁶⁰⁾ Nonetheless, between 1992 and 1998 the number of cells and individual cadres, the supply of weapons and the general performance of the military wing – including the first Hamas suicide bombings in 1993 – had evolved dramatically.

Every military operation carried by al-Qassam Brigades against the Israeli occupation was followed by a campaign of arrests and assassinations. In the late 1990s, the occupation authorities were able to tighten their grip on the movement's military wing through

campaigns to liquidate and arrest the majority of its leaders in the West Bank. These leaders had decided to build a centralized and cohesive military apparatus whose lead commanders would be based in prison. However, by the end of 1998, the occupation forces and the PA's security services had discovered the Apparatus and Israel had arrested and assassinated its cadres. Foremost among these apparatus commanders were Adil Awadallah, his brother Imad Awadallah and Muhyi al-Din al-Sharif in the West Bank. Worse still, the occupation forces seized the archive that Adil Awadallah had kept in his possession at all times,⁽⁶¹⁾ and which contained hundreds of letters and documents related to the Brigades' activities.⁽⁶²⁾

Fourth: The Hamas Army: Political and Military Integration

Between 1992 and 2000, the al-Qassam Brigades sustained a series of severe blows in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and its military-institutional structure collapsed so thoroughly that it seemed to have completely disappeared. There was no effective communication or cooperation among the various regions, and even relations with the leadership on the outside were limited and marginal.⁽⁶³⁾ The movement's mass action also declined due to a campaign launched by the Israeli occupation to pursue, arrest and liquidate Hamas leaders and cadres, while the PA worked to tighten the noose around the movement and prevent it from communicating with the people.

The eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada on 28 September 2000, however, brought about a dramatic reversal of Hamas's fortunes, bringing with it a new wave of mass and military action and restoring much of what the organization had lost in the previous three years. Nonetheless, as the Al-Aqsa Intifada picked up steam, two currents emerged within

Hamas. The first current questioned the Intifada, viewing it as a scheme hatched by pro-settlement entities on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides as a means of relieving internal pressure and assuaging popular frustration over the diminishing prospects of a political settlement, while the second current saw it as a genuine popular uprising that called for involvement and participation.⁽⁶⁴⁾

Hamas's rapid recovery of its military capacity was facilitated by the release of dozens of cadres who had been active in the Qassam Brigades from PA prisons in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. These cadres quickly set about preparing for a new phase of military action. In the West Bank, the recently freed Ibrahim Hamid helped to reconstitute military cells. He was then joined by Bilal and Abdullah al-Barghuti from the Central Qassam Organization, who brought with them extensive explosives experience. Meanwhile, the Israeli occupation authorities released Salah Shehadeh, the founder of military action in Gaza,

59 "Shāhid 'alā al-'Asr: Ḥanīnī Yakshif Tafāṣīl 'Amaliyyāt al-Muqāwama (Part II)," minutes 5-8.

60 Zahir Jabarin, one of the founders of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in the West Bank, mentions the start of security work in early 1992 and the war on collaborators in the northern West Bank before military action began. He discusses the formation of one group what would be in charge of monitoring, and another in charge of kidnapping, transportation, and providing a safe place in which to interrogate collaborators. They formed a security committee which, in addition to Zahir Jabarin, included Yahya Ayyash, Adnan Mar'i, and Ali 'Asi. Security work faced obstacles relating to a lack of equipment and funds, as there was no contact with the movement at that time due to the interruption of organizational channels after what Hamas had undergone in 1990. See: Jabarin, p. 29.

61 Shalash, "Taḥawwulāt," p. 429.

62 "Kashf al-Niqāb 'an Mazīd min Tafāṣīl al-Arshif al-Markazī li-Ḥarakat Ḥamās," *Al-Quds*, no. 10510, 28/11/1998, pp. 2-3.

63 Husam Badran, *Katibat al-Shamāl: al-Sabbāqūn ilā'l-Janna*, Khalid Mish'al (intro.) ([n.c.]: Media Office of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, 2010), p. 17.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

who likewise began rebuilding Hamas' fighting capabilities in the Gaza Strip.⁽⁶⁵⁾

From 2000-2005, the Brigades returned to their established modus operandi of autonomous cells carrying out independent operations against the occupation, with no cell aware of the others' activities for security reasons. The leadership "made no detailed decisions on military action and, in general, no specific people were assigned to lead the work," as one early operative puts it.⁽⁶⁶⁾ Hamas's growing importance to the so-called Axis of Resistance – the assassination of Rafik Hariri and the subsequent Syrian retreat from Lebanon on 30 April 2005 had forced Damascus and Tehran to rely more on local allies, Hamas included – meant that the movement inherited Syrian camps and equipment in Lebanon as well as benefiting from much-needed military and logistical support from Iran.

Within Palestine itself, however, Hamas's growing popularity meant fresh trouble with Fatah. As Fatah struggled with internal divisions after the death of Yasser Arafat, Hamas had gone from strength to strength, and in the January 2006 elections – the first it had ever run in – it won a majority of seats in the Palestinian legislature. This in turn meant that it had to find a way of combining governance and resistance. Being more inclined to the latter than the former, Hamas found itself at loggerheads with the moderate Arab current, and was increasingly drawn into a power struggle with Mahmud Abbas's PA. Moreover, with the USA and Europe unwilling to deal with Ismail Haniyeh's Hamas cabinet, the only support available to his government came from Syria, Iran, Sudan, Qatar and Turkey. The capture of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit on 25 June 2006 added a further complication to the political scene.

As conditions deteriorated in Gaza, Interior Minister Said Siyam (a member of the Hamas cabinet) decided

to form an independent security force under the control of his ministry, the Executive Force. This decision represented a major escalation between Fatah and Hamas. Siyam claimed that the EF was necessary to halt the deterioration in the security situation, particularly in Gaza, where he had lost control over the (PA-controlled) security apparatus. Shortly thereafter, President Abbas countermanded Siyam's decision and ordered the formation of a "Presidential Guard" instead, which unlike the EF was to exclude members of Hamas-affiliated organizations.⁽⁶⁷⁾ In June 2007 Hamas expelled Fatah members and representatives of the PA security forces from Gaza, and the PA cracked down on Hamas members in the West Bank.⁽⁶⁸⁾

It should be noted that there were ongoing confrontations between Israel and Palestinian resistance factions, which would respond to Israeli attacks by firing homemade rockets into Israel, and clash with the Israeli army during its incursions into the border areas of the Strip. The first major confrontation between the Qassam Brigades and Israel took place on 27 December 2008. Israel called it "Operation Cast Lead," while Qassam Brigades called it the "Furqan War." Israel's goals were to overthrow Hamas' rule in Gaza, destroy the movement's missile force, and recover Shalit. However, the battle ended without it having achieved any of these objectives.

1. The Institutional Structure of the Qassam Brigades: The Nucleus of an Army in Gaza and cells in the West Bank

By the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the gradual reorganization of the Qassam Brigades had produced a much more sophisticated military structure, with some six brigades (themselves divided into detachments, units, etc) comprising some 30,000 troops under the overall control of a Supreme Military Council. They had a substantial support staff, including a scientific department and offices responsible for

65 Shalash, "Taḥawwulāt," p. 440.

66 Badran, p. 18.

67 Maryam Itani, *Ṣirā' al-Ṣalāḥiyyāt bayna Fath wa-Ḥamās fi Idārat al-Sulṭah al-Falasṭīniyyah 2006-2007*, Muhsin Salih (ed.) (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2008), pp. 75-62.

68 Hamas referred to its military operations against Fatah in the Gaza Strip in June 2007 as the "military resolution," while Fatah called them the "Hamas coup." Approximately 161 Fatah members were killed, including 43 civilians, 91 being belonging to Fatah and its affiliated security services, while Hamas, the Qassam Brigades and the Executive Force suffered 27 dead. For more, see: *Ṣafahāt Sawdā' fī Ghayāb al-'Adāla: Taqrīr Ḥawla al-Aḥdāth al-Dāmiya allatī Shahadahā Qitā' Ghazza Khilāl al-Fatra Bayna 7-14 Yūniyō 2007* ([n.c.]: The Palestinian Center for Human Rights, [n.d.]), pp. 81-85, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <http://bit.ly/2vzam3o>.

military development, culture and education, as well as distinct military courts.⁽⁶⁹⁾ Recruits had to secure a recommendation from an existing cadre as well as a certificate of moral and religious commitment from their local mosque just to be considered – and would then have to complete an initial educational course and pass through a rigorous vetting procedure before being accepted to the Military Academy for field training. Those who excelled in their final examinations became part of the elite units responsible for complex operations (including suicide bombings).⁽⁷⁰⁾ A media office – which now has a website – showcased their operations and military data.⁽⁷¹⁾

No discussion of the development of al-Qassam's military action since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa Intifada is possible without mention of the political, military and financial support the movement has received. The interaction between the structure of the regional system and Hamas as an actor in the region contributed to defining its identity within the axis of resistance that began to form in the region following the US invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003, and which included Syria, Iran and Hezbollah. The development of political ties between Hamas and the Syrian regime resulted in increased military support for Hamas through the provision of logistical, security and military facilities. In his book, *The Hamas Movement's Approach to International Relations: The Example of Syria*, Abdul Hakim Hanini details this support, including the provision of ID cards for all security and military cadres, as well as vehicles bearing military license plates. Hamas operatives were granted special permits to purchase the weapons and ammunition needed for their training from the free market in the Ghouta area; their crossing of the border (the "military line") was facilitated; they were allowed to bring in military and security materials and equipment without hindrances or inspections; Hamas cadres received training from the PFLP; and

were allowed to conduct all experiments related to military industrialization.

Hamas benefited from the scientific centers owned by the Popular Front - General Command in developing the missile and drone industry. Hundreds of Hamas cadres underwent military training in Iran via Damascus without having to go through security checks, and their passports were kept unstamped to conceal their entry into Syria and Iran in order to keep their trips secret.⁽⁷²⁾ Meanwhile, shipments of weapons of all kinds reached the Gaza Strip through two main routes: (1) The land route: Arms shipments would arrive at Sudanese ports before being taken in convoys to the Egyptian Sinai, where they would enter Gaza through tunnels, and (2) The sea route: Arms would be smuggled by boat from Egyptian territorial waters to the Gaza coast, or to the Sinai and then to the Gaza Strip through tunnels.

2. The Development of Military Manufacturing

Despite a shortage of necessary materials, the Qassam Brigades have managed to steadily develop their manufacturing capacity. The Israeli restrictions on import of cleaning agents containing dual-use compounds and of fertilizer that can be used in explosives have made manufacturing in the West Bank very difficult. But in Gaza the tunnel system and the occasional small boats that run the Israeli blockade have made production much more feasible.⁽⁷³⁾ Current data, as well as their recent confrontations with the IDF in 2008/2009, 2012 and 2014, suggest that the Brigades are on their way to developing missiles, launchers, explosive devices, and drones that are more accurate, longer-range, and more capable of impacting the occupation forces' fortifications. The Brigades have developed "Qassam" missiles and other types, in addition to training in the use of Russian and Chinese-made missiles and the development of explosive devices, hand grenades, and drones.

69 Following the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in the winter of 2005, the *Al Jazeera* program *Fī Dīyāfat al-Bunduqīyya* presented a history of the Qassam Brigades which included recordings of Brigades leader Muhammad Daif and his deputy Ahmad al-Ja'bari. See: "Fī Dīyāfat al-Bunduqīyya," *Al Jazeera TV on Youtube*, 09/08/2014, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2TwdCGF>, minutes 11:14 -12.

70 Ibid.

71 See: The Official Website of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, at: <https://bit.ly/30yknsX>.

72 Abdul Hakim Hanini, *Manhajīyyat Ḥamās fī'l-'Alāqāt al-Khārijīyya: Sūriyā Namūdhajan, 2000-2015* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2018), pp. 130-132.

73 *Athar al-Ṣawārīkh al-Falīṣṭīniyya fī'l-Ṣirā' ma' al-Iḥṭilāl* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2008), pp. 8-9.

a. Missile Development

The idea of manufacturing rockets goes back to Nidal Farhat (1971-2003) and Tito Mas'ud (1967-2003), who manufactured the first Qassam 1 missile with a range of 2500 meters in June 2001.⁽⁷⁴⁾ Four months later, on 26 October 2001 to be exact, the first homemade rocket landed inside the settlement of Sderot, which is about 1.6 miles away from the Gaza Strip. Al-Qassam Brigades claimed responsibility for launching the Qassam 1 missile, which had a diameter of around 60 millimeters and weighed about 5.5 kilograms. During the period 2001-2005, Hamas in the Gaza Strip was manufacturing local rockets and providing them to the Palestinian resistance factions. Said Awwad (1977-2002), who is credited with developing the Qassam 2 missile, and who was assassinated by Israel in April 2002, transferred his missile manufacturing expertise to the West Bank. The Qassam Brigades launched the first three homemade Qassam 2 rockets on 24 February 2002 from the West Bank in the direction of occupied Palestine.

The manufacture and launch of rockets from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank marked a turning point in the conflict between the Palestinian resistance factions—foremost among them the Brigades, which pioneered rocket manufacturing — and Israel. The Qassam 1 and 2 rockets in use between 2002 and 2005 lacked a guidance system and were therefore quite inaccurate. Consequently, the damage they inflicted was not limited to the dead, wounded and material damages suffered by the Israeli side, but included psychological repercussions on the residents of the settlements immediately surrounding the Gaza Strip. Thus, despite the fact that in terms of accuracy and destructive capacity, these missiles are not comparable to the missiles used by the Israeli occupation forces, and which kill and maim hundreds of Palestinian civilians, these rockets came to play a role in the truce negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides.

By early 2005, Hamas had developed modern Qassam rockets known as Qassam 3, with a maximum range of 10-12 kilometers and carrying explosive materials weighing 10-20 kilograms. Approximately 450 Qassam rockets were fired at Israel over the course of

2003 and 2004.⁽⁷⁵⁾ There is no technical information about Qassam rockets from official Hamas sources, but the reference book on artillery rockets issued by the Norwegian Defense Research Institute in 2010 includes basic information on Qassam rockets, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2
Detailed Information on the Generations of Locally Manufactured Qassam Rockets

	Qassam 1	Qassam 2	Qassam 3
Diameter (mm)	60	150	170
Weight (kg)	5.5	32	90
Length (cm)	79	180	200+
Range (km)	3	3-8	10
Explosive payload (kg)	1/2	10-20	10

Source: "Hamas missiles: Qassam Frantisi, then Ja'bari," *Al Jazeera Net*, 10/2014/7/, accessed on 12/2020/2/, at: <http://bit.ly/2RNzJHj>.

Hamas subsequently changed the way it named its rockets. After using Qassam 1, 2, 3, and 4, it began using the English initials of the nicknames of leaders who had been assassinated by the occupation:

- The M75 missile was named after Ibrahim Al-Maqadimah, who was assassinated in 2003. It has a range of 75 kilometers, and a 70-kilogram explosive head.
- The R160 missile was named after Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi, who assumed the presidency of the movement after the assassination of Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, and who was assassinated in 2004. It has a range of more than 120 kilometers and an explosive head weighing 45 kilograms.
- The J80 missile stands for Ahmad al-Jabari, a commander assassinated in 2012.

During the Furqan War, the Qassam Brigades fired about 980 rockets, including 345 Qassam rockets, 213 Grad rockets, and 422 mortar shells. The list

74 "Fi Diyāfat al-Bunduqiyya."

75 "Hamas Rockets," *Global Security*, [n.d.], accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2Rd58CH>.

of Israeli targets included military bases and sites, and settlements in Beersheba, Ashkelon and Ashdod.⁽⁷⁶⁾ The Kornet-E missile was also used for the first time,⁽⁷⁷⁾ giving Qassam Brigades a comparative advantage in dealing with the Israeli occupation forces making incursions into Gaza.

The 2012 confrontation between the Brigades and Israel ("Operation Pillar of Cloud" to the Israelis, "Operation Stones of Clay" to the Resistance) lasted for twelve days, in the course of which the Qassam Brigades demonstrated an operational sophistication, intelligence-gathering capabilities and media strategy close to that of a regular army. In so doing, the Brigades benefited both from their accumulated experience in military action and the regional climate of support that had emerged in the aftermath of the Arab popular uprisings of 2011, especially with the change in the Egyptian and Libyan regimes. Israel made no secret of its concern over the flow of weapons from Libya to Gaza via Egypt and the Sudan – the then head of Shin Bet, Yoram Cohen, branded Libya a "new gateway to hell" – most of which were Soviet short-range shoulder-fired surface-to-air SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles and RPGs.⁽⁷⁸⁾ Accordingly, Israel attempted to persuade the Brotherhood-led government in Egypt to reduce these supplies.⁽⁷⁹⁾

In the 2012 war, the Qassam Brigades used the Iranian-made Fajr-5 missile for the first time. The Fajr-5, which has a basic range of 58-75 kilometers, was announced by Iranian Aerospace Industries in May 2006, and according to the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) was immediately transferred to Palestinian factions in Gaza.⁽⁸⁰⁾ It was the first time that missiles fired by

the Brigades had reached Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.⁽⁸¹⁾ By this point, Israel had put in place its Iron Dome system, which succeeded in intercepting around 421 rockets but failed to stop 58 landing in urban areas. The Brigades' new tactic of targeting Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and Haifa – taking the Israelis by surprise with the range of their missiles – meant that the Iron Dome was unable to save Israel from the fear and confusion spread by the rockets.

b. The Yasin

On 3 August 2004, the Qassam Brigades announced the launch of the first ever Yasin Missile.⁽⁸²⁾ The Yasin is a version of the anti-armor RPG that can target enemy vehicles, installations and fortifications, and works effectively in both offense and defense against enemy targets, specifically during invasions. It has a range of over 200 meters, and the projectile can penetrate up to 16 centimeters in steel fortifications.⁽⁸³⁾

c. Bombs and Explosive Devices

During the second Intifada, the Brigades developed the manufacture of hand grenades, which went through many stages, as well as anti-personnel and anti-vehicle explosive devices called "Shawaz." The first model of Shawaz contained 40 kilograms of explosive materials, and Al-Qassam Brigades later introduced modifications to it, developing approximately seven generations of it. The most recent version, which contains 3.5 kilograms of highly explosive materials, is capable of penetrating about 40 centimeters of iron. The last version of Shawaz was tested on 9 pieces of iron, each of them 5 centimeters thick, at a distance of

76 "Ma' rakat al-Furqān," *Official Website of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades*, [n.d.], accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2RgCKzQ>.

77 The Kornet-E is a Russian-made anti-armor missile which is designed to defeat tanks, light armored vehicles, fortifications and low-flying air targets. It was developed by the Instrument Design Bureau of the Russian company KBP. It is semi-automatically oriented and aimed with laser beams, so that the shooter aims the missile at the target and keeps it in his crosshairs until the hit is made. See: "Kornet-E 9M133 AT-14 Spriggan antitank guided missile system," *Army Recognition*, 25/07/2018, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2vg44pf>.

78 "Rāis al-Shābāk Yaz' um 'Anna Ḥamās Tamtalik 8 Ālāf Šārūkh wa-15 Alf Muqātil," *Palestinian Information Center*, 6/3/2012, accessed on 19/12/2019, at: <http://bit.ly/38iTnRy>.

79 Ian Black, "Fajr-5 missile gives Palestinians rare if short-lived advantage," *The Guardian*, 16/11/2012, accessed on 15/11/2019, at: <https://bit.ly/30PaIye>.

80 "Īrān: Waḍa' nā Taqniyyat Šawārīkh Fajr 5 fī Aydī al-Muqāwama al-Falīstīniyya," *Al-Alam TV*, 11/11/2012, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/3aHnbZy>.

81 Ethan Bronner, "With Longer Reach, Rockets Bolster Hamas Arsenal," *The New York Times*, 17/11/2012, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://nyti.ms/2TSAEYm>.

82 "'Uqūl al-Qassām Tabtakir Qadhīfa Jadīda min Ṭarāz al-Yāsīn," *Official Website of the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades*, 03/08/2004, accessed on 19/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/30Nw3IF>.

83 "Fī Ḍiyāfat al-Bunduqiyya," (minutes 30-33).

about 60 centimeters, which means it would be able to penetrate the Israeli-made Merkava tank.⁽⁸⁴⁾

d. Digging Combat Tunnels

On 26 September 2001, the first operation was carried out via a combat tunnel dug by members of Al-Qassam Brigades in Gaza, and which reached the bottom of an incineration site along the Egyptian-Palestinian border. The military site was detonated with a 320-kilogram explosive device. The Qassam Brigades then continued to dig a series of combat and commercial tunnels through which they could transport weapons and equipment, in addition to goods and merchandise needed by Gaza residents under siege. When a joint Israeli-Egyptian crackdown was launched against the network of commercial and military tunnels between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, the "tunnel industry" found itself out of a job. But it was easy enough to put it to work again on the other side, creating a network of offensive military tunnels connecting Gaza with the rest of Palestine.⁽⁸⁵⁾

The 7 July 2014 confrontation between Hamas and Israel, which Israel called "Protective Edge" and Hamas called "Dry Stubble," was distinguished by the Brigades' use of a large network of combat tunnels. Along with numerous attacks launched from the sea, Qassam fighters were able to use tunnels to dramatically change the rules of engagement. They were able to carry out operations in the heart of settlement blocs, infiltrate behind the lines of invading forces, and attack them from the rear during military operations against the Strip. The tunnels also facilitated the kidnapping of soldiers.

Masterfully built, lined with concrete, and containing advanced means of communication, the new tunnels reached an average depth of between 20 and 25 meters. Each tunnel had a central passage through which excavators entered, and which branched off into other passages, some of them military, in an atmosphere of strict secrecy. The construction of a single tunnel took from one to three years, and the

daily rate of excavation ranged between 4 and 16 meters, carried out by excavators carefully vetted by the Brigades. Beneath Gaza City stretches a vast, complex network of tunnels, which has allowed the Brigades to respond militarily in the event of Israeli ground operations and provided the leadership with an impregnable fortress from which to direct operations.

e. Drones

The idea of manufacturing unmanned aircraft to carry out intelligence and combat missions dates back to 2006. Known as the "Iraqi Plane," the first model for this aircraft originated with a former Iraqi army officer who had obtained a PhD from the University of Baghdad and whose graduation project was to produce a drone. He then offered his experience to the Qassam work team that was supervising the drone production unit. The team was headed by Tunisian engineer Mohamed Zouari, who was assassinated in Tunisia on 15 December 2016, but who nonetheless played a pivotal role.⁽⁸⁶⁾ As the project was in its infancy at the time, a series of exercises were conducted in Iran and Syria as part of the design process.⁽⁸⁷⁾

The Qassam Brigades' success in using locally-made drones, despite their primitive capabilities, reflects the extent of their determination and their exhaustive preparation for future confrontations. Thus, despite the difficult conditions they have faced, they have been able to combine their war effort, political action and psychological warfare against the Israelis to excellent effect. The Brigades have produced three models of an unmanned aircraft bearing the name "Ababeel 1":

- an A1A aircraft for reconnaissance missions.
- an A1B aircraft for offensive missions: dropping missiles.
- an A1C aircraft for attack-suicide missions.

On the morning of 14 July 2014, Qassam drones made three sorties, each involving more than one

84 Ibid., (minutes 32-34).

85 Ahmad Jamil 'Azam, "Anfāq Ghazza: Nazariyyatān wa-Kidhba wa-Su'āl," *al-Waṭan*, 07/08/2014, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2TSHtZX>.

86 "Muḥammad al-Zawārī: Ṭayyār al-Muqāwama," *Mā Khaḍiyya A'ḍam*, *Al Jazeera TV on Youtube*, 30/04/2017, accessed on 01/02/2020, at: <https://bit.ly/2RnJD2e>.

87 Hanini, *Manḥajīyyat Ḥamās f'l- 'Alāqāt al-Khārījīyya*, p. 131.

aircraft. Contact was lost with one of the aircraft during the second sortie, and with another during the third, although this was not the first time Qassam drones had carried out missions deep within Israeli territory. On an earlier occasion, and despite air cover and advanced interception systems, Qassam drones had carried out specific missions over the Ministry of War in Tel Aviv, which served as the launching point for Israel's attack on Gaza.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Therefore, the Israeli

occupation army decided to increase its air forces over Gaza, fearing that Hamas would use small drones carrying explosives to attack Israeli targets. Small planes similar to those used in filming operations, the drones would be capable of inflicting significant great damage if they exploded in the southern settlements. The Israeli Air Force thus launched aircraft in the skies of Gaza to intercept any unidentified drones that might be launched by Hamas as a surprise tactic.

Conclusion

In the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war, the Islamist movement in Palestine did not establish an armed wing for various reasons. Some obvious considerations include the movement's compromised organizational structure and the growing popularity of the pan-Arab and Nasserist currents which often clashed with Islamist elements. Equally important, however, was a growing generational conflict between the leaders of Palestinian Islamism: the older generation sought to justify postponing military action, while the new (post-1967) generation wanted to go to war immediately. It was this younger generation who, with the early 1980s, were able to successfully spearhead Islamist armed action.

Once Hamas was established, military action could not have endured in the face of the combined forces of the Israeli occupation and the PA had it not been for the integration of roles locally and internationally. Indeed, Hamas' military wing was almost smothered in its crib by Israeli action in the early 1990s. But the al-Aqsa Intifada breathed new life into Hamas, which maximized its military capabilities by investing its alliances with Syria, Iran, Turkey and Qatar. The unequal military confrontations with the Israeli occupation forces in 2008/2009, 2012, and 2014 highlighted the advances made by the Qassam Brigades, whose performance on the battlefield demonstrated that it now had a structure quite similar to that of a regular army.

88 *al-'Udwān al-Isrā'īlī 'alā Qīṭā' Ghazza: 'Amaliyyat al-'Asf al-Mākūl - 'Amaliyyat al-Jurf al-Ṣāmid 7/7/2014-26/8/2014*, Information File 22 (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Center for Studies and Consultations, 2015), p. 54.

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