The Iranian Impact on
the Islamic Jihad Movement
in the Gaza Strip

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One of the most striking characteristics of the Palestinian uprising which began in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in December 1987 is the saliency of Islamic fundamentalist groups. One such an organization, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, played a major role in fomenting the riots. Its structure and ideology pose a problem of a special kind: a militant Sunni movement, steeped in Sunni action and traditions, yet inspired and emboldened by the Shi'i revolution in Iran.

It is the object of this chapter to discuss the meeting points as well as the divergencies between the doctrines of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the basic tenets of the Iranian revolution. It aims to examine to what extent perceptions characteristic of Khomeini's world view have, in actual fact, been internalized and absorbed by the Islamic Jihad. An epilogue discusses the effects of the Palestinian uprising on these issues.

The Rise of Islam in the Occupied Territories

An Islamic resurgence was evident both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip since the late 1970s. As in other parts of the Arab Middle East, it was related, to a large degree, to the disappointment with the secularist notion of revolutionary Arab nationalism. For all Arabs, defeat in the 1967 War was a turning point in this respect; but for none so much as for those Palestinians who now came under direct Israeli rule. Loss of faith in secular Arab nationalism now combined with bitter opposition to the Israeli military occupation. Growing despair over the seemingly endless duration and the prolonged Jewish-Muslim disputes over places sacred to both religions (e.g. in Jerusalem and Hebron), were the breeding-grounds for Islamic revivalism. Through the "return to Islam," the local population expressed its rejection of the "corrupt" westernized life-style that was spreading as a result of
closer contact with Israeli society. The Iranian revolution then gave the spread of fundamentalist Islam its final impetus.

This was most dramatically so in the Gaza Strip. Muslim activism developed more rapidly there as a result of several distinctive factors: the traditional, conservative nature of local society; the almost exclusively Muslim population (with no Christian-dominated areas as in the West Bank); the pressing socio-economic conditions; the impact of the Gaza branch of al-Azhar University; the influence of Egyptian radical Islam; and the indirect support in the late 1970s of the Israeli military authorities who considered the more moderate Islamic groupings a counter-weight to the (then) more militant, but secular PLO.\(^2\)

The first Muslim activists in the Gaza Strip were the local Muslim Brothers whose movement dates back to the 1950s. Following the Iranian revolution, the Brotherhood stepped up its activity. Its members began to speak of the establishment of a single Islamic state throughout the Middle East. In 1984, a Gaza group led by Shaykh Ahmad Yasin actually tried to translate such theoretical tenets into practice. The group was uncovered and its members were charged with illegal possession of weapons and with intent to destroy the State of Israel and replace it by a religious Islamic state.\(^3\)

Yasin was released in the May 1985 prisoner exchange.\(^4\) He then revised his earlier views and adopted a non-violent approach, trying to deepen the Islamic roots of the local population through religious education and social activities. He soon became the spiritual leader of al-Mujamma al-Islami (hereafter Mujamma), the largest legal religious organization in the Gaza Strip, generally identified as a stronghold of the Muslim Brotherhood.\(^5\) Comprising several thousand active members, the Mujamma continued to adhere to the principle of “uprooting the Zionist entity,” but claimed that the immediate struggle should be against the nationalists, leftists and communists. Their attack was directed against left-wing PLO activists whose program, the Islamists argued, was narrowly nationalist and thus diverged from the true goal of setting up an Islamic state. In 1986, violent clashes erupted between the rival factions.\(^6\) The dispute reached an unprecedented level when Muslim activists engaged in acid-throwing attacks, knife slashings and fire-bombings against what they termed secular elements.

The Mujamma worked closely with yet another Gaza-based Islamic group, the Salafiyun, who preached Islamic purism and a return to the customs of Prophet Muhammad's time.\(^7\) Under constant pressure from the various Gaza Islamic fundamentalists, a growing number of local inhabitants began wearing conservative dress in accordance with the precepts of Islam. As the movement gained power, the Muslim activists became more aggressive, vandalizing stores that sold alcoholic drinks, attacking women wearing “immodest” dress or bathing in the sea, and breaking up weddings where western music was played.

**Al-Jihad al-Islami—The Organizational Setting**

The first cells of the Islamic Jihad appear to have become active in the Gaza Strip in 1979 (a date significant in itself). One early group called
itself "The Islamic Vanguard" (*al-tali'a al-islamiyya*) or, alternatively, "The Islamic Revolutionary Trend" (*al-tayyar al-islami al-thauri*). It was headed by Fathi Abd al-Aziz Shqiqi, a physician from Rafah who had come close to Sunni fundamentalist ideas during his student days at Zaqaziq University in Egypt, a known center of Islamic radicalism. Khomeini’s advent to power greatly impressed him and caused him to seek ways to apply Khomeini’s teachings and his example to the Palestinian scene. He viewed the Palestinian problem as basically a Muslim one—to be solved by means of *jihad* in the literal, i.e. military, sense of the word molded after the Iranian revolution.9

He soon gathered a group of militants around him, many of them in the liberal professions like himself; some were former secularists who had become “repentant Muslims.” Only a minority had previously been active in Islamic movements. Among these were students expelled from Egyptian Universities for being involved in clandestine Islamic activities there. Such was the case of Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Odeh, like Shqiqi a graduate of Zaqaziq University. When Odeh came back to Gaza in 1981, he became a preacher as well as a lecturer at the Gaza branch of al-Azhar and was soon recognized as the spiritual authority of the group.10

The group began to gather new recruits at the mosques, at colleges and at social meetings. Among the founding core of activists were: Dr. Ramadan Shalah; Sulayman Odeh; Fa‘iz Abu Mu‘ammar (of Khan Yunis); Nafiz Azzam (of Rafah); Fa‘iz al-Aswad; Ahmad Muhanna (of Khan Yunis); Sa‘id Hasan Baraka; Abdallah Abu Samadin; and Jabir Ammar. Four centers of activity came into being: at the izz al-Din al-Qassam Mosque in Bayt Lahiya (where Abd al-Aziz Odeh was preaching); at the Muti Anan Mosque in the Mashru Amir neighborhood of Gaza; at the al-Katiba Mosque of Gaza; and at the al-Salam Mosque at Rafah. The group also branched out into the West Bank, but their core remained in the Gaza Strip.11

Members were grouped in a clandestine network of cells, usually numbering 5 to 6 activists.12 The cells were called “families” (*uzra*, *usar*), an organizational term commonly used by Muslim Brothers throughout the Arab world.13 In late 1987, it was estimated that the Islamic Jihad in the territories had a total of 2,000–4,000 members, supporters and sympathizers. In the Islamic University of Gaza, a stronghold of Muslim militancy, some 200 students (nearly 5 per cent of the student body) were identified as Islamic Jihad followers.14

Alongside their overt activities, some of the members began in the early 1980s clandestine preparations for violent action, whether on their own or in co-operation with local *al-Fath* (hereafter Fath) activists. One of their first acts of violence was the murder, in 1983, of a Yeshivah scholar, Aharon Gross, at Hebron. Both Islamic Jihad and Fath men from the West Bank and Gaza participated in the team responsible for the killing (conducted under the name “The Palestinian Islamic Jihad”).15 They were inspired and guided by Shaykh As‘ad Bayd al-Tamimi a resident of Hebron and a preacher at the Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem until deported to Jordan in 1970. Tamimi was known for his close ties with the FLO leadership as well as with prominent figures in Khomeini’s regime.16 He became the spiritual
mentor of those among the Islamic Jihad movement who advocated violent action. Some of the new recruits were recently-released security prisoners, members of various PLO groups, who had become converted to the fundamentalist creed while in Israeli prisons.17

A series of further acts of terror followed the 1983 Hebron killing, with responsibility being taken by the Islamic Jihad group using different, but closely similar names. They included the killing of two Ashkelon taxi drivers knifed at Gaza in September and October 1986;18 and a hand-grenade attack at an oath-taking ceremony for new IDF recruits at the Dung Gate in Jerusalem in October 1986.19 A plan to blow up a truck filled with explosives in a suicide mission in Jerusalem in August 1987 was aborted by the Israeli security services.20 (For details on operations undertaken just prior to and during the uprising in the territories, see Epilogue.)

Ideologically, the Islamic Jihad movement in the Gaza Strip cannot be described in terms of a unified, homogeneous organization. Rather, it is composed of separate groupings with varying doctrines and principles—although they all present variations on one basic theme. Methodologically, this makes it more complicated for the researcher to describe the nature of the Islamic Jihad activity in Gaza—a difficulty compounded by the mostly clandestine nature of the group. Their specific tenets are rarely committed to writing and they have no newspapers or periodicals of their own. Their occasional leaflets deal with narrow, immediate issues rather than expose the basics of their world view.

The rank and file find ideological sustenance in two foreign publications illegally imported into and distributed in the Gaza Strip: Al-Tali‘a al-Islamiyya, a monthly appearing in London and later on as the mouthpiece of the international pro-Iran Islamist movement, and an Egyptian monthly, al-Mukhtar al-Islami, reflecting the views of radical militant Islam in Egypt.21 Both are generally assumed to correspond closely with the Islamic Jihad viewpoint. The following analysis makes use of statements by Islamic Jihad members and sympathizers quoted in these two periodicals, as well as of leaflets, handbills etc., distributed by them in Gaza, and of the writings of Shqaqi and Tamimi.

The Concept of Islamic Jihad

Palestinian Islamic Jihad members adopted views on the principles of jihad, martyrdom (shahada) and self-sacrifice (istishhad) in a way which attested to the strong influence of Shi‘i symbolism and of the slogans of the Iranian revolution. To illustrate: members of the Islamic Jihad squad who were tried late in 1986 spoke of themselves as sons of “the disinheritied (mustad‘afun) Islamic nation, seeking martyrdom in the name of Allah [and struggling against] arrogance (istikbar,) in the world.” “We attach much more importance to death than to life. Either we liberate our land or we die,” they said.22 Commenting on an incident in October 1987 in which four Gaza Islamic
Jihad members were killed, Shaykh Odeh said in a similar vein: “They are martyrs. They will go straight to paradise and their sins will be forgiven as a matter of course.” The echo here of Twelver-Shi’a concepts of martyrdom is too obvious to need comment.

Central to the concepts of the Gaza group with regard to the notion of jihād, was the idea that Arab society cannot be cured by gradual, reformist action. They rejected the notion of a slow evolutionist infusion of traditional Islamic thinking and practice into all aspects of daily life, a policy which the Muslim Brothers supported. The Islamic Jihad was born, in fact, as an antithesis of the latter’s reluctance to launch a comprehensive, immediate struggle against Israel. The new brand of Palestinian radical Islam reflected the despair and frustration of younger and more militant believers and their disappointment with the failures and compromises of the PLO as well as with the comparatively moderate policies of the mainstream Islamic trends in Gaza. Islamic Jihad spokesmen described the Muslim Brothers’ quietist approach as “unrevolutionary” and “misguided,” while the latter labeled the Islamic Jihad’s path as “adventurist.”

The differences between the “educational” (tarbiyya) path of the Brotherhood and the activist strategy of the Islamic Jihad group were articulated in a political platform distributed by Islamic Jihad supporters during the 1987 student body election campaign at the Gaza Islamic University: “[Jihad means] direct confrontation from the first moment in which the heart feels the truth of God’s uniqueness through the saying ‘there is no God but God’. The form and the means [to accomplish] this confrontation should be defined according to planning and opportunities of action.”

What was actually needed, the Islamic Jihad men claimed, was shock-action by a small elite of vanguard forces (tali’ā) capable of imposing an Islamic regime through the impact of all-out war against Israel.

The echo of Khomeinism is evident in these arguments. It was further brought out by Ahmad Sadiq, a prominent spokesman of the Islamic Jihad trend, in a lengthy essay published in al-Tali’ā al-Islamiyya in December 1983. The “victory of Allah’s faith” in Iran, he wrote, had made the Arab nation realize that Islam was “the true thesis” of the struggle against Israel. Similarly, Tamimi wrote that until the Iranian upheaval Islam “was absent from the battlefield.” The very language used to speak of the war against the enemy, he went on to say, was secular. Instead of jihād, words like kīfah or nidal (both meaning “struggle”) were being used. Instead of calling the enemy “infidels” or “Jews” they were spoken of as “imperialists” or “Zionists.” Only when it was clear that the “parties of heresy”—the socialists, the Free Masons and the secular nationalists—had failed to liberate the “blessed land” of Palestine, only then did Muslims sound the old traditional cry of jihād: Allahu Akbar! It was the Iranian revolution, Tamimi concluded, which brought home the old truth that “Islam was the solution and jihād was the proper means.”

In the view of the Islamic Jihad fundamentalists, it was the task of Khomeini’s regime to assist Muslims in the occupied territories in forming
what they called "the Jerusalem army"—a force capable of waging a "popular Islamic liberation war." They spoke in terms of a bond of ever-growing strength linking Tehran and the Holy City of Jerusalem. In taking such a stand, they ignored the traditional orthodox Shi’i legal position according to which the waging of jihad as an offensive war was the prerogative of the twelfth "absent" Imam. Instead, they adopted a central tenet of Khomeini’s interpretation of "the new Shi’a": the constant emphasis of jihad as a symbol of activism (thereby contrasting it with the traditional concept of taqiyya with its connotation of quietism).

But then reference to Iran and Khomeinism was only one dimension of the multi-faceted Palestinian fundamentalist ideology. Alongside the Jerusalem-Tehran axis with its Shi’i motifs reference was constantly made to the Jerusalem-Cairo axis (with its overtones of Sunni orthodoxy). In this contest, the Islamic Jihad developed the idea of a line of historical continuity leading from the Palestinian jihad organization of Izz al-Din al-Qassam of the late 1920s to the group of Muhammad Islambuli who led the killers of President Sadat. The line also included the al-Jihad al-Muqaddas organization established in Palestine in the late 1940s by Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, the Jihad of the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1948 Palestine war and the Usrat al-Jihad organization set up by Israeli Islamic radicals in 1979.

Qassam was held in high regard by the Gaza Islamic Jihad men. An imam of Syrian origin, Qassam became Imam at the Istiglal Mosque in Haifa and, in 1928, set up a clandestine group of religious militants who engaged in acts of violence against Jews and British soldiers. He was killed in 1935 in a clash with a British army unit. In time, he became a symbol of Palestinian resistance against foreign rule. An anonymous and illegally distributed booklet entitled "The Palestine Problem from the Islamic Point of View" devoted much space to Qassam and to the devotion of his followers who fought "holding the book of Allah in one hand and the rifle in the other." The author carried his argument to the point of comparing Qassam’s death with that of Husayn b. Ali.

Tamimi, too, presented his theme in terms of historical continuity. After 1948, he wrote, the jihad trend receded, but "the shameful defeat" of 1967 caused an Islamic revival which again brought jihad-oriented thinking to the fore. This was evident, he argued, in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Afghanistan and Egypt, as well as in Palestine. In Tamimi’s view, Qassam, the 1983 attack on the US Marines HQ in Beirut, the grenade attack on IDF soldiers in Jerusalem and Islambuli’s operation were all part and parcel of one broad picture.

The Palestine Problem and Israel

The basic attitudes of the Islamic Jihad on the Palestine problem and its possible solution draw to a considerable extent on some of the principal tenets of the Iranian revolution. It was that revolution, the Islamic Jihad men argued, that ushered in a new era and made it possible to look at the
Palestine problem from the only angle proper to it: that of Islam. According to Shaykh Odeh, the rise of Khomeini was "an important and serious attempt to achieve an Islamic awakening [and] to unify the Islamic nation." Iran, he maintained, was the only country which truly concentrated on the Palestinian cause.36

Tamimi in particular did not tire of reminding his readers that, right from the start, the Iranian revolution inscribed the word "Jerusalem" on its flag.37 It did so, he affirmed, because Jerusalem, and Palestine, are held to be holy by the Qur'an itself. "From the point of view of Islam, Palestine is not [just] a stretch of land, not [just its] trees and springs, but a country blessed because Allah blessed it in the Qur'an."38 Khomeini was working tirelessly to restore Palestine and Jerusalem to their Islamic character. Palestine's strategic importance derived from its being situated "in the heart of the Islamic body; it is the soul of Islam."39

Ahmad Sadiq took a similar line. The Muslim masses of Iran, he wrote, have brought "Islam back to the battlefield" as a counter-force (najid) to resist the Western and Israeli offensive. Shqafi saw Khomeini's greatness in his capacity to point to the great culture clash in progress between the Islamic nation with its historical tradition, its faith and exemplary civilization, and the West with its crusading spirit and Communist drive. This was a struggle between the divine (rabbanisya) and the satanic (shaytaniyya) forces.40

The spearhead of the satanic forces was Israel. It threatened all the "disinherited" and "served the interest of world aggression [as practiced by] the Great Satan, the USA."41 Israel embodied the dream of expansionism—from the Nile to the Euphrates. It was a direct, daily threat to Muslims because it sprang up in the heart of the Muslim homeland, on "the dead bodies of the Muslim Palestinian people."42 It was therefore doomed to destruction: "Israel was born to die."43

Shqafi quoted a fatwa issued by Khomeini which spoke of the religious duty of bringing about the "elimination" (izzala) of the "Zionist entity" and allocated the income from zakat (almsgiving) for this purpose.44

Tamimi based the duty to destroy Israel directly on the Qur'an. In a booklet dealing exclusively with this point, he argued that Israel must be brought to ruin because it was destroying places holy to the Muslims in Palestine, first and foremost the Aqsa Mosque. Israel, he went on, was trying to make the mosque collapse because it stood on the spot where the Jews wanted to rebuild their temple. The Jews were a "despicable" people trying to dominate, and eventually replace others by means of usury, deceit, gambling, prostitution and corruption. They succeeded in stealing the "blessed country" but victory could never be theirs because Allah condemned them to "misery and humiliation."45 These views on Jews and the existence of Israel reflected too, to a large extent, Khomeini's thought.46

The Islamic Jihad men defined the Palestinian problem as "an Islamic, not a national (watanisya) problem, concerning the Palestinians, nor an all-Arab (jawmiyya) problem, concerning the Arabs."47 It was the problem of the "Islamic nation" in its entirety, whether considered from the point of
view of history or from that of “sound” Qur’anic consciousness. The failure of the national-Palestinian approach lent redoubled strength to the Islamic concept. Again, these arguments clearly reflected Khomeini’s disavowal of the nation-state and of nationalism and his denial (at least in theory) of the existence of peoples and states within Islam.48

When speaking of the “proper” solution to the Palestine problem, Islamic Jihad writers made do with rather general statements: there must be a “popular Islamic liberation war” leading to the destruction of Israel and the establishment of an “Islamic state” in Palestine.49 Their attitudes towards other, secular, Palestinian organizations was often ambiguous, reflecting the ambivalence of Khomeini’s attitude towards the PLO and possibly their own. Initially, the Iranian revolutionaries stressed their affinity with the PLO, but later, when Khomeini sought to make the PLO conform to Islamic concepts of the “Palestinian revolution,” relations grew distant.50

The Islamic Jihad spokesmen in Gaza, such as Shqaqi, praised Khomeini’s initial encouragement of the PLO and made much play of the fact that some of his revolutionary cadres received their early training at the hands of Palestinian organizations. They recalled that Khomeini cut off oil sales to Israel and expelled the Israeli diplomats from Tehran, handing their premises to the PLO.51 Most supportive of the PLO among Islamic Jihad leaders was Tamimi who, as we have seen, advocated co-operation with Fatah in all matters of violent action (cf. also below).

At the same time, however, other Islamic Jihad men were critical of the PLO, and of Yasir Arafat personally. They accused him of defeatism, charged him with being ready to recognize Israel and with being willing to accept a “mini-state”—“no larger than a tent.”52 They considered his contacts with “left-wing Zionists” as “criminal” and condemned him for taking credit for terrorist acts actually carried out by Islamic Jihad cells.53 Thus, for example, Shaykh Odeh, interviewed in November 1987, reproached the PLO for accepting reconciliation with Arab leaders, instead of aligning itself with “the most important and effective liberation movement in the region”—the Iranian revolution.54

At a more ideological level, Islamic Jihad spokesmen deplored the secular attitudes of the various PLO groups, in particular those with Marxist convictions. They came out against the PLO’s declared aim to set up a “secular” Palestinian state (in the well-known formula of a “secular, democratic state of Muslims, Christians and Jews”)—a program betraying the “total absence of an Islamic view of history.”55 Again, Arafat was held personally responsible for this trend.

The inter-relation between Palestinian Islamic fundamentalism on the one hand, and Palestinian secular nationalism on the other is complex and multidimensional. While spokesmen of the Islamic Jihad relentlessly attacked the PLO for its political stands, other members of the organization co-operated with Fatah, carrying out joint terrorist attacks against Israeli targets. (For a partial list of such operations, see above). According to the East Jerusalem newspaper al-Fajr, the head of the Fath’s elite combat unit known as “Force
17" had "expressed interest in recruiting" Islamic fundamentalists. The newspaper further reported "agreements between Fath and the Islamic Jihad for military training." In late 1988, Yigal Carmon, the Israeli Prime Minister's adviser on terrorism, revealed that one of the PLO's military branches, known by the name of "Committee 88" was directly responsible for operations of the Islamic Jihad in the occupied territories.

Those Islamic Jihad groups co-operating with Fath benefited from its personnel, operational experience, arms supplies, communications networks, logistical support and financial resources. Furthermore, they thought of joint operations as a conduit to make their fundamentalist ideology penetrate the nationalist (i.e., in the Islamic Jihad peoples' view: secular) thinking of the PLO.

Fath's willingness, perhaps even eagerness, to engage in joint ventures with Islamic Jihad elements reflects the strengthening Islamic component in Palestinian nationalism. "In recent years Fath had accurately sensed the pulse of many Palestinians and has reached out to the growing Islamic trend. For the terrorist element inside Fath, Islamic Jihad and its sympathizers have provided a ready reservoir of activists." Each side expected to exploit the other for its own aims.

**Between Sunna and Shi'a**

For all the strong influence of Khomeinist ideas, the Gaza Islamic Jihad has failed to work the notions adopted from Iran into a coherent and explicit ideology. This reflects the fact that the Islamic Jihad groups are not, in actual fact, a single body but rather a coalition of kindred, yet distinct groupings. Their ideological loyalties are divided between:

a) the Iranian revolution;

b) Muslim Brotherhood doctrines (particularly in the form laid down by Sayyid Qutb);

c) Egyptian radical teachings of the type of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad Organization.

At various times, certain groups emphasized one or the other of these above the rest, or else tried to work them into a whole. Their notions of jihad and of self-sacrifice derived from Khomeini's teaching; they detached themselves from the Brotherhood's mainstream concept of jihad and thought of themselves as following Islamul's lead. But the jihad notion of the Egyptian radicals owed very little to Khomeini. It was a product of their own school, best summed up in Muhammad Abd al-Salam Faraj's book, *al-Farida al-Gha'iba* ("The Neglected Duty"). Furthermore, the first priority of the jihad preached by them was not to fight against Israel or for the sake of Jerusalem; their targets were the nominally Muslim but, in their view, "unbelieving" leaders of their own Muslim country. These contrasts were not being adequately dealt with by Gaza Islamic Jihad writers.
Unresolved ideological contradictions were even more salient in their attitudes towards the new Iranian state. The central concept of Khomeini's Islamic Republic, that of wilayat al-faqih was not genuinely discussed. The Gazans had little to say on the nature of the Islamic state they propagated and on whether it would be headed by a faqih or alim. Like other Palestinian fundamentalists they preferred to adopt selectively such ideas which fitted into their broad framework of views and to ignore those that did not.

The tendency to bridge, without resolving, ideological contradictions stood out in particular in their attitudes towards the Sunni-Shi'i schism. They took up the ecumenical tendency preached by the Iranian regime and stressed the latter's pan-Islamic orientation. Al-Tālib al-Islamiyya and al-Mukhtar al-Islami abounded in articles on the harmony prevailing, in their view, between Sunnis and Shi'is. Over and over again they denied that the Shi'a was heretical, spoke of it as an integral part of the world of Islam and considered existing controversies as "marginal" matters (far'iyyat). They cited with approval the endeavors of Hasan al-Banna and of Shaykh Mahmud Shaltut (of al-Azhar) to bring the various Islamic schools together. They reminded their readers of Banna's meeting with Iranian Ayatollahs, such as Abu al-Qasem Kashani, in an attempt to overcome the schism; and they enlarged on Shaltut's famous fatwa of 1959 declaring the Twelver Shi'a to be an orthodox school alongside the four other, recognized schools. They pointed to Shi'is joining the Brotherhood in Iraq and Yemen and commended Khomeini for allowing Shi'is to pray in Sunni mosques.

Both Shiqqi and Tamimi elaborated at length on these themes. The former distinguished between the universal concepts in Khomeini's doctrine and the specifically Shi'i ones. What was important, he affirmed, was that the Iranian revolution was "an Islamic revolution in the broad Qur'anic sense," not a matter for one Islamic faction (ta'ifa) only. The controversy over the twelfth Imam and the supra-natural qualities of the Imam, he averred, had no relevance to the revolution. Similarly, Tamimi issued a special fatwa declaring that it was untrue to say that Shi'is were calling for a split in Islam. They had no Qur'an other than the Qur'an, he wrote, and prayed in the direction of the ka'ba as other Muslims do. What matters, he concluded, was to co-operate with the Iranian revolution, not to get caught up in doctrinal discussions on the nature of the Shi'a. What could be wrong with a revolution, he asked, that applied Islamic law, suppressed prostitution and severed relations with "the Jewish state"?

The lack of ideological cohesion, it should be stressed, did not diminish the attraction of the Islamic Jihad groups in the eyes of their Gaza Strip followers. Their internal political and spiritual elite may have been concerned with an analysis of what brings Sunnis and Shi'is together and what keeps them apart. But such arguments did not worry the rank and file, least of all those who joined in for the prospect of taking part in violent action.

**Epilogue: The Intifada**

As noted above, the popular uprising in the occupied territories—the intifada—displayed, right from its inception at the end of 1987, a markedly
Islamic component. Islamic Jihad spokesmen claimed from the start that it had been their movement which had swept the broader Palestinian population towards an "Islamic uprising." The road accident of 8 December 1987 near Gaza and the fatalities it caused (widely considered to have triggered off the first wave of the intifada) was described by them as a deliberate act meant by the IDF as a continuation of its earlier clashes with Islamic Jihad men.65

In the preceding months, the Islamic Jihad movement had stepped up its operations, causing increased tension between the population and the Israeli authorities. The escape from prison of six Islamic Jihad members in May 1987 had given the movement added prestige in the eyes of many Gaza inhabitants. During the summer months, the movement had further accelerated the pace of its activities, culminating in the murder, in August 1987, of the officer in charge of the military police in Gaza city. In October, the IDF uncovered several clandestine Islamic Jihad cells and found a large arms cache. Some 50 members and sympathizers were arrested. Also in October, several Islamic Jihad men were killed in a clash with security forces just outside Gaza; two of the dead men turned out to be from among the six prison escapees of May 1987. The clash triggered serious unrest at the Islamic University during which two Gaza Strip inhabitants were killed. Further unrest followed when Abd al-Aziz Odeh was arrested in November and a deportation order issued against him.

This series of incidents made some contribution to creating the overall background against which the uprising started in December 1987. It made it possible for the Islamic Jihad men to claim that its outbreak was "their doing."

Once the intifada had begun, the movement played a central role in mobilizing large masses. During the first stage (the early months of 1988) the Islamic Jihad and the (PLO-dominated) "Unified Leadership of the intifada" arrived at a measure of co-operation. Later, the Islamic Jihad movement seems to have preferred independent action. The Israeli authorities asserted that it was Shiqqi who led the movement from his prison cell.66

Co-operation with the "Unified Leadership" notwithstanding, the Islamic Jihad’s appeal to the population was in the name of Islam and, unlike the leaflets distributed by the former, its own proclamations called for an "Islamic revolution . . . to liberate Palestine—all of Palestine."67 Publications reflecting its views, such as al-Mukhtar al-Islami, stressed again and again that the uprising must not be thought of as a Palestinian revolt, but as a wholly Islamic revolution led in its entirety by Islamic activists. It had, al-Mukhtar asserted, "issued forth from the mosques."68 And again: "Here he is, Izz al-Din Qassam; rising from the dead and blessing each stone [thrown against the Israelis] . . . We swear, oh dear Jerusalem, we shall be back, holding high our books of the Qur’an . . . Long live Islamic Palestine."69

Similar slogans were shouted during mass demonstrations following Friday prayers at the mosques of Jerusalem and Gaza. It is safe to assume that cries like the following came from Islamic Jihad members and like-minded people: Khaybar, khaybar ya yahud, jaysh Muhammad sawfa ya’ud ([Remember]
Khaybar, oh ye Jews; Muhammad's army shall yet return);\textsuperscript{70} or: \textit{Thawra, thawra ala al-muhtall, ghayr al-mushaf ma fi hall} (Revolution, revolution against the occupier, there is no other solution but through the Holy Qur'an).

The active involvement of the Islamic trends in the \textit{intifada} elicited a forceful response on the part of the Israeli authorities: arrests, administrative detention orders and deportations multiplied. Shaykh Odeh who (as mentioned above) had been arrested in November 1987, just before the beginning of the \textit{intifada}, was deported in April 1988; Shqapi in July; Sa'id Hasan Baraka and Abdallah Abu Samadina early in 1989. These and other measures affected the operational ability of the Islamic Jihad group and reduced its share in the \textit{intifada} activities.

But Israeli counter-measures were only one reason for the comparative decline of the movement. By the beginning of 1988, it had become clear that the group had lost its monopoly on Islamic activism and violent action. These had now become the common ground of all fundamentalist groupings in the territories, first and foremost the Muslim Brotherhood. The previous argument about the way of struggle and the proper interpretation of \textit{jihad} (see above) had been overtaken by events. The uprising had, as it were, found in favor of the militant Islamic Jihad approach. Initially the Muslim Brotherhood found itself militarily inferior, "outflanked and outgunned"\textsuperscript{71} by the activist Islamic Jihad. At an early stage of the \textit{intifada} it opted for the militant alternative. The Brotherhood formed its own military arm: the "Islamic Resistance Movement" (known by its Arabic initials as "Hamas").\textsuperscript{72} The newly-adopted path found formal expression in the platform of Hamas, the so-called "Islamic Covenant." The document, published in August 1988, stated clearly: "The day the enemies usurp part of the Muslim land, Islamic Jihad becomes the individual duty of every Muslim. . . . There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through \textit{jihad}."\textsuperscript{73}

The Brothers, however, continued defining \textit{jihad} in the broadest sense, stressing its non-military or non-violent aspects as well.\textsuperscript{74} The emphasis on "fighting the enemy" was a new departure, attesting to the Brotherhood's drawing closer to the ideas of the Islamic Jihad movement. This was also true of other concepts which had previously divided them. A salient innovation in the "Covenant," for example, was the emphasis laid on the distinctively Palestinian character of Hamas. Earlier Brotherhood writings had not highlighted such a \textit{motif}, while the Islamic Jihad group had done so all along. Now the "Covenant" stated: "The Islamic Resistance Movement is a distinctive Palestinian movement whose allegiance is to Allah and whose way of life is Islam. It strives to raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine."\textsuperscript{75}

Another instance of convergence can be seen in the attitude towards the PLO. On the one hand, a kind of fellow-feeling was expressed: "The PLO is closest to the heart of the Islamic Resistance Movement. In it are the father and the brother, the next of kin and the friend. The Muslim does not estrange himself from his father, brother. . . . Our homeland is one, our situation is one, our fate is one, and the enemy is an enemy common to all of us."\textsuperscript{76}
But then, on the other hand, the very publication of the “Covenant” was a forceful protest against what the Brotherhood considered the PLO’s “compromising tendencies.” It rejected in no uncertain terms the secular nature of the PLO and the political path it had chosen. As in the past, the Brotherhood came out firmly against the concept of “the secular state” because, in its view, the land of Palestine is a Muslim trust (waqf). The ultimate political goal, according to the new formulation by the Brotherhood following the intifada, is the establishment of an “Islamic state” on the entire area of Palestine.

This convergence of attitudes (both of doctrine and practice) does not mean that the Brotherhood has now become susceptible to the Shi’i-Iranian influence. The opposite is true. Other than some coincidental use of terms peculiar to the Iranian revolution, the “Covenant” shows no sign of echoing Khomeini-type thinking and makes no mention of Iran. The intifada did not prevent Hamas leader Ahmad Yasin from attacking Khomeini’s regime. He told an interviewer: “What the Iranians do is not precisely . . . the right model of an Islamic state, and not only because they are Shi’is and we are Sunnis. . . . If you send people to kill or get killed for the only reason of satisfying the wish of the ruler, that is not Muslim action, that is not Islam.”

Moreover, the overall relationship between Hamas and the Islamic Jihad movement has remained one of rather hostile competition. The “Covenant” speak of Hamas’ “respect and appreciation” for “other Islamic movements,” but the intifada has not caused Hamas and Islamic Jihad to co-operate in practical terms. The latter continues to attack Hamas sharply—possibly reflecting Islamic Jihad’s frustration over having seen Hamas appropriating the “senior” position among the Islamic trends which it used to hold itself.

Some observers feel that the new-found stature of the Brotherhood attests to the correctness of their earlier choice of making long-term investments in winning over people’s minds and hearts. The broad mass affinity they had created gradually, eventually paid off during the uprising. Once the intifada has began, the Islamic Jihad people killed far fewer individual Israelis; rather they engaged in mounting mass demonstrations and clashes with the Israeli security forces. Quite possibly, Islamic Jihad may, at some time or other, revert to the methods of spectacular terrorist action in order to regain its leading position in the radical Islamic movement in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The active involvement of the Islamic Jihad in the Palestinian uprising illustrates the growing overall influence of Islamic fundamentalism on Palestinian society and politics. Islam remains the most authentic identification symbol as well as the most powerful historical, cultural and socio-political framework which lends cohesion to Muslim society in the occupied territories. Twenty years of Israeli rule and a lengthy history of Jewish-Arab disputes over places sacred to both Islam and Judaism have given the Palestinian-Sunni version of militant Islam unique characteristics.

Under these circumstances, Khomeinist activism became most attractive to the population of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Despite the fact
that the ideas of the Iranian revolution have not been sufficiently internalized and absorbed, it offered Palestinians an authentic Islamic explanation and a perceived solution to both the personal stress of the individual\(^3\) and to the collective situation of living under—Jewish—military occupation.

As the intifada continues, opposition to the occupation is becoming more and more intensely charged with Islamic sentiment. It may well mark the Islamization of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Notes


4. In the exchange, over 1,000 security prisoners named by Ahmad Jibril’s Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine/General Command were released in exchange for six Israeli soldiers held by Jibril.

5. The Mujamma was founded in 1978 and was legally registered. Its base is at the Jaww al-Shams Mosque in Zaytun, Gaza. The operational head is Ibrahim Yazar. Other activists are: Dr. Abd al-Aziz Ghantisi, Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahar, Dr. Muhammad Sayyam (Rector of al-Azhar University’s Gaza branch.) For a recent interview with Yasin see al-Sirat (Kufr Qasim, Israel), Vol. II, No. 9 (January 1988), 19–20.


7. The Salafiyyun’s center is at Khan Yunis. Its founder, Salim Shurab, died in March 1986. Among the group’s prominent activists are: Muhammad Sulayman Abu Jamil, Shaykh Hasan Abu Shakra and Shaykh Abd al-Masri. Two other non-military fundamentalist organizations are also active in the Gaza strip: al-Jam‘iya al-Islamiyya (headed by Khalil al-Qoka who was deported in Summer 1988); and Jam‘iya al-Salah al-Islamiyya (headed by Tawfiq al-Kurd).

8. Other names the group gave itself were: al-Shabab al-Ahrar, al-Jihad al-Islami al-Thawri, al-Mustaqillun.

9. Shqasi was imprisoned in 1986 for incitement against the Israeli occupation and involvement in arms delivery into the Gaza Strip. He was deported in July 1988. His ideological and political views were summarized in a booklet published in 1979: Fathi Abd al-Aziz [Shqasi], al-Khomeini, al-Hall al-Islami wal-Badil, ([Cairo: 1979], 123 ff.

10. Odeh was arrested in 1984 for incitement and sentenced to 11 months imprisonment. He was deported in April 1988.


13. Us rat al-Jihad was also the name chosen for itself by a militant Islamic organization formed in Israel in the late 1970s.


15. The organization was also named: al-Jihad al-Muqaddas, al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya. On the murder of Gross see Ma'ariv, JP, 8 July 1983. For the assassins' trial see, Ma'ariv, 25 May 1984.


17. For example, Muhammad al-Jamal, a former member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, was recruited to the Islamic Jihad while serving a sentence in an Israeli jail. Hadashot, 9 October 1987.

18. Ma'ariv, Davar, 28 September, Ha'aretz, 8 October 1986. On the arrest of the squad and its trial: Ma'ariv, 26 December 1986; Yedi'ot Aharonot, 16 March, Ma'ariv, 16 March, Ha'aretz, 13 May; Yedi'ot Aharonot, 8, 13 July 1987.

19. The operation was also attributed to the Islamic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya li-tahrir Filastin) and to the Islamic Jihad Legions in Palestine (Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami fi Filastin). Davar, 16, 17 October, JP, 20, 21 October; al-Itiham al-Usla, 30 October 1986.


Foreign observers noted that copies of al-Muhktar are clandestinely circulated in the West Bank and Gaza in their thousands. Los Angeles Times, 14 September 1987. According to Shaykh Odeh both periodicals reflect “Islamic revolutionary thought.” al-Fajr, 23 August 1987.


29. Interviewed in al-Muhktar al-Islami (henceforward: M), 53 (June 1987); Zawal Isra'il, 61.

34. Al-Qadiyya al-Islamiyya min Manzur Islami (n.p.: n.d.). According to Legrain, the booklet was first published by Izz al-Din Fars and Ahmad Sadiq under the title al-Qadiyya al-Filastiniyya hiiya al-Qadiyya al-Markaziyya lil-Harak al-Islamiyya, ft. 1, 237.
35. MI, May 1986; Ahmad Qasim, 51 (May-April); Tamimi, interview, 53 (June); 56 (September 1987).
37. Tamimi, interview, MI, 53 (June 1987).
38. Ibid.
39. Shqaqi, Khomeini, 46; Dr. Fahmi al-Shinawi, MI, 40 (February 1986); Odeh, interview, Globe and Mail, 26 October 1987.
40. Shqaqi, Khomeini, 46-47; Ahmad Sadiq, Tl, 1 December 1983; 31, October 1987; MI, 29 October 1984; Dr. Muhammad Moro, MI, 46 (October 1986).
41. Ahmad Sadiq, Ibid.
42. Ibid.
44. Shqaqi, Khomeini, 118.
46. See Ramazani, Revolutionary Iran, 147, 151, 153-154.
47. MI, 43 (June 1986).
48. Ramazani, Revolutionary Iran, 20; R. Hrair Dekmejian, Islam in Revolution (Syracuse: 1985), 175. (For a discussion of such views of Khomeini, see chapter by David Menashri above).
49. Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Odeh interviewed, Globe and Mail, 26 October 1987; MI, 42 (May), 53 (June 1986).
50. On the PLO-Iranian relationship see, Huwaidi, Iran min al-dakkil (Arabic); David Menashri, Iran: A Decade of War and Revolution (New York: 1990), 103-104, 153, 210, 253-54.
51. Shqaqi, Khomeini, 47; Tamimi, Zawal Isra'il, "Readings in the Roots of the Iranian Revolution," MI, 30 (April 1980); Dr. Fahmi al-Shinawi, 48 (December 1986).
53. MI, 40 (February 1986); Ahmad al-Qasim, 51 (March-April 1987).
55. MI, 40 (February 1987), Tl, 31 October 1987.
56. Satloff, 11.
58. Satloff, 12.


63. A pamphlet distributed in Gaza (Mawajif ulama wa-qadat al-muslimin min al-shi'a, al-thawra al-Iraniyaa, 31), lists nearly 30 sources to prove the harmony between the two schools. See also: Dr. Izz al-Din Ibrahim, cover story, Ti, December 1982; MI, 43 (June 1986); 47 (November 1986); 55 (August 1987).

64. Shaykh As'ad al-Tamimi, a Sunni Imam, proudly tells of prayers which he himself conducted during one of his visits to Tehran. MI, 48 (November 1986). Shaykh Abd al-Aziz Odeh, al-Fajr, 23 August 1987; Shalqi, al-Khomeini, 35, 38-39, 56-57; Tamimi, fatwa, MI, 44 (July 1986).

65. Al-Islam wa-Filastin, 1, 15 February 1988, 4-5, cited by Paz, 4.


69. Editorial, MI, 64 May 1988, 2.

70. Khaybar was an oasis in the Arabian Peninsula inhabited by Jewish tribes. It was conquered by the Prophet Muhammad in 628.

71. Satloff, 9.

72. For a detailed discussion of the movement, see Satloff, Paz and Jean Francois Legrain, "Les Islamites Palestiniens à l'Épreuve du Soulevement," Maghreb-Machrik, 121 (July-August-September 1988), 5-41.


74. "Jihad is not confined to the carrying of arms . . . a telling word, an effective article, a useful book, support and solidarity—all these are elements of the Jihad for Allah's sake." Ibid., 21.

75. Paz, 10; Mithaq, 8.

76. Mithaq, 19.

77. Shadid, Muslim Brotherhood, 679.

78. Mithaq, 10, 20.


80. Mithaq, 18.

81. E.g., Ha'aretz, 24 October 1988.

82. A similar line is followed by the Islamic fundamentalist movement in Israel, headed by Shaykh Abdallah Nimir Darwish.