CONCLUSION
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Historically, Palestine had been a field of battles due to its geo-strategic and religious significance. Geographically, the total area of Palestine is 27,009 square km, including 704 square km of water surface that is composed of Tiberius Lake, Al-Hula Lake and half of the Dead Sea. Palestine is normally divided into four geographical zones: the Coastal Area, the Mountain Area, Al-Ghour (the Rift Valley), and the Desert Area.

Palestine is thus unique geographically, enjoying four different climates with the lowest point on earth and mountains of 1200m altitude above sea level, with lakes and seas among which one is known for its highest salt concentration that left it with no marine life. All these features are assembled in a small piece of land. All these factors together make it the most productive land in the entire world. It is most useful for growing flowers, fruits, grains, figs, beans, olives, grapes, and extensively used for herding.

Religiously, it is the Holy Land for all three major religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism), and to some other sects as well. Approximately, half of the world’s population considers it, or at least some part of it as Holy and no other land on the earth is considered Holy by such a large number of people.

For Jews: Palestine is the land in which Prophet Jacob (Ya’quob), the grandfather of the tribes of Israel, inhabited with his children; it is the land to which they fled with Moses (Musa) from the Pharon, and in which they resided under the virtuous rule of the Prophet David (Dowd) and his son Solomon (Suleiman). In this land they
founded their kingdoms, Judah and Israel, which were later on destroyed by the Babylonians and Assyrians.

**For Christians:** Palestine is the land where Jesus of Nazareth (Isa’) was born, around it, he conveyed and preached his message to the humankind, and in it, according to the Christian faith he died on the cross for the salvation of mankind and was resurrected.

**For Muslims:** Islam and Palestine have been intimately linked for centuries. As the Muslims believe in the Prophets of Christian and Judaic religions, all above are among the causes why Muslims hold Palestine as Holy. Ya’qob (Jacob), Yusuf (Joseph), Dowd (David), Suleiman (Solomon), Yusha’ and Isa’ (Jesus) are all Prophets who directed their struggle of good against evil, and Islam is the complete and final form of what they preached.

Al-Aqsa Mosque or Bait al-Maqdes is the third holiest place in Islam after Mecca and Medina in Arabia. The Prophet Muhammad said once that a prayer in Al-Aqsa Mosque is equal to 500 prayers. It is the second mosque built on earth after Al-Ka’ba in Mecca. It is also mentioned in the Holy Quran as well as in the sayings (Hadith) of the Prophet. That’s why, Muslim considers it as Holy.

However, the Arab – Israel or Palestinian – Israel conflict starts with the creation of Israel on 14 May 1948. Israel was created as a result of the U.N. Partition Resolution of 29 November 1947. The Resolution allocated 56 percent of the territory of Palestine, but Israelis occupied 77 percent of the Palestinian land, instead of Jerusalem being internationalized as provided in the Resolution, the greater part of the Holy City was Israeliized and declared the ‘capital’ of the Jewish state. Instead of Arabs permitted to remain in their homes and country to lead a normal life, nearly one million men, women and children – Muslims and Christians – were forcibly expelled and dispossessed.

Not only this, in 1967 war remaining Palestinian lands were also occupied by Israel, i.e., the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. This led to the formation of many nationalist movements to liberate Palestine in which Fatah, PLO, PFLP and DFLP were important. These movements were secular nationalist movements. Besides this, other movements were also taking shape in the background. These movements were the Islamic movements in which Hamas and Islamic Jihad were the most important.
Hamas stands for original Arabic name Harkat al-Mokwama al-Islamiya, which means ‘Zeal’ was officially founded in 14th December 1987 but its roots go back to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood which was founded by a school teacher Hassan al-Banna. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement could be considered ‘mother of all movements that comprises political Islam’ in the Middle East. When the State of Israel came into existence in 1948, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was physically divided into two parts; one in the West Bank, which was annexed to Jordan and where the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood joined the Jordanian Branch of Muslim Brotherhood, and one in the Gaza Strip, which was left under Egyptian control and therefore Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood remained close to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. During the period from 1948 to 1967 the Brothers were weak and kept a low profile. The movement was under the systematic oppression of the Nasserite regime in the Gaza Strip, while the Jordanian authorities effectively monitored it in the West Bank.

Israel’s overwhelming victory in the 1967 six-day war over the Arab armies in which Israel occupied the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, consequently accelerated Palestinian national and Islamic awareness. As a result, the Brotherhood became more organized and active. After the war, Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood in the now-occupied Gaza Strip and West Bank were disconnected from Egypt and Jordan and thus compelled to concentrate on their native communities and populations.

From 1967 to 1975 the role of Islamic Movement was confined to building mosques, bringing a younger generation into the mainstream Islamic creed, through Islamic education, proper guidance and strengthening them ideologically. The mosques, therefore, not remained merely a place of worship but were also used as school, kindergartens or place for women’s activities.

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who has been considered as the founder of Hamas was active in Islamic politics since 1970s. He was greatly influenced by the revolutionary ideas of Muslim brotherhood. Due to the ideas and teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has a deep impact upon Sheikh Yassin, formed an Islamic Society in 1976. By 1978, the need for bigger and better organization was also felt by Yassin in order to promote Islamic values in Palestinian society which would ultimately be bound to resist Israeli occupation. Keeping this in mind Yassin established Islamic Compound.
However, Maktura incident of Jabaliya refugee camp was a key event which was directly responsible for the formation of Hamas. The event started a rebellion against Israeli occupation and autocracies which is popularly known as Intifada or Uprising. On 8 December 1987, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin called an emergency meeting of the General Committee of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Gaza Strip at his house which led to the formation of Hamas.

Hamas participated in the Intifada with full force and it was proclaimed by the movement that it was their members who spread the Intifada from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. It was also claimed by the movement that it was due to Hamas that the Intifada could last so long and forced Israelis to think a thousand times settling down in the occupied territories.

Hamas adopted its Charter on 18 August 1988. It is the most important ideological document of Hamas. It contains the basic ideological commitments of the movement and proclaims its goal, means for the realization of goal and Hamas’ world view. In its Charter, Hamas clearly states that its goal is the liberation of all the historic Palestine and will not compromise any inch of Palestinian land. Hamas also advocates that the ideological basis of the Islamic Resistance Movement is Islam. It is Islam from which it derives its ideas and fundamental precepts and view of life, the universe, and humanity; and it judges all its actions according to Islam and is inspired by Islam to correct its mistakes. The land of Palestine is holy Islamic land and patrimony, therefore no individual or ruler has any right to make any concession on this land. In its Charter, Hamas talks about the Muslim solidarity and makes Jihad obligatory for Muslims. Hamas consistently refused to recognize the state of Israel and its right to exist in peace and harmony. It also showed its total opposition to any arrangement or agreement that would recognize the Israel’s right to exist.

According to Hamas, the state of Israel is a purely religious state which is the result of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, particularly against the Muslims and the whole world in general. The existence of Israel is viewed as batil and liberation of Palestine and formation of an Islamic Palestinian State is considered as haqq. The terms used to characterize the Jews are mostly derived from the Holy Quran, Hadith, Tafsir and other theological literatures. The Jews are named as ‘Bani-Israil’ and ‘al-Yahud’ in these
theological literatures which is frequently used by Islamist. Hamas often uses the term ‘al-Yahud’ as well as ‘unbelievers’ (kafireen) to describe Jews. They also characterized Jews as the people upon whom God’s wrath came, which is evident from several Quranic verses. The Jews are said to put their all efforts in developing plots and conspiracies to destroy human life since God’s wrath came upon them. God’s wrath came upon them due to their noncompliance of original Godly Jewish religion sent to them. Not only this, they murdered his Prophets and distorted original Godly Jewish religion. Particularly, they tried to harm Islamic Umma in order to dominate it because it was the new international order bringing an authentic civilization and the Godly program to humankind.

According to Hamas, the name of the Jewish state “Israel” itself characterizes its religious nature. Their religious belief based on Torah determines Zionist thought and life in Israel even till today. The education of young Israelis is also totally based on religious lines. Hamas has identified two major reasons for the success of the Jewish state. Firstly, its strict adherence to Jewish religious rules, for instance, even any law passed by “Knesset” must have to take approval of Ministry of Religious affairs which determines its accordance with the Torah. Secondly, the unprecedented support of world Jewry to the Israel as well as their mastery of the modern world and technological inventions. The ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ which is a modern European anti-Semitic document has been translated into Arabic and widely circulated in the Arab Islamic world. Hamas quoted the ‘Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ in its Charter as a proof to characterize the Jewish image of conspirators, falsehood, treason, mischief and cowardice.

However, Hamas uses the terms Israelis, Zionists and Jews alternately and synonymously in their writings. Hamas tactfully differentiated between “Judaism” and “Zionism”. Judaism is considered a religion which is by nature, racist and talks about hostility towards others in its books and provokes to wrongly take Palestine under the slogan of the Holy Land. Zionism presents the entity of the enemy (Israel) and is responsible for the shift of Jewish thought into living reality that can be seen today in Palestine. Those Jews are “Zionist” who wants to realize their religious thought on Muslim soil. Non-Zionist Jews are those Jews residing outside Palestine and do not actively support “Zionist Entity”. The Jews within Palestine are considered as Zionist if they don’t prove that they are against the Jewish occupation of Palestinian soil.
Hamas advocates that the evil Zionism must be eradicated at its root. It rejects altogether the historic claims of Zionist to the land of Palestine. Hamas provides proof with the support of a theory advanced at the beginning of this century that European Jews are not direct descendents of the tribes of *Bani-Israel* who once resided in Palestine, but they belong to the offspring of a tribe of Central Asian Turks converted to Judaism, called khazzar. The Quran itself refutes any historical claim of the Israeli Jews on Palestine.

Hamas perceives the West genuinely hostile towards Muslim countries. All these countries are united in their common aim to harm Islam, they are considered by Hamas as enemies of Islamic *Umma*. Any strengthening of Islam symbolizes a victory against the west. Hamas holds that the West – especially Britain, responsible for the creation of the State of Israel. Hamas also blamed the West, and particularly the United States for its continuous and unconditional support for Israel, at the total expense of the Palestinian people. The West is considered by Hamas and Palestinians in general as the staunch backer and protector of Israel. With the support of Western powers since its birth in 1948, Israel has acquired mightiest power in the region. Israel has acquired nuclear capabilities, the technology which was firstly, provided by Britain and France, and then by U.S.

The unprecedented support of the Western countries also made Israel as an economic power. Israel, whose population was around 6 million in 2005 enjoys a GDP of U.S. $121 billion, which is near about the total GDP of U.S. $128 billion for the neighboring countries comprising Egypt, Jordan and Syria, whose total population is more than 105 million. Israel has a per capita income exceeding U.S. $22,000 compared with a mere U.S. $1,100 in the Palestinian case. Hamas claims that the Western powers have never exerted any pressure on Israel to comply even with the long list of U.N. resolutions on Palestine formulated carefully by the west itself. The Palestinians and Arabs in general have felt disappointed by almost every single U.N. resolution on Palestine. Hamas has always stated that the resolutions have been drafted by the Western powers in a way that would always serve the Israeli interest. Thus, all these scenarios together shaped Hamas’ negative perception of the Western powers. Another aspect of Hamas’ ambiguous feelings towards the West is the field of media. Hamas blamed the Western press for safeguarding the Western as well as Israeli interests.
Hamas has shown pragmatism in its actions and ideological commitments. This can be witnessed from the changed strategy of Hamas in recent years. Hamas as a movement cannot compete with the State of Israel. In the presence of this reality it was not possible to achieve its proclaimed goal which it has mentioned in its Charter of 1988 i.e., the liberation of all of the historic Palestine. Thus, Hamas began to advocate possibly achievable goals in both short term and long term in order to confirm its shift from the realm of far-fetched dreams. It pursued goals that could be acceptable to the regional as well as international audiences and can also bring immediate relief and benefits to the Palestinian people. This changing strategy was also because of Hamas’ electoral win in January 2006 elections. After coming to power, Hamas was burdened with a lot of issues concerning daily livings of Palestinians. The situation forced Hamas to set aside its armed struggle for a while because it was not beneficial to the Palestinian interest. Hamas pragmatically realized that the immediate welfare of the besieged Palestinians was more important than its long term ideological ideals.

Although, Hamas has played significant role in Palestinian politics since its formation, its role was greatly enhanced when the Oslo Accords were signed between PLO and Israel. The Oslo Accords were announced on 20 August 1993 and signed on 13 September 1993 in the South Lawn of White House with U.S. President Bill Clinton as overseer. This event shocked the entire Palestinian population. Some cheered the advent of statehood and others blamed the PLO for legitimizing the occupation in order to save itself from isolation and bankruptcy. Critics argued that Oslo Accords neither guaranteed Palestinians statehood nor a settlement freeze. Yasser Arafat’s supporters propagated that the Accord was the best available option. They stressed that the Palestinian – Israeli cooperation could build trust between the two former enemies. They emphasized that this was the Palestinians best hope to convince Israel to relinquish land and admit Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Hamas strongly rejected the Accords and mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel. In Hamas’ view, these agreements constitute treason to Islam, as they implied the expulsion of Palestinians from their homeland and legitimization of the existence of the Zionist entity. As stated by a Hamas spokesperson, the essence of the Oslo Accords was coercion on the weaker (Palestinians) by the stronger (Israel), which was the inevitable
outcome of the PLO’s retreat both from Islam and its National Charter in its willingness to accept limited self-rule. Hamas rejected PLO’s claims that the adoption of a rational approach to a settlement with Israel would better promote the Palestinian interest than strict adherence to a position of ‘absolute justice’ that was impossible in the light of the new world order brought by the end of the Cold War and the U.S. victory over Iraq in the Gulf War. These two events left the Arabs with no choice and powerful ally on the international scene other than the U.S.

Recognizing the reality, Hamas argued that it is just a reflection of defeatism because recognition of reality does not necessarily mean surrender. Israel and its intentions, as well as the PLO leadership and Arafat were being condemned in political, economic and religious terms. The use of religious arguments were rarer than the other occasions which was possibly a response to the very concrete, political and economic threat the Accords represented for Islamists. The Accords were described as “only another face of occupation”. As stated by Musa Abu Marzuq the head of the Hamas political bureau, “it legalizes the occupation because it did not call for its end or the end of the Zionist settlement policy. It was nothing but a ‘new security belt’ for the Zionist enemy”. In fact, Israeli acceptance of the Accords was ‘conspiracy’ to weaken Intifada and to prevent any Jihad actions against the occupying power. Israel was trying to make concession in order to break Arab boycott and to establish economic links with the Arab countries.

Hamas also criticized Oslo Accords on religious grounds and stated that Israel would never be ready for concessions. In spite of various threats which the Accords presented for Hamas, it did not despair. In religious terms, the present ‘Jewish Supremacy’ was a dangerous period of time, but was ‘limited in time’. Thus, the Accords only delay the liberation of Palestine for years by giving Israel the chance to prolong its life for a while. Therefore, Israel’s goal of “Greater Israel” from the Nile to the Euphrates and demolition of Al-Aqsa Mosque would not be achieved in the long term. Abu Marzuq explained that the failure of the Accords was just a matter of time. They were only based on oral promises from the Zionist side and past experiences had shown that Israelis are lying. Keeping all these facts in mind, Hamas announced that Jihad against the enemy
would continue as long as one day follows the other. This was not a political choice but a religious duty and therefore cannot be negotiated.

The PLO and Yasser Arafat were severely criticized not only for being alienated from the masses in the territories, but also acting against the will of the huge parts of the PLO itself. A minority that ascended to leadership was said to liquidate the Palestinian question in exchange for personal gains. Hamas claimed that the PLO leadership sold our cause to the Zionists in exchange for millions of dollars. Hamas accused Arafat of giving up ‘part after part of the Palestinian National Institutions in the hope of becoming ‘village chief of Gaza – Jericho’ which meant the right to rule in the service of enemy. The submissive and profit oriented leadership of the PLO sold the whole fatherland at low price because it was tired of fighting. The treacherous project was seen to make clear to everybody that Arafat’s leadership did not represent the Palestinian people but only itself. Hamas stated that it will not recognize a leadership that imposes cooperation with the Zionist enemy on our people.

Hamas leadership repeatedly instructed its cadres to make familiar to the Palestinian people that the Oslo Accords were illegitimate and inconsistent with UNSC resolution 242, which called for Israel’s withdrawal to its pre-1967 borders. However, in the light of political changes resulting from the Oslo Accords, Hamas reassessed its strategy. Despite the debates about elections, political parties and democracy, Hamas remained committed to a continued Jihad against Israel. Hamas and Islamic Jihad were responsible for the deaths of approximately 120 Israelis in the first sixteenth months after signing of the Accords. The presence of Palestinian Authority backed by a local police was incapable to prevent Hamas from launching attacks against Israeli targets. Hamas hoped to preserve its radical base by confirming its ideological legitimacy and characteristics of armed resistance while simultaneously avoiding any damage to its mass popularity among the general Palestinian populations. By continuing armed struggle, Hamas was able to save its identity and its legitimacy because its definition of illegitimate peace further allowed defensive resistance. Hamas’ retaliatory attacks were widely supported because it was the best means to compensate Israeli assassinations.

However, throughout the Oslo period Hamas adopted a policy of controlled armed struggle and Jihad remain the cornerstone of Hamas’ policy but with certain limits. Jihad
turned not to be an ultimate goal but a means to achieve certain political goals. Hamas’ strategy during the Oslo period displayed its pragmatism. Hamas’ overall perception of the Oslo Accords has been that any peace agreement is meaningless as long as their design is built around balance of power where the realization of Israeli interest tops the agenda. Hamas repeatedly stated that these are capitulation treaties, not peace agreements. Consequently, according to Hamas, the failure of the Oslo Accords was inevitable.

The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) was established as a result of Oslo Accords signed between PLO and Israel. According to the Accords, the authority would be composed of an elected legislative council, and a government with 80 percent of its members from the legislative council, and with a chairman as its head. In May 1994, 10,000-men-strong Palestinian police force rolled into Gaza and Jericho, paving the way for assumption of control in those areas from which Israel has withdrawn according to the Accords by the PNA. On 1st July 1994, Arafat moved from Tunis to Gaza, with great fanfare and ceremony, became the head of the PNA. With the signing of the Interim Agreement on 28 September 1995, the way was open for the PNA to govern more than 90 percent of the West Bank and Gazan population.

The first general elections within the territories of the PNA were scheduled on 15 January 1996. The President of the PNA and members of the Palestinian Assembly were to be elected. The elections were conducted as per schedule across most of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: 88 members of the legislative council were elected and Yasser Arafat was elected as the chairman of the PNA. Hamas together with Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) boycotted the elections. Hamas opposed the elections because of their view that any participation would implicitly recognize the Oslo Accords. In a statement issued in Amman, Hamas officially denounced any participation in the formation of the PNA. In January 1996, Filistin al-Muslima emphasized that Hamas did not reject elections in general, but only boycotted the “Oslo Elections” that were not representative elections but an act to endorse the Oslo Accords and the occupations. The elections were called ‘carnival’ because they were based on devotion to the false and neglect of truth.
Fatah managed to get nearly half of the seats in the legislative council and controlled together with some independent supporters, most of the PNA’s institutions. The Authority as agreed in the Oslo Accords, took the responsibility to protect “Israel” from Palestinian militant attacks, and thus established huge security forces that were mostly used to oppress Palestinian movements like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Fears were expressed for the first time that civil war might breakout in the occupied territories when Oslo Accords was signed on 13 September 1993. Especially, Hamas and other opposition groups feared that the strong police force would be used against them, since they intended to continue their armed struggle against the Israeli occupation, Hamas’ policy towards PNA and Israel was based on the logic that in spite of the signing of the Oslo Accords between PLO and Israel, Israel is still an occupying power to which it has legitimate rights to combat, and the armed struggle therefore would be continued. If PNA opposes Hamas on this ground, Hamas will remain passive in relation to the Authority, but will retaliate against Israel, which was responsible for forcing the Authority to crackdown on Hamas. Through this logic, Hamas believed that they could safeguard themselves against the worst possible outcome that was civil war.

The Hamas’ strategic decision to avoid a civil war at any cost on the one hand, proved strength, because of the Hamas perception that any internal Palestinian conflict would ultimately serve Israeli interests, but on the other hand weakened Hamas in relation to the Authority. The Authority becomes aware that whatever actions it takes against Hamas, it is neither willing nor able to retaliate. Since Hamas continued its attacks against Israeli civilians and soldiers, particularly in the period leading up to the implementation of the May 1994 Cairo Agreement. This was due to the Hamas’ perception that the Oslo Accords and Cairo Agreement were existential threats and, thus, it was unwilling to abandon armed resistance against Israel. Although the attendant risk were obvious: economic closure and military actions by Israel and the PNA, internecine conflict, and eroding public support.

Hamas’ policy of continued armed struggle against Israel was further strengthened by the massacre of twenty-nine Palestinians by a Jewish settler in the Ibrahimi Mosque; Hamas launched a series of suicide attacks inside Israel which resulted in the deaths of many Israeli civilians. A severe crackdown began, first by Israel and later
by the PNA. This comprised mass arrests of Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists, assassination of key officials, and regular closures of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank which brought enormous economic hardship on an increasingly improvised population. Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad blamed the PNA of collaborating with Israel against their organizations and assassinating the key members of their military wings.

On 18 November 1994, a horrible incident took place in Gaza, which according to some Hamas officials changed the course of the Hamas – PNA relation forever. The incident was popularly known as the Black Friday. The PNA security forces opened fire on Islamic activists (mostly Hamas) and gunned down twelve in a demonstration outside of Gaza’s Filistin Mosque. The protest turned into a riot, and resulted in the deaths of fifteen people, two hundred wounded and hundred more arrested. The increased fear of internecine violence and Israel damaging economic closures as well as expectations surrounding the Oslo II agreement, known as Taba Accord, compelled both Arafat and Hamas to settle their differences in talks that took place in Cairo during late 1995. After the signing of the Oslo II on 28 September 1995, Hamas’ leadership temporarily suspended its attacks against Israel in order to avoid Hamas to be viewed as having disrupted Israel’s planned withdrawal from areas under the PNA’s control. In fact, Hamas and Islamic Jihad did not launch any suicide attacks against Israel during the period between August 1995 and February 1996, due to the overwhelming pressures exerted on both the organization by Israel and PNA.

Hamas armed wing Izz al-Din al-Qassam launched a new series of suicide attacks inside Israel in 1996. The suicide attacks were designed to avenge the Mossad’s assassination of Yahya Ayash, famously known as “the Engineer”. Ayash was at the top of Israel’s list of wanted men and was said to have been responsible for several suicide attacks in various Israeli cities in 1994 and 1995. As a result of these attacks, both Israel and PNA started to crackdown on Hamas members and its supporters in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. More than 1,200 members of Hamas were arrested, a number of Islamist social institutions were ransacked and subsequently closed down, and more importantly, the charitable organizations and Mosques that had been previously run by Hamas put under the control of Palestinian Minister of Religious Affairs.
Arafat banned six Palestinian militia, including Hamas’ Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Due to heavy international and Israeli pressure he stated that he would fully cooperate with Israel to wipeout terrorism. An international summit was held on 13 March in Egyptian town of Sharm el-Sheikh on the initiative of the United States President Bill Clinton uniting 27 nations among whom 13 Arab states together condemned terrorism and called for the continuation of the peace process. Arafat was described as a big loser in his campaign against Hamas. At the same time, Arafat was also criticized by Hamas who called him as a prisoner of his entente with the occupying power that was controlling him. Arafat was blamed for his collaboration not only with Israel but also with the United States. *Filistin al-Muslima* described the Sharm el-Sheikh summit as a mobilization of the entire world against Hamas. Noticeably, the language of Hamas was not violent rather rational and there was no use of Islamic symbols or Justification for the condemnation. Hamas was playing its role of opposing force using the suicide attacks to highlight and exploit the difficult situation and exerting pressure on its political rival Yasser Arafat.

In a memorandum, Hamas called the Palestinian Authority the “Oslo Power” and lamented the ‘acts of piracy of power’. Hamas severely criticized the PNA for human rights violations. The oppressive policy of the PNA was characterized as, for example, silencing the citizens and arresting journalists and human rights activists and also the appalling torture of more than prisoners. Hamas warned the danger of a further fractioning of Palestinian society and stated that it had remained silent for so long in order to maintain unity. Hamas could no longer remain silent in front of oppression and torture and considered it as its duty to stir up the public in order to stop these practices and to prevent Palestinian society from sliding into the hell of internal clash or a life in the shadow of dictatorship. It appealed to the Palestinians to fight for the respect of the human rights, freedom and glory of the Palestinian people.

By early 1998, hostilities between the PNA and Hamas had increased dramatically, especially after the assassination of three senior military commanders of Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Hamas proclaimed that Israel was responsible for the murders as well as it also blamed the PNA for cooperating with Israel in their execution.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out when Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount on which the Al-Aqsa Mosque can be found. This visit widely
perceived by Palestinians as a provocation, sparked the uprising against Israel and eventually gave it its name. It was initially carried on by so-called Tanzim (“Organization”) and the Al-Aqsa Martyr Brigades, both the organizations were affiliated with Fatah. Initially, Hamas decided to keep quiet and not get involved in the uprising out of the fear of both Israel and PNA. As the uprising and Israeli military actions progressed, so did a Hamas’ willingness to strike, making its use of suicide operations more popular. This together with the decline of Tanzim caused by Israeli arrests, the diminishing ability of PNA to curb Hamas’ actions as a result of Israel’s incursion into the West Bank and lack of unity among Fatah provided Hamas the opportunity it was in search of. Thus, Hamas jumped into Intifada and became the dominant face of the uprising.

The Al-Aqsa Intifada was the result of Israel’s prolonged occupation as well as the losses imposed by the Oslo Accords. The Palestinian political environment changed drastically due to the fragmentation and cantonization of Palestinian lands in the West Bank, the demographic and economic separation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Previously existing political arrangements ruptured, economic conditions continued to decline, and key social institutions were weakened. Within this context, the Islamist opposition, particularly Hamas, reasserted itself. The Al-Aqsa Intifada was chiefly directed against Israel, but it was also a rebellion against Fatah-dominated PNA and its failure to establish viable state institutions or engage in a process of national reconstruction and democratic practices. Together with Israel’s destruction of the PNA’s infrastructure, especially its security apparatus, and financial strangulation during this period, internal political fracture contributed to greater lawlessness, chaos, and insecurity. The Palestinian political structure witnessed deep fracture when the international community forced Arafat in April 2003 to establish a prime ministerial post. This further accelerated Fatah’s internal power struggles and weakened Arafat.

By 2004 the PNA had lost considerable control over the Gaza Strip and Yasser Arafat faced perhaps his greatest challenge of the preceding decade. Hamas benefited a lot by Fatah’s internal fight, refrained from this intra-Fatah conflict and concentrated instead on attacking Israel and on growing popular demands for democratic reform and
public accountability. Thus, it was also an important factor in Hamas’ electoral victory in the municipal and legislative levels.

Due to the United States mediation, an official truce was declared on 29 June 2003 between Hamas and Israel. But as the Sharon did not honor it and continued his assassination campaign, this resulted in the killing of two Hamas officials, Hamis Abu-Salam and Faiz al-Sadar on 9 August 2003, in Aksar refugee camp near Nablus. Hamas retaliated with two suicide attacks at Ariel and Rash Ha’ayin, breaking the June truce. More attacks were launched by Hamas, including the killing of 22 Israelis in Jerusalem on 19 August 2003. Ismail Abu Shanab was assassinated two days later on 21 August. On 6 September 2003, the European Union under heavy U.S. and British pressure adopted a resolution blacklisting the political wing of Hamas, declaring it a terrorist organization. The Israeli government responded quickly with the attempted assassination in Gaza of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the spiritual leader and founder of Hamas who was later assassinated on 22 March 2004.

In January 2004, Hamas proposed a ten year *hudna* in exchange for Israel’s withdrawal from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem without committing any political recognition or compromise. Hamas accepted the imbalance of power between Israelis and Palestinians stating that it is ready to compromise its ultimate goal of “liberating all the historic land of Palestine”, temporarily suspend the armed resistance against Israel if the latter withdraws its soldiers and settlers from the occupied territories, permit all Palestinian refugees to return, and release of all Palestinian prisoners. Hamas justified such a *hudna* since even the Prophet Muhammad himself is said to have favored this type of *hudna* with his enemies in Mecca. Hamas’ political shift was the result of Israel’s success in further weakening its military capacity through its assassination campaign and regular raids into Palestinians towns and cities. During 2002 and 2004, Hamas had lost almost all its prominent leaders in Gaza as well as its founder Sheikh Ahmad Yassin.

In April 2004, Sharon’s announcement of his willingness to disengage from Gaza, which it subsequently withdraws in September 2005, further encouraged a more pragmatic response by Hamas; Arafat’s death in November 2004 was also a critical turning point. Arafat’s death brought a crisis of representation and legitimacy. His
successor, Mahmud Abbas in particular, had to try to re-legitimize and rehabilitate the Palestinian political system domestically as well as regionally and internationally. Domestically, Abbas tried to do so through a series of elections: Presidential election in January 2005, which he won; municipal elections between December 2004 and January 2005; and legislative elections in January 2006. This endeavor of re-legitimization could not succeed without Hamas’ participation, nor could it sustain Hamas’ continued opposition. Regionally and internationally Abbas sought to revive the U.S. Roadmap initiative through renewal of the 2003 Palestinian ceasefire – offering Hamas a form of power sharing in return of cessation of violence.

Willing to become a part of the political mainstream and administrative structure of Gaza in the event of Israel’s disengagement was very important to the Hamas. Actually, Hamas was no longer willing to play the role of rejectionist opposition, realizing the inefficiency of armed struggle in the absence of political engagement. Hamas’ strategy was one of the gradual political integration, which would provide Hamas greater legitimacy domestically and probably internationally by differentiating itself from the Taliban and Al-Qaida.

In the meantime, however, times had obviously changed, not because Arafat was no longer there, but because PNA was weak and Hamas was strongly demonstrating with each passing day, its intention to take full part in the representative institutions available to Palestinians. Hamas started to stop its boycott of the PNA and instead to enter its halls of power. The first step was participation in local elections. The municipal elections were held between December 2004 and January 2005. Throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, Hamas was able to snatch power from Fatah in many of its traditional stronghold (e.g., Nablus). Thus, in addition to its considerable social service networks, Hamas found itself, by the end of 2005, in majority control of local councils in Gaza with access to Gaza’s (and to a lesser extent the West Bank’s) institutional infrastructure and attendant constituencies it had never before possessed.

However, just after winning the election reforms were immediately implemented in several communities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with varying degree of success that focused mostly on infrastructural improvements long set aside by earlier governments such as plans to develop Rafah’s commercial center. In March, Hamas
declared that it would take part in the upcoming legislative elections, which were then scheduled for July 2005. Given its success in local elections, Hamas widened its domestic agenda in its legislative platform to include service provisions such as social welfare, care for the poor, economic reform (reducing unemployment, encouraging foreign investments and free market initiatives), building a strong civil society and viable state institutions, proper governance, financial management and accountability.

In the face of Israeli disengagement from Gaza in August 2005, Hamas advocated that it was the result of successful strategy, it has always adhered to: armed struggle against an occupying power and no concessions on the peace process. Resistance, the Islamist movement said, brought true results on the ground and the disengagement was a clear demonstration of this fact: Israel was abandoning Gaza, just as it had abandoned Southern Lebanon. Thus, it was a forced withdrawal that resulted from Hamas’ continued resistance, for which the organization also won public support.

After Arafat’s death in 2004, the political vacuum created by his absence and upcoming January 2006 elections presented a new opportunity for Hamas’ political participation. From 1996 Hamas’ prime rival Fatah dominated the PNA. Hamas refused to participate in 1996 elections because it viewed that it was the product of the Oslo Accords, which it had strongly criticized on ideological grounds.

The scenario had changed dramatically by 2006. The peace process was in tatters and Fatah was increasingly weakened and shattered. Fatah and President Mahmud Abbas were incapable to improve law and order or deteriorating economic conditions. Now, the political system was open for Hamas’ participation with presumed success. To participate in election presented an opportunity to maintain the position of Hamas, which it had achieved in the Al - Aqsa Intifada and to cope with decreasing public support for violence. Hamas realized that through political participation it could attain legitimacy which would prevent PNA to take oppressive measures towards the movement. In the broader political context, Hamas had shown pragmatism and moderation during the past years and this tendency has been crystal clear since the movement opted for political participation. Showing political pragmatism Hamas, after less than a year of attempts to avenge the assassination of its leaders, began to realize its military limitations and concentrated on its political successes by accepting unilateral suspension of fighting.
It was the suspension of attacks which enabled Hamas to give up its boycott of participation in the political structure of the PNA and enter the political battle in full force by adopting a very critical stand against the new Palestinian leadership. On 26 January 2006, the elections were held for the Palestinian Legislative Councils in which Hamas won 74 seats out of 132. This overwhelming victory of Hamas shocked the entire world and Palestinians also. Hamas made history in January 2006, sweeping away the Fatah’s monopoly of power in free and fair democratic elections. A new phase in Palestinian politics dominated by the Islamist political culture began.

Although, Hamas won political battle in January 2006 but they had severe difficulty in exercising it. Hamas subsequently came under massive pressure after their electoral victory, as the United States and European Union insisted that Hamas recognize the State of Israel, renounce violence and recognize the previous agreements. When Hamas refused to accept these demands, economic and aid sanctions were imposed on the Palestinian Authority. Through imposing international economic and financial sanctions and attaching conditions to urgently required help, the boycott intended to force Palestinians to overthrow the government they had democratically elected.

After winning the election in January 2006, Hamas made it clear that it wanted to form a national coalition government together with Fatah and other political factions represented in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Hamas was also pursuing a strategy to let Fatah dominated PLO to carry out the government’s foreign policy, while the new Hamas led government or the PNA would focus on internal social and economic affairs. The purpose was to stay away from a direct confrontation between Hamas and Israel and place Abbas as a mediator.

As Fatah refused to participate in a government of national unity, the cabinet formed by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) at the end of March 2006 was made up exclusively of members or allies of Hamas. Fatah for its part, continuously showed its refusal to let Hamas govern. After more than a year of intense negotiations, and Palestinians on the verge of a civil war, Saudi mediation led to a summit meeting in Mecca in February 2007. The summit brought together the President, Prime Minister and responsible parties in Fatah and Hamas. The parties reached on an agreement for forming of a national unity cabinet based on Document of National Accord to which was added
respect for the agreements signed by the PLO and an explicit reference to Arab resolutions. Thus, Hamas and Fatah together with a large number of other secular forces created the first ever fragile Palestinian National Unity Government in March 2007.

On 17 March 2007, the PLC approved a National Unity Cabinet. Ismail Haniyeh as Prime Minister, headed it, accompanied by a Fatah Vice-Prime Minister. With the Popular Front of Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Islamic Jihad refusing to become associated with executive, cabinet consisted of 12 Hamas’ ministers, 6 Fatah ministers, 4 ministers from “small” parties and 3 independents.

Actually, the National Unity Government did not last for long. Power sharing proved to be more difficult than anticipated, especially within the field of security. The factional conflict between Hamas and Fatah culminated in June 2007, with scenes in Gaza resembling a civil war. The Palestinian civil strife in Gaza led to a political division of the Palestinian territories divided in a West Bank controlled by Mahmud Abbas and a Gaza Strip controlled by democratically elected Hamas government. This resulted in an eventual breakdown in the National Unity Government.

The inter-factional violence which resulted in subsequent Hamas’ takeover of Gaza and confined Fatah to the West Bank was also rooted in the U.S. Government’s plan to weaken and ultimately overthrow Hamas-led government, formed soon after Hamas’ electoral victory. Although, both Hamas and Fatah were responsible in creating anarchy, but foreign powers have also contributed directly to the combustion, which Hamas constantly and perfectly analyzed as an attempted coup against its democratically elected government.

Following the Hamas’ takeover of Gaza, Israel and other major players in the international community strengthened their plan of siege, isolating Hamas even more and penalizing the whole Gaza in deceptive belief that by undermining Hamas and its capability to deliver they would compel Gazans to overthrow it. It could be better to say that while Hamas has gained total control in the Gaza Strip, it paid heavily for that in the West Bank.

Hamas and Israel indirectly agreed through Egyptian mediation to the six-month ceasefire in June 2008. In return for a freeze on attacks, Hamas believed that Israel would open the Gaza border crossing to let the flow of goods and workers. During the first five
months, the truce held comparatively well. Some rockets were fired into Israel, but most of them were connected to the non-Hamas militant factions and, later, Hamas seemed gradually more competent and willing to suppress even these attacks. Israel, exemplified the periodic rocket fires as justification for maintaining the border crossing and Gaza’s seaport blocked for almost everything, even to the basic humanitarian supplies.

On 4 November 2008, the ceasefire was broken. A month and a half before its natural term, Israeli tanks entered into a few hundred meters into the Gaza Strip under cover of Israeli Air Force. The official justification was that the tanks were attempting to destroy a tunnel that Israel believed was being used in an attempt to capture Israeli soldiers. During the offensive, six Hamas militants were killed. The Hamas’ military wing responded quickly and fired dozen of rockets against Israeli cities in the Negev. On 27 December 2008, Israel launched an extensive military campaign known as “Operation Cast Lead” against Hamas in the Gaza Strip with the aim to counter Hamas’ rocket fires into Southern Israel and generally, to severely weaken all aspects of Hamas’ rule in Gaza. From 27 December 2008 to 19 January 2009, the entire Gaza Strip was pounded by airstrikes, artillery bombardments and infantry attacks; many unreported or only distantly reported by the independent foreign journalists, who were for the entire duration of the operation, not allowed to enter the Gaza Strip by Israeli authorities. After tough negotiations with Egyptian officials, Hamas accepted a ceasefire, which provided that Israel would commit itself to withdraw from the Gaza Strip in a week’s period. Both parties agreed verbally to the truce, and Musa Abu Mazuq announced it publicly at noon on 18 January 2009. Israel withdrew its troops before the deadline.

After the Operation Cast Lead, the Mavi Marmara incident of 31 May 2010 took place which shocked the entire world. The Mavi Marmara had sailed from Istanbul under the Turkish flag ten days earlier, and was the largest in a convoy of six ships, called the Freedom Flotilla, that intended to break the siege Israel had imposed on the Gaza Strip by bringing 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid. The whole operation was recorded by the journalists on the board. The Israeli Navy’s special operation unit Shayetet 13, along with a helicopter, started the attacks against Mavi Marmara. The Shayetet 13 men were fully armed as they attached their ropes to the ship and climbed the board. They started
From 9 March to 14 March 2012, the IDF launched a military operation under the Codename “Operation Returning Echo”. It was the most violent eruption of hostility covered by the media in the territory since the Operation Cast Lead or the Gaza War of 2008 – 2009. On 9 March 2012, Israel launched targeted air attack in the Gaza Strip, which killed the secretary general of the PRC, Zohair al-Qaisi.

Palestinian fighters retaliated by launching rocket attacks on Israel, with more than 300 Grad missiles, mortar shells and Qassam rockets fired, of which 177 struck Israeli territory, hitting the main urban centers of Ashkelon, Ashdod and Beersheba, besides smaller communities. Twenty-three Israelis were wounded; mostly civilians and schools all over Southern Israel remained closed for almost a week to save students from rocket fire. Israel’s Iron Dome missile system intercepted several rockets fired by Palestinian militants towards big cities and destroyed 56 rockets in 71 attempts.

Israel attacked with air strikes and targeted Gazan weapons storage sites, weapon manufacturing facilities, rocket launching sites, training centers, posts, tunnels and militants, killing 22, most of them were members of Islamic Jihad and the others from the PRC. Four civilians were also killed in this attack. Approximately 74 Palestinians were reportedly wounded in the attack, largely civilians. Hamas did not take part in the combating openly and asserted that full-fledged war would “be destructive to the Palestinian people”.

Operated Pillar of Defense was an eight-day military operation by the IDF in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip, formally launched on 14 November 2012 with the killing of Ahmed Jabari, the head of the Gaza military wing of Hamas. The operation was launched in reaction to Palestinian groups firing more than 100 rockets at Israel within a 24-hour period, a strike on an Israeli military patrol jeep inside Israeli borders by Gazan militants, and a tunnel blast caused by IEDs close to the Israeli Defense Forces on the Israeli side of the fence. The Israeli government declared that the objectives of the military operation were to stop rocket attacks directed against civilian targets launching from the Gaza Strip and to weaken the potentialities of militant groups. The Palestinians accused the Israeli government for the rise in violence, blaming the IDF of attacks on Gazan civilians from...
the beginning of the operation, and quoting the encirclement of the Gaza Strip and occupation of the West Bank, as well as East Jerusalem, as the major cause for rocket attacks. Gaza officials revealed that 133 Palestinians had been killed in the attack of which 53 were civilians, 79 militants and a police officer, and assessed that 840 Palestinians were injured. A lot of families were dislocated.

Throughout the operational-Qassam Brigades and the Islamic Jihad further accelerated their rocket attacks on Israeli towns and cities, in an operation code named **Operation Stones of Baked Clay** by the al-Qassam Brigades, firing more than 1,456 rockets into Israel. The rocket fires caused the death of three Israeli civilians in a direct hit on a house in Kiryat Malachi. Till the end of the operation, six Israelis had been killed, 240 were wounded and almost 200 had been treated for nervousness by Megan David Adam. On 21 November a ceasefire was proclaimed after days of talks between Hamas and Israel brokered by Egypt. Hamas and Israel both claimed victory. Israel proclaimed that it had achieved its goal of weakening Hamas’ rocket-launching capacity, while Hamas declared that Israel’s choice of attacking Gaza had ended.

Hamas exiled leader Khaled Mishal visit followed a ceasefire, which brought an end to the conflict between Hamas and Israel. He entered Gaza City from Egypt at the Rafah border crossing, kissed the ground in celebration. Khaled Mishal said on his first ever visit to Gaza on Friday, 7 December 2012 that he wished to become a “martyr” there. “I hope God will make me a martyr on the land of Palestine in Gaza”, Mishal said shortly after crossing from Egypt into Gaza. While addressing media he stated that “I consider this moment my third birth, and I pray to God that my fourth birth will be the moment when all of Palestine is liberated”. Michael had been banned for years from entering the Palestinian territories via crossing controlled by Israel. Entry from Egypt had been blocked by expelled president Hosni Mubarak, but was facilitated by the country’s new Islamist-led government.

Though, Hamas has been designated as a terrorist organization by the U.S., Israel, and the European Union together with other Western powers. The foregoing discussion makes it abundantly clear that is a national liberation movement which has gradually transformed into a political party. It has a separate military wing known as Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Armed struggle has been a cornerstone of Hamas’ policy since its
formation. It is due to the Hamas realization that without armed struggle it would not be possible to achieve its proclaimed goal which is the liberation of all the historic Palestine. Thus, Hamas always advocated that Jihad is the only means through which the liberation of Palestine would be possible.

Hamas role in Palestinian politics can be witnessed since its formation. The first Palestinian Intifada, which broke out in 1987, in Jabaliya refugee camp was an immediate cause for the formation of Hamas. Without the participation of Hamas, the Intifada could not have lasted so long and it was the Hamas’ members who made it possible to spread the Intifada throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Hamas’ continued armed struggle has been a major factor for its growing popularity among Palestinians.

However, its role in Palestinian politics greatly increased when the Oslo Accords were signed between PLO and Israel. Hamas vehemently criticized the Accords on political, religious and economic grounds. Throughout the Oslo period, Hamas adopted a policy of controlled armed struggle and avoided a direct confrontation to the PNA, which was established in 1994 as a result of the Oslo Accords. Hamas had shown a great level of pragmatism in its behavior on several occasions. Severe crackdown on Hamas’ activists by the PNA such as torture, custodial deaths, close down of social and charitable institutions run by Hamas, collaboration with Israel in assassinating key leaders and commanders of Hamas’ military wing brought civil war like situation on several occasions, but Hamas remained passive in relation to the PNA because of Hamas’ realization that any inner Palestinian conflict would ultimately serve Israeli interests.

Hamas’ landslide electoral victory in the January 2006 elections surprised the whole world as well as Palestinians. How could it be possible that a “terrorist organization” as it has always been represented in Western media, emerge as a victorious political power? Hamas’ chief rival had been the secular Fatah movement, which without interruption for almost a half century dominated the Palestinian political arena. Israel, the United States, European countries, Arab countries and many other regional and international players wanted Fatah to win. Against all expectations, their enemy Hamas triumphed. Hamas’ overwhelming victory not only enhanced its role in Palestinian politics, but also provided it with legitimacy for which it was in search of. As a result of this victory, Hamas formed a National Unity Government and became the leading force
in the national liberation struggle. Besides this many social and charitable institutions are run by Hamas to provide help to the besieged Palestinian population.