



**Palestine**

LATOFF 2006

**SONS OF MALCOLM**



# EDITORIAL



Dear Readers,

Welcome to the *Sons of Malcolm* magazine, a special issue focusing on the issue of Palestine. *Sons of Malcolm* is a concept which is inspired by the principles of Malcolm X / Malik El-Hajj Shabazz. A 'Third Worldist' perspective focusing on the struggles of those oppressed by neo-colonialism and racism and who fight for their social, political and cultural freedom.

This is a special issue on Palestine as it remains one of the most important people's struggles in defying the hegemony of the West, particularly the USA. Although the situation in the Middle East is fraught with war and strife, without the Palestinian peoples struggle, the US and its bosom buddy Israel would have achieved many more successes in the region and beyond. The resistance in Afghanistan, Somalia, and especially Lebanon and Iraq has tied up the US and Britain, and has enabled other peoples such as those in Latin America to achieve developments in their popular struggles in a matter of years which otherwise may have taken much longer. In this sense the world's freedom loving peoples are indebted to these resistance movements. Latin America has possibly the biggest and most radical political movements of the world, and the level of change towards the left across South America in the last five years has taken everyone by surprise.

It is however troubling that people even within the 'movement' are slow to develop solidarity with the resisting masses in Iraq. Iraq is probably the greatest battle taking place between the Third World and the West powers, between liberation and occupation, and between humiliation and dignity. 'There is nothing more precious than independent and freedom', this still rings true today as it did when Ho Chi Minh stated those words. The Iraqi people have fought on behalf of the worlds oppressed and have received very little in return. The situation in Iraq is undoubtedly complicated and messy, but there still remains much work to be done in developing our efforts in supporting an independent and unified Iraq. Hopefully the interview with Abduljabbar al Kubaysi from Iraq will give some insight into what is taking place there.

Palestine too remains a focal point of the struggle for independence against US hegemony. Some of the reasons are due to its resistance to the outrageous oppression of the Zionist settler-colonial state, and to the advanced political and organisational strength of patriotic organisations from the militant left such as the PFLP and DFLP, through to the nationalists in Fatah to the Islamist-Nationalists of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In words of the late Marxist leader of the Palestinian people George Habash, it is now the turn of the Islamists to have a go at leading the struggle when before it was the leftists. Nevertheless one cannot forget the great contribution that people like George Habash have made in bringing the plight of the Palestinians to the worlds attention for the first time in the 1960s and '70s.

There is still much confusion in the West as to the nature of different Islamist movements, and the reasons why the left in the Middle East have weakened over the last few decades and the ascension of the Islamists. One hopes that some of the articles herein can provide a starting point for further study and discussion with a view of developing dialogue and respect between people in periphery and those in the West.

Although the force of the struggle against US hegemony generally comes from the Third World, it remains crucial that movements in the West develop their own organisations and struggles that are confronting racism and Islamophobia, and the attacks on working people and their communities. England seems lagging behind Ireland, Scotland and Wales in terms of developing a mass movement that confronts these issues. Maybe this is can be partially explained by England's role as the colonial centre of these islands, surrounded as it is by progressive and left nationalists. England *does* possess inspirational role models. People like the eloquent Moazzam Begg remain examples of those who from overcoming unimaginable ordeals become inspirational examples of what individuals are capable of in the struggle against war, exploitation and oppression.

Finally thanks to all the contributors to this magazine, and especially to our great artist Latuff from Brazil, whose weapons are his emotive and defiant cartoons, and who has been a great help in the production process of this magazine.

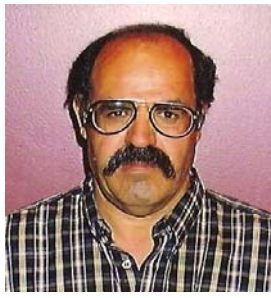
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# 'A Global Massacre Against Gaza'



**Adel Samara**  
March 2, 2008  
*Kanaan Online*

The debate on whether Israel will launch a large scale or "limited" aggression against Gaza is pure non-

sense and meaningless. Any "limited" aggression against civilians, by an army with most recent US inventions of war machine and Zionist inhuman behavior, will kill many people.

The most important question, however, is somewhere else: What are the reasons and who is really behind this holocaust?

The main reason can be summarized as "No Resistance in the Era of Globalization" (NOREG). This should remind us of the fact that US neo-cons regime, western capitalist regimes, and Arab comprador regimes support and encourage Zionists to wipe out Hezbollah as the main force of resistance in this era. That is why, the war of summer 2006, was a precious gift for Arab regimes. But fortunately, the results were deeply disappointing.

Since 2006, if one does not mention the holocaust in Iraq, Arab regimes and the Palestinian Authority (PA) stand in the camp of: "No Resistance in the Era of Globalization" NOREG.

This is an international camp. It transcends national, ethnic, religious and ideological boundaries. That is why, Arab rulers, Zionists, US neo-cons, Anglo-Saxon, French, German regimes are in one camp.

Accordingly, the war against Gaza is a decision from a terrorist leadership of all these regimes, and the Zionists are its paw. It is the war of regimes and ruling classes that is aimed at liquidating all forms of resistance.

Any Palestinian, Arab or Thirdworld-ist who

stands on the line of resistance is a candidate for termination: Baghdad, Gaza, Lebanon, Serbia ...etc are all fields for implementing this rule.

## Rockets are not the Reason

Those who pretend that rockets are the reason behind the current Zionist massacre are liars. If we have to look for a reason for that massacre, it should be found in the 1948 Zionist occupation of Palestine, the eviction of Palestinians from their homeland, and the Zionist insistence on terminating the Palestinian Right of Return (RoR) by all means. Three quarters of the population of Gaza are refugees who were evicted as a result of the occupation of Palestine in 1948, and who are part of a large community of Palestinian refugees amounting to 6.5 million scattered all over the globe. Why shouldn't they resist?

The Zionist regime, US and most of western capitalist regimes, and later many Arab regimes are hand in hand supporting the Zionist settler and criminal regime working on terminating the RoR. Oslo Accords follow the same direction albeit it is not directly written in their text.

It is worth noting that the Zionist massacre is not only because Hamas stands for the RoR and refuses the recognition of the Zionist regime. It is well known that the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people had never ceased since 1948, and Palestinian resistance will never stop as well.

It should be also noted that Palestinians are the only native people who still resist the white settlers, while in other white settlements, i.e. USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the native people had been mainly terminated while some have given up the struggle.

## Will there be a big war?

This form of question is a simplification of facts. Israel does not need more than this

level of holocaust against civilians. It is in Israel's interest to force Palestinians into another mass eviction than to kill all of them at once. Zionists have never changed their plans: to occupy Palestine in its entirety, but ....void of its people. That is why; they prefer Palestinians' self- 'transfer'.

Of course, this does not eliminate the possibility of launching a massive war against Gaza or a massive destruction as the Zionists did in Lebanon 2006[1] considering the fact that the camp of globalization in their support. It is not an exaggeration to note that the transfer of Palestinians is a real possibility now.

One of the reasons for delaying a more extensive war is the Zionist expectation that they will lose more soldiers in a fierce face to face battle, a loss they are never ready for. For a colonial settler entity that fights for importing more settlers, losses of soldiers is of catastrophic consequences. The Zionist entity, Israel, is the only white settler regime that is still 'buying' new settlers, while the US white settlement is building a wall against Mexican immigrant workers who are fighting to enter the country even as slaves. During 2007, the number of settlers who left the Zionist regime exceeded the new incoming immigrants.

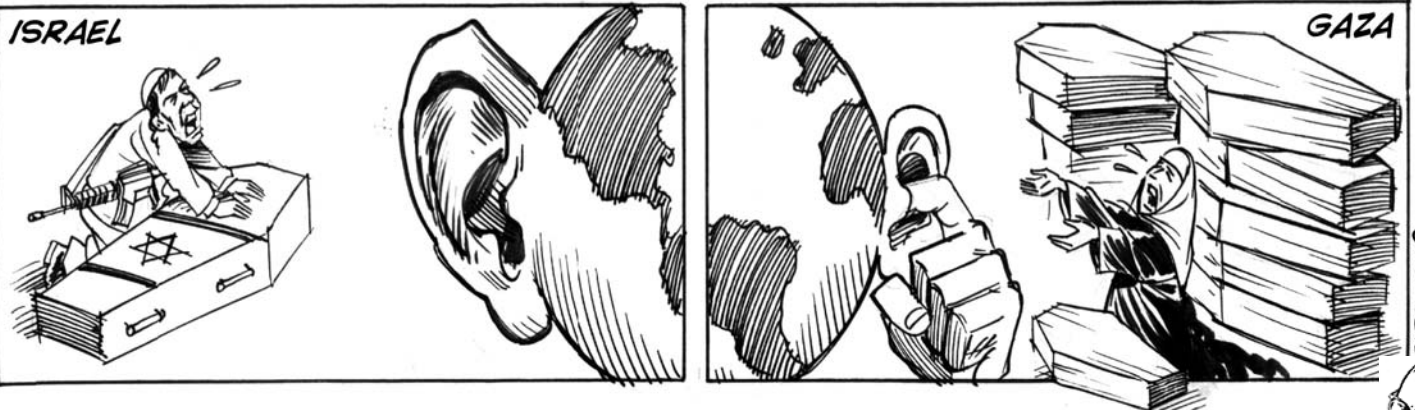
## Bin Laden in Gaza !

A year or so ago, the PA repeated that some al-Qaeda fighters are in Gaza. Later, the PA and some Arab rulers repeated the same lies and accused Hamas of facilitating the infiltration of al-Qaeda militant to Gaza.

This propaganda is another war against resistance. As a matter of fact, many do not buy the story that there is a single al-Qaeda organization.

I believe that the NOREG consider any militant all over Arab, Islamic and even Third world as al-Qaeda. Even if there is one single al-Qaeda, the question is: Who created it? Who started terror in the modern world history? It is the western capi-

## WESTERN LOGIC



TOFF 2008





*Palestinian relatives of one of three Palestinians killed by an Israeli missile mourn outside the hospital of Beit Hanoun, northern Gaza Strip, 23 February 2008. - Wissam Nassar/MaanImages)*

The most dangerous part of the peoples' enemy propaganda is its ability to mix all Arab and Islamic militants in one pot[2] and show that they are the so-called al-Qaeda or the Salafi!

Unfortunately, some Arab thinkers fall into that trap. In their criticism to Political Islam (PI), they are being lured by the hatred of the Zionist and western leftists towards Arab and Moslem resistance. Some of these writers are keen to prove to the Zionists and western leftists that they are not religious, and they are anti pan-Arabism ... etc. They strive to be accepted in western leftist circles!

One of the bad results of this subjugation is that they confirm that Arab people support Salafiyah! That is why; Zionists and many western leftists used the victory of Hamas to 'prove' this pretence. These Arab writers failed to explain that in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip and other Arab countries, the people have to choose between PI and the comprador which betray their history, memory, present, and future.

As long as these Arab leftist writers help the deformity of PI groups, they are, whether they mean it or not, placing socialist/ Communist Arabs in the camp of imperial-

ism. This, in fact, delays the re-emergence of an Arab radical left.

If Hamas wants to create something, it will not create al-Qaeda; it will create other fighters for Hamas! But, since the war machine is that extensive and is declared against the Palestinian people, why would not Palestinians create

many al-Qaedas?

### Israel Fights for Arab Regimes as well

This is another dimension or reason of the massacre in Gaza. We must remember that Arab regimes were and still are terrified by the Palestinian struggle. When the first Intifada erupted, the goal of Arab regimes was to keep their citizens away from its influence. When Hezbollah liberated South Lebanon, and later defeated the Zionists in 2006, Arab regimes were devastated.

When Hamas won the Palestinian elections in January 2006, Arab regimes were terrified again, and a global, though gradual, coup d'état started against it. The crisis reaches its peak when Hamas defeated Fateh in June 2007.

Consider the following developments: the Zionist aggression in Gaza is a protection for Arab regimes from the expansion of this phenomenon. One should keep in mind that these regimes are ready to pay any price to avoid the provocation of their suppressed people.

### The Two Weak Wings

Anyone who believes that the Zionists will

reduce their aggression, is either naïve or cooperating with them. It is an entity that was created against the Arab Homeland especially the Palestinian people. That is why, they have no alternative but to prove and emphasize their role.

If radical people in the region want to rebuild their power and to fight for a united Arab socialist Homeland, defeat of the Zionist regime, and achieve the RoR, they must first start their battle against two local groups:

- The ruling comprador classes in Arab Homeland;
- The various groups of local intellectuals: the westernized, renegade communists, NGOized political activists and many academicians who are tied (and financed) in one way or another, by the bloody regimes of the United States, many other western regimes, and even the Zionist regime.[3]

[1] The arrival of the US Cole warship to the Lebanese shores is a direct threat for another destruction of that country.

[2] That is why; the comprador regime in Morocco arrested lately some leftists with Political Islamists. It should be noted that these arrests are in fact directed against the influence of Hezbollah of Lebanon as a new current which is not a fundamentalist. It might attract leftists as well.

[3] A very recent example of those intellectuals is the Moroccan poet Abdullatif Al-Lua'bi, who is visiting the occupied WBG now during the mass extermination of Palestinians in Gaza under occupation invited by the French Cultural Center. For those who are not familiar with the issue of normalization, any Arab who visits the occupied WBG is in fact normalizing with the Zionist occupation and recognizes the Zionist regime.

*The Author is a Palestinian Marxist Economist living in Ramallah.*

# DPRK Bitterly Condemns Israel's Massacre

*Pyongyang, March 5 (KCNA)*

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK gave the following answer to the question raised by KCNA Wednesday as regards the massacre perpetrated by Israel through its indiscriminate attack on Gaza Strip of Palestine: Of late Israel escalated its military attacks on Gaza Strip of Palestine, indiscriminately killing innocent civilians, the spokesman noted, and continued: This action

is bringing the strained situation in the area to an extreme pitch of tension and arousing a serious concern of the international community. All facts go to clearly prove that Israel is a cancer-like entity disturbing the peace in the Mideast region. Israel should stop at once its inhuman massacre of Palestinians and blockade against Gaza Strip and pull its forces out of all occupied Arab territories.



# Nasrallah speech at Mughniyah funeral

[Excerpts from Nasrallah's speech on Feb 14th 2008—Ed]

"... first I would like to convey to his dear and honourable parents, Abu-Imad and Umm-Imad, our congratulations and condolences and say to them: Blessed by this heavenly selection of your family. God bless your patience, steadfastness, and sacrifice. Let the whole world know that this jihadist family has sacrificed all its sons as martyrs. A family may offer two or three martyrs when it has six or seven young men, but Al-Hajj Abu-Imad sacrificed all he had - Jihad, Fu'ad, and Imad. They marched towards martyrdom one after another.

...  
"Brothers and sisters, we were not surprised by this martyrdom that has been awaited for 25 years as we all belong to a school whose prophets, imams, and leaders are martyrs. After the martyrdom of Al-Hajj Imad, we feel the way we felt after the martyrdom of Al-Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi, our leader, master, and secretary general, and the way we felt after the martyrdom of Shaykh Raghیب Harb, the shaykh of our martyrs, because we are engaged in a real and a bloody battle, in which we defend our homeland, people, nation, holy places, and dignity in the face of the ambitions, threats, challenges, and aggressions represented by Israel and America and all those who support them.

...  
"First, they, that is, the Zionists consider the martyrdom of Al-Hajj Imad a great achievement while we consider it great news, signaling the upcoming decisive and final victory, God willing. Let us go back a little in memory. This is what happened to Shaykh Raghیب. They killed him but the resistance escalated and Israel got out of the capital, the mountain area, the western Al-Biqā, and most of the south except for the occupied border strip. It did so as a result of his pure blood and the proud resistance and not the international resolutions or international intervention, which has always supported the Zionists.

"This, too, was the case with leader martyr Al-Sayyid Abbas al-Musawi. They killed him, imagining that by killing him the resistance would collapse. Resistance escalated and took an upward turn. A few years later, that is, in 2000, they left defeated and humiliated as a result of his blood and resistance which carried the name and banner of Abbas al-Musawi, and not as a result of the international resolutions or international community. Today, they killed brother leader Al-Hajj Imad Mughniyah, thinking that by killing him, the resistance will collapse. They killed him against the backdrop of the July war, which, brothers and sisters, is still ongoing.

Until this moment, no ceasefire has been announced. It is continuing on the political, media, financial, and security levels, and is supported by the same countries which supported the July war. He was killed against the backdrop of this war, but they are completely mistaken in the same way as they were mistaken when they killed Shaykh Raghیب and Al-Sayyid Abbas.

...  
"This is not said as an expression of emotions or sympathy. It is said in a moment of reflection and contemplation. Hear me well. You all know that Ben-Gurion was the founder of the Zionist state in occupied Palestine. Therefore, he knew better than others the points of strength and weakness of this entity, and the equations which protect or destroy it. Listen to what Ben-Gurion said. Had the Arab leaders heeded what he said, this conflict would have ended long ago.

"Ben-Gurion said Israel would collapse. He did not say it would get out of the south or from the Golan, Sinai, or the West Bank. No, he said Israel, which is an artificial entity, would collapse after losing the first war. He said Israel would collapse after losing the first war. Israel waged war in July 2006. Some Zionists called it the sixth war as became known to the world, but high-ranking strategic commanders in Israel called it the first war. All the right and left wings and all extremists in Israel - because there are no moderates - were unanimous in saying that Israel lost the war. The Winograd report, which was softened and made appropriate to keep what is left of Israel, could not conceal the bitterness of the fact that said hundreds of times the words serious failure, great failure, inability, and weakness on the level of the political and military leaderships and the Israeli Army. Did the Winograd report not say this? It was not Imad Mughniyah who said this. It was said by a judge appointed by Olmert. He told part of the truth in order to alert Israel to its fate.

"The question, o brothers and sisters, is why they have failed and lost the July war, although, as he said, they have the strongest army in the Middle East. They also have more advanced equipment and technology than any other. This is simply because they faced in Lebanon over the 33-day war a serious, honest, and valiant resistance and because Imad Mughniyah was fighting them during the July war in Lebanon, along with his brothers and students.

"They were lying in wait for them and fought them bravely, courageously, and cleverly. Therefore, Israel has lost the first war, and according to the historical laws and rules and

the promise made by its founder, it is doomed to collapse and will collapse, God willing. The consequences of shedding the blessed, pure blood



of Hajj Imad Mughniyah, Shaykh Raghیب, Al-Sayyid Abbas, Fathi al-Shaqāqī, Ahmad Yasin, and the other martyrs, leaders, and mujahidin will destroy this cancerous, usurper entity which has been planted in the heart of our Arab and Islamic nation.

"Second, let our worried friends be reassured and let the enemy know that it has acted very foolishly. I am now in front of Hajj Imad, and my brothers know the reality. I would like to tell both friends and foes that there is no weakness or loophole in the body of the resistance. Imad Mughniyah's brothers will press ahead with his project and jihad. The Israeli does not know what the blood of Imad and Al-Sayyid Abbas has done in the heart of Hezbollah. He does not know that it has created an emotional and spiritual unity inside Hezbollah and that it has provided a great new incentive to the resistance. They do not know all this because they belong to a completely different culture. The blood of Hajj Radwan will further our unity and firmness and will give us an incentive to press ahead with our march more strongly, God willing.

"At this point, I would like to tell the enemy before the friend that Hajj Imad has accomplished his mission, along with his brothers. Today, before leaving us as a martyr, he left behind him only a little to be accomplished. Since the end of the July war on 14 August, we have been preparing for another day, for a day we expect Israel, which is aggressive by nature, to attack Lebanon and wage other wars on Lebanon and the region. This is what Winograd has recommended. On 14 August, the second day, the displaced began to return and a large part of our organization was supervising the housing and compensation issues and removing the debris. But since the first day, the fighters have prepared for a possible upcoming war.

"What I have previously promised has been fulfilled by Hajj Imad and his brothers. Today, Hezbollah and the Islamic resistance are fully prepared to face any potential aggression or war against Lebanon. In the past, I have talked about rockets, but today, I will talk about youths because we are now in front of one of the great leaders of youths. Winograd says that several thousands of fighters stood firm for several weeks in the face of Israel's army, which is considered the strongest in the Middle East and



admitted defeat.

"After they killed Hajj Imad, let them hear me well: In any coming war, not just one Imad Mughniyah will be waiting for you, and not just a few thousands of fighters. Imad Mughniyah has left behind him tens of thousands of trained, equipped, and ready-for-martyrdom fighters. Third, we tell the enemy that we do not act treacherously and we apologize to the friends. The Zionists killed Hajj Imad Mughniyah in Damascus. All our field and investigative information so far confirms this. The Israelis have been handling the issue with hints - which are even stronger than being explicit - that claim responsibility for the assassination. I tell them: You have killed Hajj Imad outside the recognized battle zone. Our battle with you has been and continues to be on our Lebanese land. You used to kill us on our Lebanese land and we fought your usurping entity back. You have crossed the border. I will not say much now, but I will quote one phrase from the July war, when I

addressed you the first time and told you Zionists: If you want an open war, then let it be an open war. I promised the believers victory, because I trust God, the believers, and our people and mujahidin.

"Now, there is only word to say: With regard to this killing, considering its date, place, and style, Zionists: If you want this kind of open war, then let the entire world listen: Let it be an open war. We have a sacred right to self-defence and we will do everything this right entitles us to do to defend our country, brothers, leaders, and people, God willing.

"Fourth, on the anniversary of the martyrdom of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, we wished the martyrdom had helped people assemble together in squares, but some want to use such occasions for insults, abuses, and baseless accusations. Speakers ended the party of insults with extending their hands. If these hands had been honest, we would have extend our own hands, but out of my respect for the martyrdom

of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and this blessed funeral of a great leader in our resistance, I will not respond to the party of insults. Let everybody hear this: Lebanon, to which we have offered our dearest leaders, ulema, brothers, sons, women, and children, will not be an Israeli territory, will not be an American territory, and will not provide a foothold for the Zionists. Lebanon will not be American and will not be divided or federalized.

"Concerning those who want to divide the country, let them leave this country and let them go to their masters in Washington and Tel Aviv and Lebanon will remain a country of national unity, coexistence, and civil peace. It will remain a country of resistance, victory, and national dignity in spite of the dwarfs. In spite of those summoning armies to fight Lebanon and Syria on their behalf and in spite of those who try to sow sedition day and night, Lebanon will remain a country for unity, dignity, loftiness, sovereignty, and strength. ..." - *Al-Manar, Lebanon*

## 'Never Talk to Terrorists'



**By Moazzam Begg**

*Cage Prisoners*

Today's approach to terrorism in the UK as a relatively new phenomenon ignores crucial lessons that should have been learned from Northern Ireland. Earlier this year, I was greatly honoured by the people of

Derry to help formerly open the Free Derry Museum. The Museum was established by relatives of the people killed on Bloody Sunday, who have yet to receive justice for what happened to their loved ones. I was asked to address an audience which included the most well-known leaders of the Republican movement. But the forgotten lesson of Bloody Sunday is why over 25,000 protestors had been marching peacefully that fateful day. It was because of internment. It was because people had had enough of seeing their relatives imprisoned without evidence, without charge and without trial. They were sick and tired of being dehumanised. But the ensuing British Army action was to cause the greatest recruitment drive the IRA had seen in decades and an unprecedented bombing campaign on the UK mainland.

The biggest internal revolt ever faced by the present Labour government was when it attempted to increase detention without charge for terrorism suspects from 28 days to 90 days. Despite this huge defeat, government bills resurrecting the same argument continue to materialise, only with an



auction-like reduction in the bid to 56 days instead. But two months or three would be a sentence no sane person would be willing to serve or accept - especially without charge or trial.

The last time people were detained in this country for significant periods in this manner was during internment in Northern Ireland. And that became, unsurprisingly, the catalyst for bringing terrorism to our doorsteps.

Some people have been held in this country - without charge or trial - either awaiting extradition to countries known to practice torture, or, under anti-terror measures for up to seven years. Several of these people, who were granted asylum in the UK, having fled the oppression in their own countries, are included amongst them. Some were held for so long and in such dire conditions that they opted to voluntarily return home and face possible torture and arbitrary imprisonment.

The argument about foreign policy affecting the radicalisation of Muslim youth no longer holds true of itself, even though intelligence services and think tanks advised the government that the invasion of Iraq would increase the likelihood of terrorism in the UK. But now internal policies, created in the light of reactions to the invasion, along with new attitudes, are exacerbating hostility both towards the Muslim community and eliciting it from them.

In addition to new legislation in this country, which includes increased police powers of stop and search, stop and question, an accepted shoot-to-kill policy and increased surveillance, media onslaughts, the rise of the extreme right, insensitive statements by government ministers and open season on all things Muslim has forced many to find strength in their own communities, neighbourhoods and faith. After Jack Straws negative comments on the niqab (face veil) sales of this item went up ten-fold, conveying a metaphorical, but clear middle finger to the Commons leader and his opinion.

At the Derry meeting I spoke of how Muslims in the UK were openly targeted, vilified and demonised as 'terrorists', and how I felt dejected by this. A Sinn Fein leader took my hand and said, 'Don't feel dejected. Some of us know what it's like to be a criminalised community. Be strong, persevere and it will pass.' A few weeks later, this one-time commander of the redoubtable IRA Provos was shaking hands with Prime Minister Blair as he took his historical place as First Minister for Northern Ireland. I believe all-inclusive dialogue, a lesson learnt the hard way in Northern Ireland, is the only way to achieve the peace people claim to be working for. But it was the ironic words of Blair I still can't fathom: 'We will never talk to terrorists.'

*An edited version of this article is due to appear in the Oxford Forum magazine, a termly publication at the University of Oxford.*



# Samir Amin & Dyab Abou Jahjah debate Political Islam



## *Political Islam in the Service of Imperialism*

by SAMIR AMIN

All the currents that claim adherence to political Islam proclaim the “specificity of Islam.” According to them,

Islam knows nothing of the separation between politics and religion, something supposedly distinctive of Christianity. It would accomplish nothing to remind them, as I have done, that their remarks reproduce, almost word for word, what European reactionaries at the beginning of the nineteenth century (such as Bonald and de Maistre) said to condemn the rupture that the Enlightenment and the French Revolution had produced in the history of the Christian West!

On the basis of this position, every current of political Islam chooses to conduct its struggle on the terrain of culture—but “culture” reduced in actual fact to the conventional affirmation of belonging to a particular religion. In reality, the militants of political Islam are not truly interested in discussing the dogmas that form religion. The ritual assertion of membership in the community is their exclusive preoccupation. Such a vision of the reality of the modern world is not only distressing because of the immense emptiness of thought that it conceals, but it also justifies imperialism’s strategy of substituting a so-called conflict of cultures for the one between imperialist centers and dominated peripheries. The exclusive emphasis on culture allows political Islam to eliminate from every sphere of life the real social confrontations between the popular classes and the globalized capitalist system that oppresses and exploits them. The militants of political Islam have no real presence in the areas where actual social conflicts take place and their leaders repeat incessantly that such conflicts are unimportant. Islamists are only present in these areas to open schools and health clinics. But these are nothing but works of charity and means for indoctrination. They are not means of support for the struggles of the popular classes against the system responsible for their poverty.

On the terrain of the real social issues, political Islam aligns itself with the camp of dependent capitalism and dominant imperialism. It defends the principle of the sacred character of property and legitimizes inequality and all the requirements of capitalist reproduction. The support by the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian parliament for the recent reactionary laws that reinforce the rights of property owners to the detriment of the rights of tenant farmers (the majority of the small peasantry) is but one example among hundreds of others. There is no example of even one reactionary law promoted in any Muslim state to which the Islamist movements are opposed. Moreover, such laws are promulgated with the agreement of the leaders of the imperialist system. Political Islam is not anti-imperialist, even if its militants think otherwise! It is an invaluable ally for imperialism and the latter knows it. It is easy to understand, then, that political Islam has always counted in its ranks the ruling classes of Saudi

Arabia and Pakistan. Moreover, these classes were among its most active promoters from the very beginning. The local comprador bourgeoisies, the nouveaux riches, beneficiaries of current imperialist globalization, generously support political Islam. The latter has renounced an anti-imperialist perspective and substituted for it an “anti-Western” (almost “anti-Christian”) position, which obviously only leads the societies concerned into an impasse and hence does not form an obstacle to the deployment of imperialist control over the world system.

Political Islam is not only reactionary on certain questions (notably concerning the status of women) and perhaps even responsible for fanatic excesses directed against non-Muslim citizens (such as the Copts in Egypt)—it is fundamentally reactionary and therefore obviously cannot participate in the progress of peoples’ liberation.

Three major arguments are nevertheless advanced to encourage social movements as a whole to enter into dialogue with the movements of political Islam. The first is that political Islam mobilizes numerous popular masses, which cannot be ignored or scorned. Numerous images certainly reinforce this claim. Still, one should keep a cool head and properly assess the mobilizations in question. The electoral “successes” that have been organized are put into perspective as soon as they are subjected to more rigorous analyses. I mention here, for example, the huge proportion of abstentions—more than 75 percent!—in the Egyptian elections. The power of the Islamist street is, in large part, simply the reverse side of the weaknesses of the organized left, which is absent from the spheres in which current social conflicts are occurring.

Even if it were agreed that political Islam actually mobilizes significant numbers, does that justify concluding that the left must seek to include political Islamic organizations in alliances for political or social action? If political Islam successfully mobilizes large numbers of people, that is simply a fact, and any effective political strategy must include this fact in its considerations, proposals, and options. But seeking alliances is not necessarily the best means to deal with this challenge. It should be pointed out that the organizations of political Islam—the Muslim Brotherhood in particular—are not seeking such an alliance, indeed even reject it. If, by chance, some unfortunate leftist organizations come to believe that political Islamic organizations have accepted them, the first decision the latter would make, after having succeeded in coming to power, would be to liquidate their burdensome ally with extreme violence, as was the case in Iran with the Mujahideen and the Fidayeen Khalq.

The second reason put forward by the partisans of “dialogue” is that political Islam, even if it is reactionary in terms of social proposals, is “anti-imperialist.” I have heard it said that the criterion for this that I propose (unreserved support for struggles carried out for social progress) is “economistic” and neglects the political dimensions of the challenge that confronts the peoples of the South. I do not believe that this critique is valid given what I have said about the democratic and national dimensions of the desirable responses

for handling this challenge. I also agree that in their response to the challenge that confronts the peoples of the South, the forces in action are not necessarily consistent in their manner of dealing with its social and political dimensions. It is, thus, possible to imagine a political Islam that is anti-imperialist, though regressive on the social plane. Iran, Hamas in Palestine, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and certain resistance movements in Iraq immediately come to mind. I will discuss these particular situations later. What I contend is that political Islam as a whole is quite simply not anti-imperialist but is altogether lined up behind the dominant powers on the world scale.

The third argument calls the attention of the left to the necessity of combating Islamophobia. Any left worthy of the name cannot ignore the question des banlieues, that is, the treatment of the popular classes of immigrant origin in the metropolises of contemporary developed capitalism. Analysis of this challenge and the responses provided by various groups (the interested parties themselves, the European electoral left, the radical left) lies outside the focus of this text. I will content myself with expressing my viewpoint in principle: the progressive response cannot be based on the institutionalization of communitarianism. [A political theory based on “collective cultural identities” as central to understanding dynamic social reality.—Ed MR]. which is essentially and necessarily always associated with inequality, and ultimately originates in a racist culture. A specific ideological product of the reactionary political culture of the United States, communitarianism (already triumphant in Great Britain) is beginning to pollute political life on the European continent. Islamophobia, systematically promoted by important sections of the political elite and the media, is part of a strategy for managing community diversity for capital’s benefit, because this supposed respect for diversity is, in fact, only the means to deepen divisions within the popular classes.

The question of the so-called problem neighborhoods (banlieues) is specific and confusing it with the question of imperialism (i.e., the imperialist management of the relations between the dominant imperialist centers and the dominated peripheries), as is sometimes done, will contribute nothing to making progress on each of these completely distinct terrains. This confusion is part of the reactionary toolbox and reinforces Islamophobia, which, in turn, makes it possible to legitimize both the offensive against the popular classes in the imperialist centers and the offensive against the peoples of the peripheries concerned. This confusion and Islamophobia, in turn, provide a valuable service to reactionary political Islam, giving credibility to its anti-Western discourse. I say, then, that the two reactionary ideological campaigns promoted, respectively, by the racist right in the West and by political Islam mutually support each other, just as they support communitarian practices ...

*Notes From the Editors of Monthly Review: Samir Amin is director of the Third World Forum in Dakar, Senegal. James Membrez translated this essay from the original French.*

FULL ARTICLE:

<http://www.monthlyreview.org/1207amin.htm>



# Samir Amin & Dyab Abou Jahjah debate Political Islam



## DYAB ABOU JAHJAH

While the left in the world is regrouping and regenerating itself under various forms (anti-globalisation, Zapatista, Bolivarian, etc) and it has reviewed several of its former premises and abandoned in many ways some futile dogmas; the Arab Left (whether Marxist, or Nationalist) is still routed and unable of doing the same.

Samir Amin attacks the alliance between sections of the Left and Political Islam

claiming that political Islam can only be in service of imperialism for the following reasons:

1- Political Islam is not secular. This is a strange argument of Amin, because what antagonism does secularism and imperialism have? Most imperialist states are secular so how can being secular or not play a role in determining the position of any political movement towards imperialism? Just like being secular is no guarantee for anti-imperialist positioning, being non-secular is not related to a pro-imperialist positioning. Add to that the fact that Amin opts for a restrictive definition of secularism as being separation of religious thinking and politics while I define it as separation between religious institutions and the State. According to my understanding it is totally conceivable to have an Islamic ideology and adhere to secularism at the same time, Just like the Christian Democratic parties in Europe are secular.

2- Amin considers Political Islam to be the carrier of culturalist policies of belonging and he claims that it focuses too much upon identity and group loyalty. First of all again this does not define any relationship whether positive or negative towards imperialism. Second this is a common feature among all national liberation movements in the Third World and not only Political Islam. Why does Amin not criti-

## Popular campaign to pressure Hamas and Fatah to reconcile

*Ma'an News*  
February 26, 2008

Gaza – Ma'an – The Palestinian Center for Democracy and Conflict Resolution, and the Popular Campaign for Nationalist Reconciliation announced on Tuesday a campaign to collect signatures to urge the Palestinian rivals Hamas and Fatah to begin dialogue.

The deputy director of the Democracy Centre Iyad Al-Hujair said in a press conference in Gaza City: "We have proposed a plan for nationalist reconciliation through pursuing the origins of the conflict. Many legal experts and specialists in the Palestinian affairs from Arab countries have participated to the plan, and 250 thousand copies have been prepared to be distributed in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip."

He added, "Once signatures are collected, the center will organize rallies in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip calling for nationalist reconciliation and handing the petition signed by hundreds of thousands of Palestinians to both Hamas and Fatah officials."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas dismissed a national unity government in June 2007 after Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip. Since then, efforts at reconciliation have failed, with the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority demanding that Hamas give up control of Gaza as a precondition for dialogue.



cize the Zapatistas or the Chavistas, who also adhere to a cultural version of nationalism along with socialism. The fact that Islamist movements are developing a nationalist discourse should be considered a step in the right direction and not the opposite. This allows Islamist movements to build bonds of citizenship with their countrymen even those who do not adhere to the same religious views, or to the same religion for that matter. Add to that the fact that denying the peoples of the world their right to cultural emancipation and identity is a frightening idea and is more aligned with the imperialist project of globalization. The fact that Amin considers the diversity-friendly left to be a retreating left is a matter of concern to me. It reflects an ancient reflex of the time when the left oppressed diversity and capitalism was striving on it. Today it is the left in the world (and the left in the world today is centered in the South and not in the West) that is striving on diversity and it is capitalism that is promoting the unique thought, in that regard Amin is reactionary just like many segments of the European left.

3- Amin claims that the Islamists approach the conflict from an angle of clash of civilization, nothing is less true. Whether it is Hezbollah, or Hamas, or even Al Qaeda one thing they have in common and that is linking the linking of their struggle to the act of aggression by imperialism against their countries and peoples. The clash of civilization discourse is much underrepresented in Islamist circles and is often expressed by marginal figures and streams, while it is more dominant in the West and it find its way to the highest ranks in politics and government.

4- Amin considers Political Islam to be allied to capitalism. It is true that Islamists don't have yet a completely formed economic theory. But one can not claim that they are left or right. Both tendencies are represented in the Islamist camp when it comes to economics. However, some Islamic principals like Al-Zakat (tax on capital roots) and rentless economy can be meeting points with a leftist vision of economy that is also yet to be reinvented and still being debated. The Islamists are not less leftist than the social democrats and one can work towards deepening their awareness of the nature of capitalism.

5- Amin claims that the governing classes in some pro imperialist countries like Saudi and Pakistan belong to Political Islam. Nothing is less true, these classes belong to Islam and use it to depoliticise the masses and not to politicise them. The Saudi's used Islam in the sixties against Abdel Nasser and then exiled the Islamists in the eighties to the Afghani Jihad but eventually clashed with them in the nineties in both their moderate and Salafi Jihadi versions. In Pakistan the power circles are formed by feudal leaders and the Islamist movement in all its factions have always been in cold or open conflict with the regime.

My conclusion is that Amin is frustrated because of the fact that Islamism is today leading the struggle in the Arab world against imperialism. It is not easy to belong to the Arab Left in our days and we share a lot of Amin's frustration. We also share the belief that the best scenario would be to organize resistance around national titles and not sectarian ones because we see our enemy using sectarianism to weaken resistance. Nevertheless we should not act upon frustration and wishes but upon facts, and the facts on the ground are clear. Our task as the Arab Left is to organize ourselves and claim our role in the struggle for freedom and change in our countries. The wrong reaction would be to enclose ourselves in a ghetto and not to face facts. Islamism can produce resistance and it can produce collaboration ( Hezbollah and Badr corps are both belonging to the same ideological school yet one is resisting and the other collaborating) and the same goes for a secular ideology or any other ideology. We must ally ourselves with Political Islam on clear basis of dialogue and mutual respect and in order to defend our people and Nation, and we should agree on resolving our differences through the democratic choice of the people.



## The 'Osloization' of the Palestinian Left

*In spite of its rich revolutionary tradition, the Left has been hijacked by right-wing cabals, whose interest is intertwined with that of the political elite of Oslo.*

**By Majda Hassan**

Special to PalestineChronicle.com

The Osloization of the Palestinian Left is now complete. The opportunistic and unprincipled position taken by the right-wing "Left" of the PLO vis-à-vis the current standoff between Hamas and Fatah is yet another indication of the Left's inexorable deterioration which followed its' implicit acceptance of the Oslo accords-despite its alleged opposition to that agreement. In fact, the People's Party never opposed the accords, but rather legitimized them by its acceptance of ministerial positions in almost every government formed since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

Judging by statements and analyses presented by the main Left organizations and individuals, one could conclude that, in spite of its rich revolutionary tradition, the Left has been hijacked by right-wing cabals, whose interest is intertwined with that of the political elite of Oslo. Although I fail to understand how a nation can have elections under the boot of a brutal occupying power, I still naively thought that the Palestinian Left, and liberal forces for that matter, would seize the unique opportunity which arose as a result of that democratic process in January 2006 and support and strengthen it. The long held slogans of "from and for the masses" and "long live the people" turned out to be hollow.

No honest supporter of the Left would disagree with the statement that the Oslo agreement has brought disaster to Palestine. Oslo brought an unprecedented level of corruption into Palestine; and security coordination with Israel has become the norm. To guarantee itself an easy ride, the controlling party-itself hijacked by a right-wing cabal groomed by General Keith Dayton-has managed to bribe the major secular forces belonging to the PLO. Most members of the Political Bureaus of the major Left parties are either directly employed by the PA, or get paid monthly salaries without being directly employed!

Instead of harnessing all effort to fight the outcome of the Oslo Accords, and instead of respecting the outcome of the 2006 elections and forming a United Front with the party that won the elections (Hamas) with a clear majority on a platform of resistance and reforms, the Left has, alas fallen in line with the undemocratic methods adopted by the controlling party (Fatah) and failed the his-

torical test.

I am aware of the differences within the Left itself, but I am more interested in the position of its supposedly most radical wing, i.e. the PFLP. In its statements and in most interviews with its leaders, the PFLP has shown an unexpected undemocratic position by mainly dovetailing its position with that of the unelected government in Ramallah and the 'ancient' leadership of the PLO. By claiming to be taking a neutral position, but blaming Hamas for defending itself against General Dayton and General Abrams plans to oust it and liquidate the Palestinian cause altogether, the PFLP has taken not just a short-sighted position, but an opportunistic one. Not a single PFLP leader in Gaza and the West Bank has mentioned the names of the American Generals and their roles in the bloody clashes that took place in Gaza in June 2007. In fact, Abdul Rahim Mallouh, Deputy Secretary General, has made it more than clear in almost all the interviews he has given to Palestine TV (itself a tool of right wing propaganda) that Hamas is responsible for the current situation. Other senior PFLP leaders in Gaza have reiterated this. None of them seems to be aware of the role played by the American Generals in arming and financing war lords in Gaza.

Hani Hassan, a member of the Central Committee of Fatah, is more conscious of this role.

In support of the unconstitutional Ramallah government, the Palestinian Left in Gaza has been revived within the PLO so that it can fight the caretaker government of Hamas. Marches, Friday prayers, and strikes have been staged in Gaza to protest against Hamas and its executive forces. "Freedom of expression" has become the new slogan of the Palestinian left, but with great selectivity. The banning of two Hamas affiliated newspapers in the West Bank; the shutting down of the offices of Alaqsa Satellite Station, and the imprisonment of 600 political prisoners by

the PA without a trial or charge; the shooting and killing of an An Najah university student by PA security forces; the bi-weekly meetings between the Palestinian Chairman of the PA and the Israeli PM; the shutting down of more than 110 charity organizations; and the obstruction-in coordination with the Israelis--of a Qatari draft at the SC of the UN to consider Gaza an area of human disaster-have not motivated the Left to stage a single march or strike in the West Bank.

The Palestinian Left has a historical mission that it has not lived up to; a mission that should take resistance and democracy as the two torches which will lead to freedom. Alas, it has failed miserably and what is left of the Left is just rhetoric that has nothing to do with the rich legacy of the historical leaders and fighters that radicalized the concept of struggle, not only locally, but also internationally. This Left has not been able to adapt to the new realities which face the Palestinian people. A "new" Left is, therefore, necessary; a Left that is completely free of the Oslo legacy; one that can provide a democratic alternative to the two-state industry. This "new" Left must, together with other popular forces of resistance, strategize and build on international solidarity and boycott campaigns, in a united front, to confront the Zionist and imperialist onslaught. Is there a way of reaching the ears of the Left in Palestine? Alas, the signs are not that encouraging.



# ARAB LEFTIST CRITIQUES THE ARAB LEFT



By  
**Hisham  
Bustani**

The situation of the Arab Left is similar to "the phenomenon of the transformation of the Left"

on the global scale and a reflection of it. The reason is simple: the Arab Left, as a general rule though with some exceptions, was never a "Left" in the dialectical materialist sense. It has always been a reserved, conservative entity, "reactionary" rather than proactive, "importing" theory rather than producing it, adhering to the "letter of the text" (mainly the text of the Soviet policy!) rather than being an innovative critical thinker.

Below I attempt to dissect the main weaknesses of the Arab Left, as well as the obstacles it faced, and discuss whether there really was an Arab Left at all. This is of special importance since, coming from a Marxist position itself, criticism will help in evolving a revolutionary Left again in the Arab region and the world.

Under the British and French occupation, the division of al-Mashreq al-Arabi (the Arab East, divided by colonialists into the states we know today as Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq) took place for many objective reasons:

(a) "Divide and Rule", a doctrine that is a well-known mechanism for depriving people of the power to change and diverting their political energy into internal channels (channels within the manufactured benign system), thus facilitating the job of the occupier and tremendously impeding any effort towards unifying the Arab masses -- the only mechanism that can lead to the defeat of imperialism. Also through this doctrine, colonialist occupation will have a "new function" to undertake as it transforms its image and presumable function from an oppressor to a buffer between internal divisions, a trick that makes the occupation a "necessity."

(b) Pave the way for the implantation of an imperialist base, a functional entity that can serve imperialism and comprise a material barrier between the Eastern and Western wings of the Arab space. Let us not forget that the greatest attempts for an Arab liberation project started by uniting the Eastern and Western sides of the Arab homeland -- Syria and Egypt. That was the case with Saladin, who united Damascus and Egypt in 1174, paving the way for ending the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1187. It was also the case with Mohammed Ali Pasha (1769-1848), known for his industrialization and

modernization plan to establish a strong state in the Arab region. He united Egypt and Syria and was forced to eliminate his project by the British and Austrian naval attacks. And then Nasser (1918-1970), in his attempt to set up a truly independent sovereign Arab state, also succeeded in unifying Egypt and Syria as a backbone for an Arab unity, but for many reasons, the unity lasted only for less than three years, from 1958 to 1961.

(c) Keep these manufactured "states" under continuous subordination to imperialism, since it is impossible to achieve liberation on the level of the manufactured state (lack of resources to establish independent development and lack of political and popular depth to support a liberation project are among other objective reasons for its impossibility).

The climax of the colonialist drive for division and maintenance of the state of subordination was the establishment and legitimization of the Zionist entity (Israel): a racist colonial-settler entity organically and functionally attached to the imperialist powers.

There is no objective reason whatsoever that might convince a leftist to acknowledge and accept the establishment of such an entity; on the contrary, the logic of Marxist theory and its developments concretely leads to conclusions against such an acknowledgement. There is an exception, of course, and that is the case of a Left that is completely mechanical and under the influence of a center that acts more like a superpower than a revolutionary center.

The Soviet Union accepted the U.N.-sponsored Partition Plan of 1947, thus accepting the material manifestation of the Zionist/imperialist project in the Arab region. Subsequently, almost all Arab Communist Parties accepted what the Soviets agreed to without any critical objection! Moreover, there are reports that the Syrian Communist Party, (the most mature of the Arab Communist Parties at the time), having printed its paper with headlines in objection to the proposed Partition Plan, had to throw all that batch in the garbage and print another edition with a reverse position after the Soviet agreement to the plan!

From that point on, Arab Communist Parties had to become a sort of "devil's advocate," defending the existence of "Israel," and fabricating/promoting all sorts of theories about a "unity of the Arab and Jewish working class" in Palestine. That was and remains a theoretical joke that demanded the unity of the oppressed and occupied with their colonial-settler occupiers and oppressors under the banner of "working-class unity" against imperialism!!

Palestinian Communists formed "united" parties composed of Arabs and colonialist-settler Zionists, self-proclaimed Communists, while other Arab Communists maintained a close relationship and sought to coordinate with this Zionist "Left" and still do today.

On March 2006, the Jordanian Communist Party held a coordination meeting with the Israeli Communist Party in Amman, an example of many that may have taken place unbeknownst to others over the years. Yet that meeting, not so strangely, was even a subject of boast in the JCP's official newspaper! While it is strange enough to be a "Communist" and an "Israeli" at the same time, the two parties obviously had no political conflict, since both of them promote the notion that the occupation of Arab land (1948-occupied land) and the establishing of a functional racist colonial-settler entity on that land is just and acceptable, provided the Zionists give back part of the land (occupied later in 1967) for the Palestinians to establish a fragmented totally subordinate "state," the so-called "two-state solution," an unjust proposal for ending the Arab-Zionist struggle that is used for maintaining the status quo through a never-ending "peace process" and pushing the entire world to accept injustice (Israel) as a normal legitimate state of affairs. Both the JCP and the ICP agree on this solution as their strategy, a coincidence that links them up with the mainstream political agenda globally. Even the U.S. and "Israeli" governments seem to be hooked on the "two-state solution," a strange agreement with "Communist" strategy!

It is ironic that, although Arab Communists were keen on coordinating and forming unified fronts with "Israeli Communists," a similar effort was not undertaken towards Iranian and Turkish Communists, despite the fact that, unlike "Israelis," the people of Iran and Turkey are the historic neighbors of Arabs, and they are an integral ally, and an integral part of an anti-imperialist anti-Zionist struggle.

Some of the Arab Communists were pioneers in crafting terms like "political sensibility" and "understanding the balance of powers." Such terms have become part of the theoretical arsenal for parties and regimes alike who no longer wanted to "liberate Palestine" but rather to follow whatever the Israel/USA couple would put forward, an endeavor that has led us to the pathetic result we see today in Palestine.

The Communists, under the influence of the Soviets, were also the first to accept U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 that further establishes "Israel" as a legitimate state, ordering Arabs to forget about their land occupied before 1967 and terming only Arab land occupied after 1967 as "occupied territories" (under the UN banner, there was no occupation before 1967 -- history does not exist before that year).

The Soviet Union tried to push everybody to accept resolution 242. Mjalli Nasrawin, head of the International Relations Department of the Ba'ath Party and member of its National Leadership Board during the 1960s, reports that, in November 1969, the Soviet ambassador in Syria, Nuradin Mukhitdinov,



demanding that the party (ruling Syria at that time) accept Resolution 242. Nasrawin recalls that weeks later the party received a letter signed by the Soviet leadership troika Brezhnev, Podgorny, and Kosygin, stating that the Soviets consider the decision not to accept Resolution 242 on Palestine a threat to global peace and that, if the current Ba'th party leadership did not accept this resolution, the Soviets would cease all support for them.

The Ba'th Party leadership did not have to wait long to experience the Soviet cessation of support. In of the 10th Extraordinary National Party Conference in late 1970, Hafez el-Assad (then the Minister of Defense and leading a pro-242 faction in the Ba'th Party) was voted out of office. Nasrawin recalls that al-Assad immediately left the conference and staged a military coup. Within hours, the Soviet Ambassador met with party leader Salah Jdeid and informed him that, if he accepted Resolution 242, the Soviets would back the leadership of the party; otherwise the Soviets would not intervene. Jdeid refused, and within hours Hafez al-Assad declared "the corrective movement," his epithet for his military coup against the leadership of his own Ba'th party. Party leaders were all arrested and ended up serving 20-years-plus in jail. Mjalli Nasrawin was released after serving 23 years in prison. Other leaders were not so lucky. Salah Jdeid and Noor ed-Din Atasi left prison for their graves.

It is worth mentioning that the ousted Ba'th Party leadership in 1970 was the democratic progressive leftist element, refusing to eliminate al-Asad and his faction militarily, despite previous knowledge of his intentions, and promoting the necessity of a Marxist theory and practice to become the strategy of the party, as opposed to romantic socialism/nationalism promoted by other factions.

If these were the Soviet demands and pressures on the Ba'th Party, one can imagine their demands and pressures on the Arab Communist Parties regarding the issue of Palestine, the central issue of Arab liberation.

The Arab Communist Parties are not the only ones to blame for their lack of vision and analysis. Self-proclaimed Marxist organizations had also moved away in their strategy from liberation to "two states." Those are the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The DFLP was a pioneer in proposing "stages" in the struggle for liberation. This paved the way for strategic concessions being portrayed as "necessary stages" in the struggle. The PFLP, having a much more progressive position, and being at the forefront of military resistance at one time in the history of struggle, took some time before it also withdrew into the rhetoric of "stages" and "two states," now their official political line.

It is clearly seen now (with some exceptions) that the organized Arab Left -- Communist Parties, the PFLP, and the DFLP -- have all succumbed to "political rationality" and detached themselves from an uncompromising

objective theory and struggle, paving the way for the rise of Islamist organizations that still insist on "liberation" and "refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Zionist entity" and practice armed resistance at the same time.

Another major mistake of the Arab Communists was their lack of clarity on the issue of Arab unity. Being a peculiar case in history, Arabs moved directly from the stage of a 600-year-long Ottoman oppression before WWI to the stage of colonialist occupation and division following WWI. It is elementary that fragmentation is a tool of subordination: this is true of the working class (thus the call for unity of the workers), and it is also true of fragmented people who have yet to acquire their national existence, for whom a classical capitalist social structure with its relevant class structure is far from being an objective reality. It is only simple sense that a call for the divided Arab toilers to unite in the struggle against Zionism and imperialism, and against the subordinate client Arab regimes that safeguard this division, breaking the colonialist-drawn division lines, should have been a priority for the Arab Left.

While Arab Communists, driven by a metaphysical Arab-Zionist "workers' unity" plan, were far away from the main struggle, making no actual effort on the issue of Arab unity as a main propeller for a successful confrontation, pan-Arabist organizations started to evolve into Marxism, proving objectively that Arab unity must have a class nature, must adopt Socialism to accomplish liberation, and must be an anti-chauvinist, all-encompassing secular effort for all the oppressed people in the Arab region. In this sense, the influential Arab Nationalists Movement of the 1950s gave life to the Marxist PFLP, and the Ba'th Party evolved a progressive leftist leadership in Syria ousted by the 1970 right-wing military coup.

The Arab Communists' position on Palestine and Arab unity, a product of mechanical subordination to the Soviet center and lack of critical theory and analysis, is solid proof that a "Left" was never born in the classical Communist Parties. In fact, those parties hindered and sometimes fought against critical thinkers who came from within the establishment.

This long history has prepared the road to NGO transition for many Communists and Communist Parties in the Arab region, following the "liberal wave" on the global Left after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the elimination of the Soviet Union, the political godfather of the Arab Communist Parties. (Of course, exceptions, like the Lebanese Communist Party, still exist, but the argument concerns general phenomena.) Furthermore, following this line of history will also temper the sense of astonishment that might arise from seeing the collaboration of the Iraqi Communist Party with the U.S. occupiers, and their integration within the occupation-dominated political process, while being backed by other Arab Communist Parties like the Jordanian CP.

It is only logical that the Arab Left is a very weak entity at the moment, divided between

two main camps:

1. A classical Communist camp that continues along the political line of its predecessor, with "liberal" additions: promoting a "two-state" solution in Palestine, having a deep faith in imperialist-imposed "democratic processes" such as the one in post-occupation Iraq, joining the agendas of NGOs and accepting their funding, and fighting for its own political existence rather than a political program and ideology. This line is deeply rooted in historical organization (of Communist Parties and similar structures);

2. A critical neo-Marxist camp that, although present and active, is unorganized and divided, mainly because it is comprised of individuals who left the classical official structures without finding an alternative or building one.

Although I don't like the term personally, and prefer the term "Unity Left," the critical neo-Marxist camp is often referred to as "Nationalist Left," opposed to the liberal "Democratic Left" (a malformed equivalent of Europe's Social Democrats) or the classical "Communist Left."

This new critical Left has clear views on

(a) Palestine -- the core of the Arab liberation struggle and not a mere Palestinian-Israeli conflict, an uncompromised struggle for existence between the Arab liberation project and the Zionist/imperialist project, cannot be resolved by "political processes" and cannot be resolved by maintaining a Zionist entity on any part of Arab land;

(b) Iraq -- not recognizing U.S. occupation and any political process that follows from it);

(c) Resistance -- unconditional support to all forms of resistance, including armed resistance;

(d) Unity of the Arab struggle -- the impossibility of liberation on the level of the weak, subordinate colonially-manufactured current Arab state.

(e) Necessity of forming anti-Imperialist fronts based on clear political strategies with forces that share this approach though not particularly leftist (like Islamists, nationalists, etc.).

Through a polarization between those two camps -- an effort that should extend globally on the basis of political clarity -- a new radical, militant, clear and revolutionary Left can be born, and again become a key player in the liberation process, in the Arab region, and the world.

*Hisham Bustani is the Secretary of the Socialist Thought Forum in Jordan, and a member of the Coordination Committee of the Resistant Arab People's Alliance. This article first appeared in Italian in the progressive magazine Senza Censura, No. 24, November 2007.*



# Shifting Attitudes towards Hamas



By Ali  
Abunimah

Since Hamas won the legislative elections in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in January 2006, the United States has attempted to isolate the Islamist resistance movement in Gaza while propping up the leadership of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his defeated Fatah faction in Ramallah in the hope of reversing the election result and restoring Fatah to power. This fit the U.S. strategy of fostering so-called “moderate” regimes in the region, allied with the United States and dependent on it to a greater or less extent, and confronting indigenous forces such as Hamas in Palestine and Hizballah in Lebanon, which the United States portrays as being mere extensions of regional rival Iran.

This strategy has backfired. In Palestine, Hamas withstood an extraordinary military, economic and political campaign waged against it by Israel with the encouragement of the United States. After its breach of the border wall with Egypt, allowing hundreds of thousands of desperate Palestinians to break the blockade on Gaza, Hamas is arguably more popular than ever. U.S.-sponsored peace negotiations between Israel and Abbas’ U.S.-recognized Palestinian Authority have gone nowhere. There is a growing realization that the approach to Hamas must change. This brief assesses movement towards engagement with the group among various key actors.

## Background

The election to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) was held on 25 January 2006, with support from President Bush, as part of his announced agenda of promoting democracy in the Middle East. On a turnout of 75 percent, the Hamas-backed Change and Reform list won 74 of the 132 seats while the U.S.-backed Fatah won just 45. The election was judged to be free and fair by international observers, and Hamas won a larger overall share of the vote than Fatah. The PLC election was conducted according to a mixed system with each voter receiving two ballots, one to select a national party list with seats to be allocated by a system of proportional representation widely used around the world and one to select individual candidates in a local district. Hamas won a majority of the 66 seats allocated by proportional representation and an even larger share of the local district seats. Hamas’s disproportionately large share of the seats in local districts was attributable to divisions in Fatah, which led rival Fatah candidates to run against

each other in many areas, splitting their potential support.

Within weeks of the election, Israel and the Quartet (the ad hoc group representing the United States, the European Union, Russia and the U.N. Secretary-General) had agreed to the complete isolation of Hamas unless it met certain conditions: renouncing armed struggle, recognizing Israel’s main political demand that it has a “right to exist” as a Jewish state and agreeing to abide by all previously signed agreements. No reciprocal conditions were imposed on Israel—which did not have to recognize Palestinian political demands a priori—was free to continue military attacks on Palestinians, expand settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and could violate signed agreements with impunity.

With hindsight, it appears that the conditions were tailored to be unacceptable to Hamas. The United States, in collaboration with Israel and elements of the Fatah leadership, put in place a plan to squeeze Hamas and the civilian population in Gaza militarily, economically and diplomatically in the hope that the population would turn against Hamas and back to Fatah. The United States sponsored what amounted to an attempted coup against Hamas by contra-style militias, resulting in Hamas’s complete takeover of the interior of the Gaza Strip in June 2007.

This setback prompted the United States to support even greater pressure on Hamas while attempting to do an end-run around the group by boosting economic and military support for Fatah in the West Bank. With the November 2007 Annapolis meeting, the Bush administration relaunched peace talks between the Israeli government and Abbas. These talks, however, have made no reported progress; both Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Abbas are seen as weak leaders lacking the authority or mandate to negotiate or compromise on key issues. This political process has been overshadowed and further undermined by the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, resulting from the Israeli siege<sup>2</sup> and the escalating armed conflict that has claimed hundreds of Palestinian and several Israeli lives.

## Is Hamas Ready for Engagement?

One of the common claims of Israeli and other opponents of any engagement with Hamas is that the movement is an irrational “jihadist” organization with no identifiable or satiable political goals. It is presented exclusively as a “spoiler” for whom violence is its *raison d’être*. In fact, Hamas is a complex, dynamic and diverse movement whose leadership has set its sights on a nationalist political strategy that cannot succeed without engagement with the group’s adversaries, including Israel.

The claim that no agreements can be reached with Hamas is belied by the fact that the group has observed indirectly negotiated hudnas in the past and has conducted indirect negotiations

with Israel over the release of prisoners for several months.

While media reports in the United States repeat the mantra that Hamas is committed to the “destruction of Israel,” citing its 1988 charter as evidence, the Change and Reform platform did not make any such call and focused on good governance and fighting the corruption widely viewed as endemic under Fatah rule. On the political front, Hamas had suspended its campaign of armed resistance against Israel for a year prior to the elections, observing a hudna indirectly negotiated with Israel via Egypt and other intermediaries. Both before and after the election, Hamas leaders broadcast their interest in extending this truce on a reciprocal basis with Israel for ten to twenty years after which it could be renewed.

Hamas leaders appear to have undertaken a fundamental shift in their strategy. After years of boycotting the political institutions set up under the 1993 Oslo Accords, they entered the political arena—as many critics had called on them to do. They appeared to have recognized the limits of what armed struggle could achieve without political engagement.<sup>3</sup> Ahmed Yousef, a senior advisor to Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh (who was dismissed by Abbas in June 2007), explained the logic behind the extended hudna which calls for an end to violence without declaring an end to the conflict: “[w] hereas war dehumanizes the enemy and makes it easier to kill, a hudna affords the opportunity to humanize one’s opponents and understand their position with the goal of resolving the intertribal or international dispute.”

Yousef proposed as a potential model the truce between the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British government that laid the ground for an end to their conflict. He noted that the IRA “agreed to halt its military struggle to free Northern Ireland from British rule without recognizing British sovereignty.” Irish Republicans, he observed, “continue to aspire to a united Ireland free of British rule, but rely upon peaceful methods.” A crucial point from Hamas’s perspective was that “[h]ad the IRA been forced to renounce its vision of reuniting Ireland before negotiations could occur, peace would never have prevailed.”<sup>4</sup>

Is it possible to find statements from Hamas figures, including some of high rank, that contradict this conciliatory tone and strategy and put forward more militant positions? Of course it is, which is exactly why Hamas cannot be pushed to move away from long-established positions too quickly. Like the IRA and all other organizations in a similar position, it must move incrementally as its own concerns and the needs of its constituencies are addressed. To do otherwise would be to risk splits and provoke rebellion from the rank and file. The British and U.S. governments understood this in the IRA case but have made no such allowances for Hamas.

Hamas’s escalation of its armed response to



Israel's siege, extrajudicial killings of its members and attacks on the Gaza Strip does not contradict the desire to reach an extended hudna. Rather, it appears to be a calculated gamble that such action can force Israel to agree to pursue a long-term truce with new "rules of engagement" and at the same time veto any political process, such as Annapolis, that attempts to bypass Hamas. The group also wants a deal to re-open Gaza border crossings in which it will have some role.

### The Palestinian Authority

It is likely that the Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas would engage in a rapprochement with Hamas absent the significant U.S. pressure on it to maintain a boycott of the group. Abbas, after all, infuriated the Bush administration by agreeing to form the short-lived national unity government in February 2007 as part of the Saudi-sponsored Mecca agreement. Rank and file Fatah members tend to favor reconciliation, as do some key figures within the movement. Nevertheless, some powerful Abbas advisors have an entrenched interest in the status quo; their patronage, financing, privileges and recognition by the United States, Israel and the E.U. stems from their willingness to confront and work against Hamas. They may be the last to consent to any accommodation as they would stand to lose most from it.

### Is Israel Ready for Engagement?

The debate within the Israeli political-military establishment is between those on the one hand who believe that reoccupying the interior of the Gaza Strip and possibly assassinating senior Hamas civilian leaders can "solve" Israel's problem, and those on the other who have recognized that some form of accommodation is inevitable and is the only means to stop the escalation of violence. The position of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, while nominally closer to the former camp, may be driven by political expediency rather than ideology. Olmert, like Abbas, is a politically vulnerable leader heading a fractious coalition; his position depends to a large extent on U.S. political support. This support in turn depends on Olmert going along with U.S.-set goals: a continuous negotiation process with Abbas, even if it achieves nothing, and the isolation of Hamas as part of the broader U.S. regional strategy of confronting "extremists" and supporting U.S.-anointed "moderates."

Yet within Israel, there appears to be a shift in public and elite opinion towards supporting cease-fire negotiations with Hamas. Two thirds of Israelis, including half of Likud voters and large majorities of Kadima and Labor voters, now support direct negotiations with Hamas to achieve a truce and release prisoners.<sup>5</sup> There is a growing sense that "[p]ower has limitations. The Israel Defense Forces cannot solve everything."<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the most hawkish advocate of engaging Hamas has been Efraim Halevy, the former head of Israel's Mossad intelligence service. Halevy rejects the oft-made claim that Hamas cooperates with or is ideologically similar to Al-Qaeda or that the group is subservient to

Iran. Hamas is "more credible and effective as a political force" than Fatah, which Halevy estimates is "more than ever discredited as weak, enormously corrupt and politically inept." Halevy notes that Hamas "pulled off three 'feats' in recent years in conditions of great adversity. They won the general elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council in 2006; they preempted a Fatah design to wrest control of Gaza from them in 2007; and they broke out of a virtual siege that Israel imposed upon them in January 2008." In doing so, he argues, "They affected a strategic surprise upon all other players in the region and upon the United States, and in each case, no effective counter strategy mounted by the U.S. and Israel proved effective." Halevy has been critical of the political condition imposed on Hamas that it recognize Israel. The demand for "a priori renunciation of ideology before contact has been made," Halevy points out, "has never been made before either to an Arab state or to the Palestinian Liberation Organization/Fatah."<sup>7</sup>

Despite this apparent shift in Israeli opinion, there remains significant opposition to any engagement with Hamas, not least from opposition parties seeking to cast the government as "weak" in the face of "terrorism." While Israel may tacitly agree to short-term deals with Hamas, a fundamental change in the Israeli approach seems remote without significant external pressure.

### The U.S. Role

Up to this point, United States policy has been to foster and deepen internal Palestinian divisions, collude with Israeli policies that have caused significant harm to the Palestinian population and employ rhetoric that presents the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as part of a regional or even global confrontation with Iran and "militant Islam," as opposed to a local conflict that can be resolved through mutually satisfactory political arrangements and guarantees.

Yet, the shift in view apparent in Israel is also evident among U.S. foreign policy elites, where some prominent Middle East policymakers have long been critical of the policy of shunning Hamas. One barometer of changing sentiment is that both The New York Times and The Washington Post recently published editorials criticizing the current approach and calling for a negotiated truce with Hamas.<sup>8</sup> It is too much to expect that the Bush administration will abandon its entrenched positions and publicly reverse course, however. The best that can be

hoped is that the United States will not stand in the way of third parties mediating between Israel and Hamas. A positive sign is that the United States appears to have blessed recent efforts by Egypt to broker a truce ending the upsurge in violence in Gaza and southern Israel.<sup>9</sup>

An additional factor is the U.S. presidential election campaign. Rather than promote sober discussion of policy, this tends to push candidates towards more hawkish positions. Already, one of the major Democratic contenders has publicly endorsed the Bush administration policy of refusing to talk to Hamas, even while stating that he might engage with other groups currently shunned by the United States.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, what is said in an election may not serve as an accurate guide to what a new administration might do.

Above all, the United States must abandon the policy of picking sides in internal Palestinian politics and allow Palestinian factions to reach an internal accommodation, as the vast majority of the Palestinians desire.



### Europe Uneasy

Once seen as an independent and more even-handed actor with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the European Union has in recent years hitched its wagon to the United States policy of unconditional support for Israel. This tendency has been more pronounced since 2003 after which date European policy has been driven by an imperative to heal the internal and transatlantic rifts caused by the Iraq war and the absorption by some European elites of the rhetoric of a "clash of civilizations" with Islam. Nevertheless, while publicly committed to the Quartet conditions, some European governments have maintained low-key channels with Hamas, and there is growing unease with the isolation strategy.



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Notably, the European Parliament passed a resolution declaring that "the policy of isolation of the Gaza Strip has failed at both the political and humanitarian level" and calling on the Abbas Palestinian Authority to work with "all parties concerned in the Gaza Strip"—code for Hamas—for a reopening of the Gaza crossings.<sup>11</sup> Calls for direct engagement with Hamas have also been growing from European civil society. A joint report issued by eight leading human rights and humanitarian agencies, including Amnesty International, Oxfam, Save the Children U.K. and Christian Aid, called for talks with Hamas, concluding that "the international policy of isolating Hamas has not reaped any benefits. On the contrary, it has led to increasing polarization across the Occupied Palestinian Territories and resulted in a political stalemate with Israel."<sup>12</sup> Israel's ambassador to the E.U. has reportedly warned his government of "an overall European policy change toward Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which could even lead to a recognition of Hamas," and Marc Otte, the E.U. Middle East envoy has declared, "We must consider a change of policy in everything regarding Gaza."<sup>13</sup>

These changes, while welcome, are again unlikely to result in a complete reversal in European policy. However, they are likely to lead to more contacts with Hamas outside the public eye and perhaps European efforts to persuade the United

States and Israel to moderate their own hard-line approaches. If this happens, it may help diminish violence, foster internal Palestinian unity and lay the groundwork for a genuine peace process that has popular consent and therefore a chance to succeed.

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**NOTES:**

1. The most complete, but certainly not the only, account of this subversion strategy was documented in David Rose, "The Gaza Bombshell," *Vanity Fair*, April 2008 (<http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>).
2. A coalition of European humanitarian organizations, including Amnesty International, Christian Aid, CAFOD, CARE, Medecins du Monde U.K., Oxfam, Save the Children U.K. and Trócaire, published a joint report detailing the effects of the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. The number of people in Gaza dependent on food aid has risen to over 80 percent from 60 percent in 2006. See: "The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion" ([http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/resources/gaza\\_strip\\_report.aspx](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/resources/gaza_strip_report.aspx)).
3. For examples of the appeals for engagement and an

- extended truce by senior Hamas figures, see Mousa Abu Marzook, "What Hamas Is Seeking," *Washington Post*, 31 January 2006; Abu Marzook, "Hamas' stand," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 July 2007; Abu Marzook, "Hamas is ready to talk: We welcome the call for dialogue, and reject insincere demands for an undemocratic boycott," *The Guardian*, 16 August 2007; Ahmed Yousef, "What Hamas Wants," *The New York Times*, 20 June 2007; Yousef, "Engage With Hamas; We Earned Our Support," *The New York Times*, 20 June 2007.
4. Ahmed Yousef, "Pause for Peace," *The New York Times*, 1 November 2006.
5. Yossi Verter, "Poll: Most Israelis back direct talks with Hamas on Shalit," *Haaretz*, 27 February 2008.
6. Nehemia Strasler, "Talk to Hamas," *Haaretz*, 4 March 2008 (<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/960433.html>).
7. See Laura Rozen, "Israel's Mossad, Out of the Shadows," *Mother Jones*, 19 February 2008 ([http://www.motherjones.com/washington\\_dispatch/2008/02/israel-mossad-out-of-the-shadows.html](http://www.motherjones.com/washington_dispatch/2008/02/israel-mossad-out-of-the-shadows.html)).
8. "The Gaza Dilemma," *The Washington Post*, 4 March 2008; "Talk, but No Peace," *The New York Times*, March 8, 2008.
9. "Cairo Gaza talks make no progress," *BBC News*, 7 March 2008 ([http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7283361.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7283361.stm)).
10. "Obama says United States should not meet with Hamas," *Reuters*, March 4, 2008.
11. European Parliament resolution of 21 February 2008 on the situation in the Gaza Strip
12. See: "The Gaza Strip: A Humanitarian Implosion" ([http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/resources/gaza\\_strip\\_report.aspx](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/stoppoverty/conflict/resources/gaza_strip_report.aspx)).
13. Yossi Lempkowitz, "European Parliament: policy of isolation of Gaza 'failed,'" *European Jewish Press*

# Palestinian initiative prompt dialogue between Fatah and Hamas

**Al-Quds al-Arabi**  
February 12, 2008

A group of Palestinians in Gaza announced the formation of a front to pressure Hamas and Fatah into sitting around a dialogue table, ending the state of division and securing national unity. The group called itself the Loyal and Honorable Vanguardists Among the Sons of Fatah and Hamas, in reference to the fact that the group includes elements from both sides. The Palestinian group issued its first statement which was widely distributed in Gaza last week.

"It said: "Let all these warring sides in Fatah and Hamas know that if they do not reach an agreement, they will dissipate because our great people are able to proceed toward liberation after all the yielders, the collaborators, the corrupt, the exploiters, the bigots and the errant living in the shadows of strife are gone." The statement then called upon the conflicting sides from Fatah and Hamas to wake up, because the loyal current from within our struggling and resisting people is on the move, so "wake up before you are washed away by the current".

"The statement then assured that the Arab and Islamic nation is capable of achieving recon-

ciliation between the brothers in Fatah and Hamas, of lifting the blockade imposed on the Palestinian people and providing help to the Palestinians despite the colonialists, the Zionists and their followers. In this regard, Palestinian sources said to Al-Quds al-Arabi that a number of Fatah and Hamas leaders - who are rejecting the current state of division on the Palestinian street and have repeatedly asked the two movements to engage in dialogue without prior restraints or conditions - were among the founders of this new front.

"The sources expected this front to be very popular on the Palestinian street in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, especially if leaders from both movements were to announce their accession to or support of this front. A Fatah leader who requested anonymity said to Al-Quds al-Arabi it was likely that a number of Fatah elements and leaders in Gaza were members of the new Palestinian front and among those calling for dialogue with Hamas...

"... In the meantime, Isma'il Haniyah's political advisor who is also a leader in Hamas, Dr. Ahmad Youssef, welcomed the call featured in the statement to launch a dialogue with Fatah. He said that this front included a group of patriotic people with a positive spirit trying to save the Palestinian situation from division and sedition.

"However, he said he had not seen the statement and that Hamas had nothing to do with it. Youssef added to Al-Quds al-Arabi that Hamas wanted to reach a Palestinian concord and hold a dialogue with Fatah and all the national Palestinian forces."

**IRAQ**

**PALESTINE**

**WASHINGTON**



# Hamas: Islamic democracy and national liberation



**By Sukant Chandan**  
*Conflicts Forum*  
October 15, 2007

The Hamas election victory in January 2006 has led to an increased interest in the Islamic

Resistance Movement. Hitherto little had been understood of Hamas' history, political and social strategy and tactics. Rather rumors and cheap prejudice against Hamas have been rampant across the political spectrum in the West. Regrettably, progressives in the West have largely dodged the challenges of internationalism and anti-racism in the context of neocolonialism's racist campaign focused on Muslims and Islam, of which the maligning and criminalisation of Hamas is a component. Democrat-minded and progressive people who challenge the criminalisation of Hamas by the West, in so doing confront the Eurocentric idea that legitimacy is only bestowed upon those that the West consider democratic rather than what the people in the given country have chosen. This article seeks to demonstrate that Hamas' ideology has as much claim to the values and practices of democracy and human rights as those political movements in the West. The difference is that these values are inspired and rooted in their own religious, cultural and social contexts.

The Oslo peace process failed to secure any lasting and just peace for the long-suffering and long-struggling Palestinians, thus creating the conditions in which Hamas came to the forefront of the Palestinian national struggle. Since the start of the Oslo process in the early 1990s Palestinians could see elements in the Fatah leadership living relatively opulent lives, involved in all kinds of moral and financial corruption and arresting and torturing Islamists. In stark contrast Hamas were proving increasingly popular due to their record of dedication to serving the people through their civil institutions, lack of financial corruption and frugal living of their leadership and being morally upright, all in accordance to their Islamic principles. The devastating suicide attacks inside Israel conducted by Hamas' armed wing – the Al-Qassem Brigades – at a time when the negotiations were proving to be fruitless in deterring Israeli aggression, also raised Hamas' prestige as the defenders of the Palestinian people. This dedication to the people and struggle translated into electoral support. Hamas gained half of all votes in municipal elections by the time of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in 2000.

Hamas withheld from participating in the presidential and national elections due to their opposition to Oslo, as they saw these elections as being an integral part of a process which they perceived as a sell-out to the Palestinian

national revolution. Eventually in a historic decision they decided to stand in the 2006 elections, and even more momentous was the fact that they achieved a resounding victory at the polls.

Those interested in a more detailed analysis of Hamas' election campaign should read Khaled Hroub's study, *A "New Hamas" through its New Documents*. Hroub states that documents issued at the time of the 2006 election campaign revealed that Hamas showed a greater commitment to unity of all Palestinian movements, a desire for a national government and a de-emphasis on Islamic rhetoric. In no way should this be interpreted as meaning that Hamas abandoned its objectives of an Islamic state as the best solution for Palestinian society and liberation, but it was a recognition by Hamas that they must operate in a spirit of democratic tolerance and respect for other secular factions and the Palestinian electorate. Hroub also argues that these developments and documents of have been largely ignored in the West. This study is particularly pertinent at this time of national discord between Hamas and Fatah, with many portraying Hamas as 'coupists', Hroub's study shows on the contrary that Hamas have for some time been calling for strategic unity amongst patriotic Palestinian ranks.

Hamas have their own Islamic strategic objectives, but they promote these by democratic and civil means. They have always maintained that the Palestinian people are the ones who have the final say on these issues by means of democratic elections. Dr Salah Bardawil leader of Hamas in southern Gaza said in the Arabic language edition of *Asharq al-Awsat*, January 30, 2006: "...Hamas has absolutely never and is absolutely not thinking of the enactment of any laws that impose Islamic teachings and force it upon society." He said religious teachings are followed when they are accepted by the people "not when they are imposed by terrorizing and frightening". He explained that the Palestinian people know of the lenient approach of Hamas which has resulted in the movement winning more Christian votes than some of the other secular movements and considered the accusations that Hamas were planning religious coercion to be "a wide propaganda campaign that national, international and Israeli sides are engaged in, in order to disfigure the movement's image."

Hamas' commitment to democracy is nothing new. Ever since its inception Hamas has expressed its commitment to the democratic will of the people no matter what their decision. The paraplegic leader of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin who was killed by an Israeli air strike in March 2004, stated back in 1989 in the Arabic language daily *Al-Nahar*: "I want a multi-party democratic state, and I want whomever wins those elections to assume power." When asked by the interviewer if this would still be the case

if the Communist Party were to win the elections Sheikh Yassin replied "I would respect the wishes of the Palestinian people even if the Communist Party won."

Tensions did exist between Hamas and other factions, and one should not cover-up or forget the political and cultural nature of the internal tensions that have always existed within the Palestinian national camp. There have been many cases of violent clashes between Hamas, Fatah and other factions such as the Popular Front and Democratic Front. These tensions are not always a simple case of over-zealous Islamist youth attacking those whose only crime is that they are secularists as the following anecdote illustrates.

A Palestinian political leader of a Marxist faction was often seen drunk in the streets in Gaza during the first Intifada. He was brutally attacked by Hamas youth in the first Intifada which left him hospitalized in a critical condition for weeks. He stated however that he held no grudges against Hamas and even sympathized with their actions as he felt that his behavior was unacceptable at a time when the whole community was making immense sacrifices. This is reminiscent of the scene in the film *Battle of Algiers* when a group of around twenty children of the Casbah attack the local drunk and expel him from the community. In a time of mass struggle, especially in a society which frowns upon such behavior at the best of times, liberation movements often take harsh although popular measures to ensure social cohesion and unity within the community.

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, which the West and Israel hoped would do their job for them by repressing Palestinian revolutionaries, Hamas members were being detained, tortured and at times killed by the PA, but they never resorted to revenge attacks. The leadership always held back from the rank and file's occasional demands of retribution against the PA and Fatah. Hamas has shown a remarkable amount of patience throughout its years of existence, especially as they have been treated as a veritable enemy within, by the Palestinian Authority dominated by Fatah. Hamas activists and fighters, along with those of other factions, were routinely jailed and tortured by the PA, although such was their strength and support amongst the masses, Arafat always referred to Hamas as brothers in the struggle and held back from a complete crackdown. A similar situation of repression and arbitrary arrests by Fatah against Hamas activists is taking place today in the West Bank. While Fatah and other opposition forces are generally allowed to demonstrate hold rallies and meetings in Hamas-ruled Gaza, in the Fatah-controlled West Bank, Fatah has arrested scores of Hamas activists, with Hamas accusing Fatah of torturing many of these detainees. >>>



<<< Back in 2006 after winning the elections Hamas requested Fatah and other factions to join them in a unity government. Hamas leader Mesh'al was quoted on the Palestinian Information Center website when he addressed Fatah; "Be with us, and don't abandon political partnership. Our hearts are open for you; our hands are extended to you. Let us turn a new page, and work together for the best of our people based on mutual respect and cooperation. We are one people, united in the resistance, and must unite in the political arena as well."

The English-language Al-Jazeera website reported that newly elected Palestinian Prime Minister and Gaza-based Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyah, emphasized Hamas' desire for unity in the Palestinian patriotic camp, again highlighting Hamas' aspirations of unity with the other largest Palestinian movement; "Hamas ran in the race on the basis of political multiplicity. We don't deal with the political issues based on one party coming into power and another leaving. We want to come and work with each other because the challenges in front of Palestinians are so big and the war with the occupation still going on."

Even now after Hamas' takeover of Gaza, Hamas continues to call on Fatah in joining them to build a joint Palestinian government and political leadership. Far from reciprocating, Abbas and the group around him have decided to ally closer to Israel and the West in an attempt to strangle and starve the Palestinian people away from Hamas. There is no indication that this ploy is bearing any fruits. While Abbas is widely seen as participating in inappropriately convivial meetings with Olmert while Gaza is labeled a 'enemy entity' by Israel, many commentators are remarking that far from gaining support from Palestinians, Abbas will be seen as a Judas to the national cause. One can only guess as to what Abbas thinks he has to gain in pursuing this strategy.

Some who thought Hamas were going to enact an intolerant and stereotypical religious fundamentalist society have been disappointed by events in Gaza. They haven't enforced a Taliban-style regime; on the contrary, their leadership often states that this is not in their line of thinking. Possibly confounding another prejudice against the movement, some may be surprised to know that Hamas women have been developing their political leadership in championing women's rights in the struggle for liberation and in the context of their Islamic principles.

During the time of the Palestinian elections in

January 2006 the Hamas aligned PIC website stated, "The Palestinian woman must assume her real role. It is high time that society appreciated the extent of her sacrifices and jihad." The article went on to explain that Hamas will give women their role in the Legislative Council side by side with men in the struggle against the occupation. The article continued: "Hamas will seek to pass legislation to protect women and their rights. Hamas will resist any attempts to marginalize the role of women."

After Hamas' election victory The Guardian in 2006 ran two articles, one written by Hamas MP Jameela al-Shanti writing from Beit Hanoun in Gaza, and another written by Chris McGreal in Bureij refugee camp in Gaza. In the article entitled 'Women MPs vow to change face of Hamas,' Al-Shanti argued passionately on how unarmed women, including herself, faced an Israeli assault on their community which saw the killing of many Palestinian men women and children, including her own sister-in-law, a mother of eight. She said defiantly that her people's struggle for freedom will not be surrendered for a handful of rice. McGreal wrote about the struggle of Palestinian women in Hamas that sought to change the face of Hamas, reporting that the movement comprised of new women Palestinian leaders who are confident, intelligent and resilient and are challenging sexual discrimination in Palestinian society, discrimination which is not a product of Islam, they contended, but of outmoded traditions.

The writer has met one female Gaza resident who graduated from the Islamic University and whose lecturers included Hamas leaders Abdel Aziz Rantisi (assassinated by Hellfire missiles launched from an Israeli Apache helicopter on April 17, 2004) and Mahmoud al-Zahar. She was a proficient student and confident student organizer. Hamas students tried to get her to join the Hamas-affiliated student organization, but she refused as she did not share all of Hamas' views. Recognizing her abilities they nevertheless helped her to set-up a new independent student body with her initiative. This is an anecdotal example of how Hamas is able to act in a democratic manner in developing peoples' contribution to Palestinian struggle and society.

These positions of Hamas on the role of women in society and struggle also distinguishes the movement from the radical Islamist movements who are affiliated or openly sympathetic to Al-Qaeda, who do not expound any social role for women in society and in the struggle for independence, but rather

encourage women to withdraw from society. This perhaps can be understood in some instances as being more a result of the influence of tribal culture such as in Afghanistan, and in the context of brutal wars such as in Iraq where women often bear the brunt of the ensuing social calamities which occupation brings. The Palestinians in contrast are an example of a people enduring a decades-long military occupation and protracted civil and armed struggle, in which the women in the Islamic Resistance movements of Hamas, as well as in Islamic Jihad, have a social role in the community, society and in the struggle encouraged by these Islamist political parties.

Hamas' political ideology and practice is one that shares many principles with Western democratic and progressive ideas. Instead of being inspired by the secular democratic, bourgeois and socialist traditions of the Western context, Hamas is inspired by similar principles in the cultural context and traditions of Arab and Islamic history. One should bear in mind that the political ideologies which are leading the struggle for independence and progress in the Middle East are doing so in the context of more than a century of brutal colonial and neocolonial oppression, whereas the democratic and left-wing ideas in the West have developed out of a privileged intellectual atmosphere on the basis of a society which has stolen all of the America's gold, exterminated indigenous populations on two continents, and 'turned Africa into a warren for the hunting of black skins'.

We in the West must accept that secularism is not going to become a leading political force in the Middle East any time soon, due not least in part as it was brought to the region by colonialists. Arab and Muslim people, and by many more across the world who desire independence from US hegemony, see in the West many social and moral conditions that they don't want to emulate but which Westerners often see as examples of the superiority of their societies. People around the world are developing their own political identities from their own cultural and political roots. Morales, Chavez, Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas are a few such examples. In the process of developing these indigenous movements, there is a move away from the uniform cultural and political forms of Western secular and Marxist models. However it must be stressed that there remain universal principles that these liberation ideologies and Western democratic and progressive ideas share, and there exists the possibility of developing mutual respect, solidarity and unity between the two. This dialogue and solidarity is jeopardized by the twin problems and challenges of Eurocentric prejudice and Western oppression of Third World peoples.

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# “WE NEED MORE ‘PUNK-ASS KIDS’”

Moazzam Begg interview

**Dan Glazebrook**

A special for OURAIM website

“I was relieved.” A stunned silence from the audience. Hang on – what? Did we hear that correctly? Wasn’t Moazzam Begg just asked how he felt when he was told he was going to be sent to Guantanamo Bay? Yes, he was. “You have to understand that at that time, I was being held at Bagram.” The US base in Bagram, where Moazzam was held for a year, is notorious. This was where he had had to endure being kept awake for nights on end by the terrified screams of fellow detainees – both women and men – two of whom were beaten to death before his eyes, and where he was threatened with being sent to Egypt for extreme torture, before being hooded, shackled and beaten himself. After a year here, “I was looking forward to Guantanamo.”

Moazzam became politicized at an early age through his experiences of racism growing up on Birmingham’s Sparkhill estate. It was these experiences that led him to join anti-racist gang ‘the Lynx’, who played a part in clearing racism off the streets of Birmingham. His political consciousness deepened as he began to educate himself about international issues during the First Gulf War. Always tending to back the underdog his sympathies lay with the Iraqis, and as he read more widely he found himself broadly supportive of Ho Chi Minh and Fidel Castro in their struggles against US imperialism, as well as Mandela and the Palestinians in their struggles against apartheid and occupation.

His growing internationalism led him to take part in eight aid convoys to Bosnia, and finally to start work as aid worker in Afghanistan. When the US began bombing in 2001, he and his family fled to Pakistan, from where his nightmare began. Kidnapped by the Pakistani police (who were being paid by the US military for each foreign Muslim they captured), and delivered into US custody, his journey took him from Kandahar to Bagram, where he stayed one year before ending up in Guantanamo’s Camp Echo.

Once there, Moazzam was kept in solitary confinement for two years, never once being informed of any charge against him. How did he survive? “In reality, I didn’t always survive. There’s not much you can do. I often felt I couldn’t use the experience for any kind of benefit. I would dream of escape, but I would also try to memorise my copy of the Koran, and I would make lists of everything

I could think of – all the foreign words I knew, all the capital cities, what I would do when I got out. I also started to write poetry.” The methods used at Guantanamo Bay – 24 hour lighting, sensory deprivation, public humiliation, half-drowning... - have been widely reported in this paper and elsewhere. I don’t want this interview to dwell on the details, but I do want to know what Moazzam believes is the purpose of this abuse. It is becoming increasingly clear that the Guantanamo/ Bagram methods, far from producing the quality intelligence the US claim is their purpose, are actually designed to break prisoners down until they admit to anything. In other words, the US torture system is designed not to extract information, but to manufacture it for dubious political purposes. In his book, *Enemy Combatant*, Begg notes that Ibn as-Shaykh al-Libbee was tortured into signing a ‘confession’ that Saddam Hussein had trained Al-Qaeda in using WMD, which was used as ‘evidence’ during the buildup towards the invasion of Iraq, before later being retracted. After several particularly brutal interrogations and threats, Moazzam himself “began to think that the only thing I could do to end this misery and terror was to pretend to admit to being involved in some terrorist plot... eventually I did agree to say whatever they wanted me to say, to do whatever they wanted me to do. I agreed to be their witness to whatever.”

But Moazzam believes there is also another reason for Guantanamo. “It is a stark warning to the rest of the world: this is what happens to people who dissent, or who live in countries whose governments dissent. We can pick you up, anywhere in the world, without charge, and do these things to you for as long as we want: and no one can do a thing about it.” And let’s not kid ourselves that we are talking only about the US here: Contrary to the widely propagated image of the British government as an appalled, if ineffectual, bystander in the case of the British Guantanamo detainees, in Moazzam’s case at least, they were central to the whole process of his incarceration. MI5 were present at his very first interrogation, and at several others subsequently. Indeed, it was they who had suggested to the Americans that he be picked up in the first place. Why? Their suspicions seem to have been raised by his internationalist work over the years – driving aid convoys to Bosnia, visiting, and subsequently moving to Afghanistan to work in a girl’s school set up under the Taliban – but particularly by a letter he had received from an acquaintance alleging torture



and requesting legal assistance.

It seems clear that a big part of what MI5 had against Moazzam was his model of internationalism – a practicing example of aiding just struggles and supporting those less privileged than ourselves. Is part of the ‘War on Terror’ aimed at terrorizing and criminalizing the whole concept of international solidarity? The Terrorism Act 2000, by banning even symbolic support for mass resistance groups such as Hamas, certainly gives that impression...

“One of the things that people don’t recognize in this country - or seem to have forgotten – is that there was a time when Britain could well have been occupied; in fact Jersey and Guernsey were occupied. There was a counter-occupation plan drawn up by the Ministry of Defence, which included what would today be termed terrorism. It included dad’s army – the real dad’s army – taking up arms against not only the occupiers, but also collaborators. We seem to have forgotten that. How do we recognize the legitimacy of, say, the French Resistance, who were using ‘terrorism’ against the Nazis, and not recognize the right of people to defend themselves in Iraq or elsewhere? It’s a principle: are you allowed to resist occupation or not? To say that it is only legal ‘when we say so’ is to remove the principle of self defence. It is a time honoured tradition for people to resist occupation. The Terrorism Acts in this country attempt, with a series of legislation, to criminalize not only attacks against civilians – but any ability or idea to support resistance movements against occupation, whether in Iraq, Palestine, or anywhere else.” Do people outside the Muslim community have anything to fear from the Terrorism Acts? “We’ve already seen it being used against people like Walter Wolfgang [elderly Labour Party member arrested under the Terrorism Act for heckling Jack Straw at Labour Conference]. I think it is just a beginning. Clearly they are not targeting the non-Muslim community, but I would only add the caveat “yet”. >>>



And that is because the idea of dissent is being demonized. It's not only just the [Muslim] community that is being demonized, as much as we are, but what is really being demonized is dissent. Because we are regarded as having traitorous voices, not supporting our boys back home because we are against the war; when in fact, the reality is that the government doesn't support them. The government, by introducing this new legislation, is beginning to try to suppress dissent. One example of this is the glorification of terror. Having a certain interpretation could very easily include situations where the British government themselves would have supported terrorism; for example during the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. The Russians called the mujahadeen terrorists. The British, on the other hand, were bringing mujahadeen to Scotland and to Snowdonia to train them and sending them anti-aircraft missiles; but the Russians always maintained they were terrorists. So it's paradoxical to recognize just how the tables have turned, but in essence the idea of criminalization will not just be limited to the Muslim community, but to wherever opposition is."

I ask Moazzam if he sees parallels between the criminalization the Muslim community is now facing, and what the Irish community here faced in the 1970s and 1980s. "There is, and one parallel stands out in particular - the major lesson of Northern Ireland - unpalatable as it may be to some - is that the people

the government need to think about talking to, are the very people they are currently demonizing."

It turns out Moazzam has just returned from his third visit to Ireland, where a plaque bearing his name was unveiled as part of the annual Bloody Sunday commemoration. Moazzam's activism has clearly not been blunted by his time in US custody - not even, it seems, for its duration. In Bagram, he successfully agitated to improve the prisoners' conditions on two occasions - once to be allowed to exercise, and once for more daily water - the latter through that time-honoured Irish prisoners' tactic of the hunger strike.

Back in Britain, what does Moazzam think is the way forward for the anti-war movement, given the fact that government are not bothered by marches? His answer is unequivocal: "I can tell you that with a lot of people I have been speaking to across the board, Muslim and non-Muslim, the idea of a campaign of civil disobedience is really starting to take off. That could well be the next step I think."

How would the government respond? "The response would be arrests of people. I think this goes out to the crux of the matter - how much are people willing to sacrifice for the greater cause? As a lot of Americans also say, our country is now internationally hated - and I think anybody that cares about how

their country appears to the rest of the world should take note of that, because whether we like it or not, we're all British. When we go out of this country, people regard us as ambassadors to our nation. How can one be proud to say, yes, I'm British, to, not just somebody in Iraq, but in Brazil or Guatemala or anywhere else, when people regard you now as war criminals? Britain has invaded Afghanistan more times than Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan, and it continues to do so."

Could a campaign of civil disobedience really take off? "I often get asked when I speak at universities and elsewhere, 'what do you think should be done'? And I remember a soldier, a Southern Alabamian who served two tours of duty in Vietnam, who said, 'listen, son, we didn't lose Vietnam, it was those punk-ass kids - they're the ones who lost us Vietnam'. So what I said at the University is: we need more punk-ass kids."

Moazzam is clearly a serious political thinker and strategist of whom the British anti-war and anti-imperialist movement can be immensely proud. Maybe we should start doing as he suggests.

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# CUBA AFTER CASTRO

***In the wake of the announcement by Cuban leader Fidel Castro that he will “neither aspire to nor accept” another term as the country’s president, much of the analysis in the mainstream media has concentrated on whether Fidel’s retirement will usher in a “transition” period for Cuba’s socialist revolution, now in its 50th year, writes Pablo Navarrete in Red Pepper***

But while the transition being talked about by these analysts foresees a globalised, neoliberal economy, Cuba has in fact been engaged in its own distinct transition for the past year or so, when illness resulted in Fidel handing over power to his younger brother Raul in July 2006.

Under Raul Castro, the Cuban revolution’s leadership has initiated a series of far reaching debates within Cuban society about the type of socialism that it sought. Through various mechanisms Cubans have been actively participating in determining the future direction of the country’s revolution. During this period Fidel has largely remained in the background yet the widely predicted implosion of Cuba’s revolution has failed to materialise. Instead, the revolution has shown that it can both survive without Fidel at the helm and make the type of changes needed to renew the island’s socialist model.

It now seems that Fidel has reached the stage where he feels able to let go and let a new generation of revolutionaries lead the island’s political process. In his resignation letter Fidel said of these: "Some [in the new leadership] were very young, almost children, when they joined the fight in the mountains and later they filled the country with glory with their heroism and their internationalist missions. They have the authority and the experience to guarantee the replacement. There is also the intermediate generation which learned with us the basics of the complex and almost unattainable art of organising and leading a revolution."

So, rather than a chaotic turn to capitalism, as occurred with the demise of the Soviet Union – and which Fidel has sought to avoid at all costs in Cuba - the changes taking place in Cuba so far seem to be controlled by the leadership yet importantly also contain a significant degree of popular participation in moulding the model of society that Cubans aspire to.

Two inter-related factors have been critical in ensuring the survival of Cuba’s revolution and facilitating the transition currently underway in the face of continued U.S. opposition. The first is the rise to power of a number of left-wing governments in Latin America, the so-called “pink tide” sweeping the region.

In particular, the election of Hugo Chavez to the Venezuelan presidency in December 1998 has been of incalculable importance for Cuba. As well as providing invaluable economic support (especially access to Venezuelan oil), Chavez has spearheaded an ideological assault on the failed

neoliberal policies that Washington has promoted in Latin America. With his fiery rhetoric Chavez has also reignited the anti-imperialist discourse that has characterised Fidel’s Cuban revolution and many of the social movements that are once again on the march in the region. By standing shoulder to shoulder with Cuba and daring to talk of “21st century socialism” Chavez has conferred a level of legitimacy on Cuba that many predicted would disappear with the crumbling of the Soviet bloc.

Indeed, Chavez’s ‘Bolivarian revolution’ – named after Simón Bolívar, who liberated Venezuela and much of South American from Spanish colonialism – has become a reference point for the left not only in Latin America but across the world. And the alliance that Cuba has formed with Chavez’s Venezuela and other governments such as those of Evo Morales in Bolivia and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua has meant that Cuba feels more secure than at any point since the end of the cold war, when it was left without friends or support.

The second factor concerns the current US government’s inability to impose its agenda for transition in Cuba due to the severe weakness of its Latin American policy. The Bush administration’s fixation with the “war on terror” and its involvement in Iraq has meant that its policy of “regime change” in Cuba has failed to find public support in Latin America.

Such is the loss of the US political influence in Latin America that a statement released yesterday by the secretary general of the Organisation of America States (OAS), José Miguel Insulza, said that the Cuban people should be allowed to determine their own future, free from foreign interference. The significance of this lies in the fact that Cuba was famously suspended from the OAS in 1962 at the behest of the US

In light of all of this, the announcement of Fidel’s retirement seems much less dramatic than what we have been led to expect. The fact is that Cuba is already changing, and rather than signalling the beginning of a move towards a discredited neoliberal model, Fidel’s retirement merely forms part of a home-grown model of transition.

*Pablo Navarrete is Red Pepper's Latin America editor*



# Uribe's Colombia is destabilizing a New Latin America

by James J. Brittain &  
R. James Sacouman  
VenezuelaAnalysis.com  
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A few weeks after the Ecuadorian and Venezuelan state called on the Colombian government to respect the need for peace and negotiation with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (FARC-EP), the administration of President Álvaro Uribe Vélez supported an extensive armed air and land assault against the insurgency movement-not within Colombia's borders, but rather on the sovereign territory of Ecuadorian soil. On March 1, 2008, the Colombian state, under the leadership of Uribe, Vice-President Francisco Santos Calderón, and his cousin Defence Minister Juan Manuel Santos, illegally deployed a military campaign within Ecuador, which resulted in the deaths of Raúl Reyes, Julian Conrado, and fifteen other combatants associated with the FARC-EP. Such actions are a clear display of the US-backed-Colombian state's open negation of international codes of conduct, law and social justice.

The actions of March 1 took place days before a major international demonstration scheduled for March 6. Promoted by The National Movement of Victims of State-Sponsored Crimes (MOVICE), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), and countless social justice-based organizations, March 6 has been set as an international day of protest against those tortured,

murdered and disappeared by the Colombian state, their allies within the paramilitary United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) and the newly-reformed Black Eagles. Recently, President Uribe's top political adviser, José Obdulio Gaviria, proclaimed that the protest and protesters should be criminalized. In addition, paramilitaries in the southwestern department of Nariño-not far from where the illegal incursions were carried out in Ecuador-have threatened to attack any organization or person associated with the protest activities.

It is believed that the Uribe and Santos administration is utilizing the slaughter of Commander Raúl Reyes and others as a method to deter activists and socially conscious peoples within and outside Colombia from participating in the March 6 events. Numerous state-controlled or connected media outlets, such as El Tiempo-which has long-standing ties to the Santos family-have been parading photographs of the bullet-ridden and mutilated corpse of Raúl Reyes throughout the country's communications mediums. Such propaganda is clearly a tool to psychologically intimidate those preparing to demonstrate against the atrocities perpetrated by the state over the past seven years.

Over the past two months, numerous researchers, scholars and lawyers have supported the call to declare the FARC-EP a legitimate force fighting against the corrupt Colombian state. In January 2008, Ecuador's Foreign Minister Maria Isabel Salvador argued that the FARC-EP should no longer be depicted as a terrorist organization. Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez also announced that the FARC-EP are far from a terrorist force, but are rather a real army, which occupies Colombian territory and shares in a Bolivarian vision for a new Latin America. Mexican deputy Ricardo Cantu Garza also has promoted the recognition of the FARC-EP as a belligerent force legitimately fighting against a corrupt and unequal socio-political system. As prominent US attorney Paul Wolf argued:

*The FARC-EP are a belligerent army of national liberation, as evidenced by their sustained military campaign and sovereignty over a large part of Colombian territory, and their conduct of hostilities by organized troops kept under military discipline and complying with the laws and customs of war, at least to the same extent as other parties to the conflict. Members of the FARC-EP are therefore entitled to the rights of belligerents under interna-*

*tional law ... there is no rule of international law prohibiting revolution, and, if a revolution succeeds, there is nothing in international law prohibiting the acceptance of the outcome, even though it was achieved by force.*

From Copenhagen to Caracas, numerous state officials have denounced the description of the FARC-EP as a terrorist organization. Progressive officials and administrations in Mexico, Ecuador and Venezuela have rather opted for the status of belligerent or irregular forces to more accurately depict the FARC-EP's domestic and geo-political stance. Disturbingly, in the face of this evidence and the FARC-EP's consistent promotion of a humanitarian prisoner exchange and peace negotiations with the state in a demilitarized zone in southwestern Colombia, the Uribe and Santos administration has moved ever farther away from supporting an end to the civil war within Colombia by opting for systemic violence.

Over the past several years, different aspects of the FARC-EP's real social, political and cultural activities for progressive social change have been censored or marginalized by the private press or governments in support of the Colombian state. Nevertheless, after researching the FARC-EP and the country of Colombia for years, independent journalist Garry Leech argued that, "while there is little doubt regarding the global reach of terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, there is no evidence that the FARC is anything but one of the armed actors in Colombia's long and tragic domestic conflict."

In actuality, the FARC-EP is an actor within the strategic confines of Colombian society that aims its directives at domestic social change. In light of such realities, how can this insurgency be a terrorist threat to external nation-states? Coletta A. Youngers, of the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), responds to this question by describing how: *The U.S. government now views the Latin American region almost exclusively through the counterterrorist lens, though the region poses no serious national security threat to the United States ... little evidence has been put forward to substantiate such claims, and whatever activity is taking place there appears to be minimal.*

While Youngers does not trivialize its revolutionary tactics, she clearly argues that the FARC-EP cannot be correctly framed within the concept and rhetoric of global terrorism.



# INTERVIEW WITH ANTI-OCCUPATION IRAQI NATIONALIST

## Anti-Imperialist Camp

*Abduljabbar al Kubaysi, influential political leader of the Iraqi resistance and secretary-general of the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance (IPA) elaborates on the new situation evolving in Iraq*

Q: In the last period the European media when touching Iraq have been speaking only on a sectarian civil war. What is really happening?

Actually the US occupiers as well as the government imposed by them are pushing for this sectarian civil war. Also the Iranians have interest in this as they are looking for a federation in the South as well. Their attempt is to make the Sunni, the Christians, the Mandaeans leave to have a purely Shiite zone. Under the conditions of war this sectarian drive has an immediate effect.

The US uses this as an argument to stay in Iraq as they claim that they would be needed to settle this strife.

There is, however, so much evidence that the intelligence services of the US, of the Iraqi as well as of the Iranian government are the real source of the violence. They plant bombs or pack them into cars which are then being exploded by remote control or by helicopter in

both Shiite and Sunni areas deliberately killing civilians not involved in politics. Thus, they try to spark the sectarian conflict.

In the beginning, the media used to check on the site of the blast and often eye witnesses contradicted the official version that a person exploded himself. Now they use to cordon off the area and impede questions to the locals. They want to have the news spread that militants did the massacre while it was governing forces or the US who planted explosive loads. In most of the cases there is no person involved killing himself. In these cases you can be sure that the ruling coalition is involved.

For example, they changed the name of an important road in the Al Adhamiye district in Baghdad from a Sunni religious figure to a Shiite one during the night. It was the Shiite community of al Adhamiye itself to change it back to the original name. Then they came again with their Hummers...

But actually they did not succeed in creating the rift between Sunnis and Shiites. Yes, in official politics there is. The Sunni Islamic Party, which is with the Americans, and the Shiite block, which is with Iran and the US, litigate along such lines, but they did not succeed in pushing the ordinary people to go with them. Here and there, there might be some minor conflicts but in substance the broad

masses on both sides insist that they are Iraqis regardless of their confession.

Look to Najaf and see the positions of the Arab Shiite Ayatollahs who continue to advocate national unity and oppose the occupation. Or look to Diala province which is composed of 50% Shiites and 50% Sunnis and at the same time is a strong base of the resistance. Two big Shiites tribes, al Buhishma and the followers of Ayatollah Abdul Karim al Moudheris, are with the resistance and everybody knows it. The Ayatollah's son fell in combat. He was the leader of a big tribal contingent of the resistance. In Baquba, the provincial capital, they cannot do the same cleansing as in Basra with the Sunnis or as in Amara with the Mandaeans. In Baquba both Shiite and Sunnis support the resistance. Certainly there are attacks by the different resistance groups on the Iraqi government agencies, the US army, Iranian forces and the Shiite parties and militias like the Madhi army which are inside the political process, but you will not hear of sectarian killings.

There is another example: Tal Afar in the Northwest of Iraq near Mosul. Between 50 and 70% of its population is Shiite. Nevertheless it is one of the capitals of the resistance.

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Q: At the onset, the Americans set all their

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## Uribe's Colombia is destabilizing a New Latin America

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Youngers argues that the insurgency is not a direct political threat to administrations within the United States, Canada, the European Union and any other foreign nation-state in the fact that the FARC-EP's activities "are targeted inward, not outward," hence, "applying the terrorism concept to these groups negates their political projects."

Characterizing the FARC-EP as a foreign terrorist organization dramatically alters the dynamics of the peace process in favour of a killer state. Stipulating that the FARC-EP is terrorist results in the inability for legal peace negotiations to take place between the FARC-EP and any government that subscribes to the categorization. According to James Petras and Henry Veltmeyer, promoting the FARC-EP and its supporters-as terrorists "puts them on the list of targets to be assaulted by the US military machine" and "thus subject to total war."

The terminology of terrorism is perfect for imperialist ideology and expansionism. It is a very open-ended reference that "allows

maximum intervention in all regions against any opposition" and "that any group engaged in opposing militarism, imperialism (so-called 'globalization') or local authoritarian regimes could be labelled 'terrorist' and targeted," thus legitimizing external invasion or attack, say Petras and Veltmeyer.

Internal and external condemnation of the Colombian state has fallen upon the deaf ears of the Uribe and Santos administration. After years of increased violations of civilian human rights, the ongoing suppression of trade-unionism, assassinations of left-of-centre activists and politicians, and a political reality that has witnessed 75 governors, mayors and Congressional politicians alleged or found guilty of having direct links to the paramilitaries-including Vice-President Francisco Santos Calderón and his cousin Defense Minister Juan Manuel Santos and President Uribe's brother Santiago and their cousin Senator Mario Uribe-now the Colombian state has deemed it necessary to illegally encroach upon those nations that deviate from their ideological model of political and economic centralization.

Not only has the Uribe administration criticized its neighbours, but after the actions realized on March 1 it is clear that the Colombian state, with the full backing of the

United States, will impose its own ideological goals and values through force, regardless of the democratic rights and privileges of conventional electoral law and procedure. While the neighbouring states of Ecuador and Venezuela struggle for peace and try to assist the people of Colombia in the quest for an end to the civil war, the Uribe and Santos administration has bypassed judicial realities and governance to impose its own objectives.

Careful analysts of the Colombian situation continue to debate whether the Colombian state is pre-fascist or actually fascist. It is certainly neither humane nor actually democratic. The current Colombian state must be transformed, sooner rather than later. Those fighting for peace must condemn the action of this regime. In solidarity, we must protest the policies of the Colombian state and raise our voices in support for a New Colombia that stands for peace with social justice.

*James J. Brittain (Assistant Professor) and Jim Sacouman (Professor) are Canadian sociologists at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada who have been researching the Colombian civil war and political economy over the past decade.*



## TALES OF IRAQ WAR



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hope on the Shiite political parties but later they discovered that the situation ran out of their control. So they developed the strategy which was called redirection trying to bring in Sunni forces and also sections of the resistance. Did these efforts yield any results?

As time went by, the US realised that their allies' loyalty goes only to Iran. Many of them are even Iranians. For example right now 13 MPs are officers in the Iranian army. Or, in the former Governing Council only six members out of 25 were Arabs both Sunnis and Shiites. Another eight were Iraqis belonging to minorities. So the majority were real foreigners. The al Hakim family are for example from Isfahan. Only some years ago al Hakim was still called Abulaziz al Isfahani.

It were the US neo-cons to introduce the model of religious and ethnic divide. They deliberately wanted to create a Shiite rule as they wanted to have a minority in power, a minority with regard to the entire Arab world, which they thought to be able to better stir and control.

They originally planned to continue their campaign to Damascus and install the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood there. So Damascus would have supported the Iraqi Sunnis while Tehran would have done the same for the Iraqi Shiites and the war would have carried on for decades – not on the base of anti-imperialism but on sectarian grounds. But the Iraqi resistance foiled these plans.

The Iraqi resistance sprang up rapidly and gained strength so they recognised that they could not cope with them only by military means. This is the main reason of their strategic shift. They designed the political process and brought in the Sunni Islamic Party. They intended to dry the lake where the resistance fishes swim. But soon the influence of the Islamic Party evaporated and their leaders have been flying to the Green zone or abroad.

At the same time they realized that the Iranians had deeply penetrated

into the state apparatus beyond the confines of the game. So they moved to also curb this process.

Q: What is the situation of the resistance both in a political and a military sense?

The resistance is still gaining strength. Only judging by numbers they rose from some thousand now exceeding by far 100.000 fighters. Their combat capabilities increased as well. But they could also develop intelligence structures penetrating the Iraqi army and police but also sometimes the environment of the US army. So all together the system of resistance includes some 400.000 people.

The US army and their allies are really demoralised. While the resistance fights to liberate its country they only fight for money. Thus they are becoming more and more savage. They increase numbers not only of direct US troops, but also of mercenary forces which are even more barbarian. Taken all together they consist maybe of some one million troops.

Look to the US losses released by the Pentagon itself which are obviously sugar-coated. If you disregard the months of special military operation like against Falluja or Tal Afar you can see a clear tendency. At the beginning you had some 50 US soldiers killed by month, then later it was up to 80 and now some 100 get killed each month.

The resistance is now a real popular movement; it is a culture among the people. Everybody contributes its share. And the fact that no government helps us has also its good side. If they would pay than you have always corruption. The typical Arab façade would have been erected. Now, instead, there is no excuse. Every section is responsible for itself, to organise its people, to train it, to plan the attacks, to raise money, etc.

Also politically there have been taken some steps ahead. At the beginning there were hundreds of groups but people understand the necessity of unity. Now we can say that there are eight main groups. What has so far not been achieved is a unified political command which remains one of the main tasks ahead.

Q: There are reports of armed clashes between resistance groups and forces related to al Qaeda. What is the relation of the resistance to the Salafi and Takfiri groups?

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Regarding al Qaeda, in the first two years no such thing existed under this name and even the Americans mainly spoke of foreigners penetrating from outside and especially from Syria. They tried to create a pretext to attack Syria although Damascus did absolutely nothing to help the resistance. On the contrary they did 200% what Washington dictated to them to avert an aggression at least in the first months.

In the first two years they were a very limited force with maybe 1.000 to 1.500 fighters coming from inside and outside. Also the level of military activity was not very high. In a time frame of two years they themselves claim some 800 attacks while the resistance were carrying out 800 attacks by week.

Later they steadily gained ground and they still keep growing. They have a lot of money but they do not spend it on a luxury life, but live a very decent life on minimum needs dedicating everything to the struggle, which shows a very serious and attracting behaviour. They spend the money on the struggle. Most of the youths join them not for their ideology but because they offer a place to resist.

In the East you do not need to write books to convince people. If your personal life style is congruent with your mission you will convince people.

When America started the political process it eventually came to the benefit of al Qaeda. Those joining the political process argued that otherwise the Iranians would take over and in this way they would only co-operate a short period and then could kick the Americans out as well. Of course they failed. Al Qaeda argued in a very principled way that only protracted armed struggle will advance their cause and reality confirmed their way of thinking, their trend.

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They offered money also to some resisting tribes with strong Muslim identity which needed these resources for their struggle. Thus they created a coalition of six groups, one al Qaeda and five local groups. That gave them a big push. They were not big forces like the Islamic Army but still with roots in Ramadi, Falluja, Haditha etc. They gave their coalition the name Mujahideen Shura Council. Under this label they continue until now and not as al Qaeda.

They have a lot of resources and a steady supply also from outside while the other groups get nearly nothing from outside. Today maybe we can say that al Qaeda is the first organisation of the resistance. They go separately from the others but nevertheless in each city there is a kind of council to co-ordinate military action, to chalk out a plan of defence.

Islam is a weapon to make the people rise up. The Islamic history, the Islamic figures, the Islamic culture is used to push the people to fight because they consider Islam as their identity. National and religious symbols are being mixed. The Koran says that if Islamic land is attacked by foreigners, armed resistance is obligatory. This is until today out of question in the common sense. Jihad becomes a Muslim duty for the people being occupied by foreign invaders like fasting and praying.

So all the resistance groups whether Islamic or not use this spirit as a tool to mobilise and raise the people. Take for example the statements of the Baath party and of Izzat al Durri personally. Judging by his language you would believe him to be an extreme Islamist. But this does not mean that all of them are really Islamists.

The entire environment is Islamic. By Marxist or nationalist calls you will not attract young people. Where ever young people go you will find Islamic sentiment and spirit dominating. This indirectly favours al Qaeda. People who join them do not feel to do something not normal as the general conditions are Islamic. On the contrary they will believe to only act consistently.

Q: But what about the sectarian attacks? Doesn't al Qaeda bear at least partial responsibility for them?

The responsibility lies with the government both with its Shiite and Sunni components, the US, Israel and Iran. Regarding the attacks attributed to al Qaeda by the West, one has to subtract 95%. And for the remaining 5% you hear only a part of the truth. Sometimes al Qaeda retaliates to governmental or militia attacks on Sunni areas by attacking Shiite areas. They want to show the Sunni population that they can defend and convince them to remain. They thus want to foil the plan to drive the Sunnis out of Baghdad which should become part of the Southern Shiite federal entity. This is pursued by the Shiite parties, Iran and

in the beginning also by the US.

But this is not a strategy and happened only few times in the last year reacting to big attacks. And for every attack they take the full responsibility. They direct a call to the wise people among the Shiites: stop the crimes which are being committed in your name, otherwise you will have to bear the responsibility as well. We are able to strike back with ten times the force.

I do not want to defend this approach, but we need to restore the facts from the distortions by the West.

There is another striking example. Al Qaeda started in Falluja as the entire resistance started there. While it is a 100% Sunni town right after the beginning of the occupation about 12.000 Shiite families from the South took refuge in Falluja and Ramadi because they were accused of being Baathist. I was not only an eyewitness, but also involved in organising the relief for them. They were helped by the ordinary population because they regarded them as being with the resistance. Until today about 20.000 Shiite refugees remain in Falluja and not a single hostile act on sectarian base could be observed not even by al Qaeda. There certainly are quarrels between the resistance groups over domination, this is normal, but not on the basis of religion.

Q: Two years ago you founded the Patriotic Islamic National Front comprising the Baath Party, the Iraqi Communist Party (Central Command) and the Iraqi Patriotic Alliance. There are several religious figures both Sunni and Shiite who support you, but until now the big military formations of the resistance seem not to be represented by your front. Is the time still not ripe for such a front?

It is an exclusively political front and not a military one. That does not mean that there are no relations but we confine ourselves strictly to the political level. Regarding the Islamic military forces you must understand that they were built as military resistance groups and did not have any political representation. We are not interested to recruit this group or that leader. No, we are in a comprehensive dialogue with all of them with the proposal to form a unified political command of the resistance set against the so-called political process. Maybe it will go the other way round that a co-ordination is formed and we will join them. Our aim is not to show our role, but to create this political unification.

Whenever we seem to be very close to accomplishment, something happens which impedes its advancement. We also know what is behind. It is the influence and the meddling of the adjacent Arab regimes.

Regarding al Qaeda, they always want to remain separated and are not included in this process.

Q: During all these years of the resistance, there has been the problem of the ambiguous behaviour of the movement of Muqtada as Sadr who on the one hand became the main pillar of the government and a driving force of the sectarian killing, but on the other hand speaks against the occupation, against the American imposed federative constitution and even against the sectarian strife. As he leads the most important section of the poor people how do you believe to bring at least sections of his followers to join the resistance?

Contrary to most of our friends, at the beginning I always stressed that his movement is very wide and that many Baathists, Marxists and nationalists went inside to protect themselves against the Iranian militias. Maybe half of his movement comes from other political environments and were not followers of his cleric family. So whatever mistake he would commit I thought we could count on these people to rectify it or retrieve at least some of them. Secondly, most of his followers are very poor but at the same time uneducated. Of course this is a double-edged sword. Different to the other Shiite parties the social background of his base are not wealthy merchants who might speak one day against the occupation and the next day sign profitable contracts with the US. Their opposition to the occupation is real.

I believe that finally he has been pushed and cheated by his allies in Iran, mainly Ayatollah Kazem Haeri who is the successor of his uncle, and in Lebanon. Hezbollah visited him three times advocating that he should follow the line applied in Lebanon participating in the political process, running for parliament, seizing positions in the state apparatus and especially in the army thus enabling the construction of a strong party. Otherwise al Hakim would take over and dominate by the use of those resources. This is why he ran on the list of his arch enemy al Hakim.

Everybody knows that his father was assassinated on order of Hakim although officially Saddam is being blamed. Muqtada originally also heavily attacked them including Ayatollah al Sistani for co-operating with the US declaring them even unbelievers. This is why they conspired with the proconsul Bremer to kill him. Actually the US really attacked him heavily. Under this pressure he backed down fearing to be extinguished.

It is simply not true that he claims to be against the constitution. He is fully involved in the political process. He has 32 MPs and 6 ministers in the government which is all to the benefit of the occupation.

Then they pushed him to attack the Sunnis in the prospective to create a Shiite Mahdi state. At this point many of his followers left him while other people joined

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# BRITZ: A brave & honest film



**Moazzam Begg**  
Cage Prisoners  
02/11/2007

The invited audience reacted with pin-drop silence for several minutes as the credits began to roll after the screening of Peter Kosminsky's new

two-part drama, Britz, at Channel 4's studios last week.

Britz is undoubtedly a gripping thriller in its own right, let alone a film that dares to address so many sensitive issues. It is, quite literally, an explosive piece of work. But no one - including me - got up at the end for a round of applause. It's not the sort of thing you feel like doing after watching something like this.

Shown in two parts, the cleverly interwoven, yet idiosyncratic stories of Sohail and his sister, Nasima, Britz is designed to bring these young, thoroughly British (Asian) Muslims into our homes and humanize them before sending them on a journey that takes both characters onto paths of opposite extremes, shocking our stereotypical attitudes towards them every inch of the way. But this is not a film about Islamic fundamentalists. When Nasima is told that she will be 'sitting at the right hand of God' and replies 'that's not why I'm doing it,' the viewer is already aware of what she is planning by now and praying she doesn't. But the empathy for her is probably even more profound than it is for her 'patriotic' brother.

Even as an MI5 operative Sohail (played by Riz Ahmed of The Road to Guantánamo) undergoes racist abuse at the hands of the police, which he points out only alienates people further. And when seeking assistance from the British Consulate in Islamabad he says, 'I didn't think these places were for people like me,' it echoed of a time when the British Embassy there refused me any help when I'd been abducted. However, one of the scenes takes Sohail to a secret detention facility in Eastern Europe where he interrogates a suspected Al-Qaida mastermind, despite his appalling physical condition and the absence of any due process. This especially resonated with me and when I met MI5 agents in places no dissimilar to it. And my sympathies for him began to shift. My work with Cageprisoners.com highlights the multitude of such abuses as almost commonplace within the world of 'ghost' detention.

Nasima is a secular activist who believes democracy, not at all an Islamist. But she is challenged by one, who asks her: "Name me one piece of legislation that your political action has over-turned. Name me one

new law, designed to turn Muslims into second-class citizens that you've even come close to denting. You can't, can you?" Her response in the negative helps to shape the rest of the film.

Peter Kosminsky came to the front of the theatre, after the stretch of silence, to answer questions from an audience which consisted of, surprisingly to me, only four Muslims. I asked him about why he chose to make this film. He replied that it was to make people ask more questions about internal and foreign policy; about spooks as well as suicide bombers. Indeed, it was to boldly ask the question whether the effects of personal trauma - in this case Nasima's best friend who is detained without trial and then subjected to a control order - , coupled with societal hostility and a sense of political impotence can lead someone to the path of violent extremism. And if it can, are we able to understand? He also commented that this film was not at all aimed at the Muslim community - quite the opposite.

Nasima's recorded message at the end is haunting, yet chillingly familiar in content, even if not in style. It is followed by some statistics and a statement:

81% of British Muslims think the War on Terror is a war on Islam.  
91% think the War on Terror has increased the threat of terrorism in Britain. .

Thirty six Justice bills, six anti-terror bills and five asylum and immigration bills have been introduced in Britain since 1997. Many young Muslims feel this legislation is aimed directly at them.

"I have a horrible feeling that we are sinking into a police state..." - George Churchill Coleman, Former Head of Scotland Yard's Anti-Terrorist Unit.

There are some improbabilities in this film: Islamists would never interact with Nasima in the way depicted in this film, and vice versa. But people will be talking about the issues raised in Britz long after the award ceremonies are over.

*An edited version of this article appeared in the Mirror*



## ... IRAQ INTERVIEW

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him causing a deep transformation of his movement. By now also the Iranians have been infiltrating the Mahdi army to the point that half of its personnel is composed of members of the Revolutionary Guards.

Up to 2004 Muqtada was on the right side. For example, he came to Falluja. But after the blows he suffered, in 2005

he moved to the other side. Now it is highly improbable that he will rectify his line. Sometimes he makes some

words against the sectarian killings admitting however that his people are involved and even dismissed three of his leaders. But they continue. Partially he has even lost control over this militia. If you give weapons and money to very poor and ignorant people, if you make them strong, they often believe to be able to take the reigns in their own hands. They become mafia leaders and work on their own account.

All this was also possible because of the fact that he is young, inexperienced and immature so he can be easily influenced by his advisers, his environment including Iran.

...  
*Interview conducted by Willi Langthaler*

FULL INTERVIEW:  
<http://www.antiimperialista.org>





# REMEMBERING GEORGE HABASH

## THE BEARER OF THE DREAM

By **Lamis Andoni**

English Al-Jazeera website

George Habash, the Palestinian leader who was laid to rest on Monday in Amman after six decades of unwavering struggle, had two dreams: an end to the dispossession of his people and the realisation of Arab unity.

He died without seeing either dream come true. In his last years Habash watched, with deep sadness imprinted on his warm persona, as Israel expanded, the Palestinian movement splintered, Iraq fell under US occupation and the Arab World growing increasingly divided.

But he lived and died without forsaking his dream or losing faith in his people.

"His message to the Palestinians was to restore our unity," Issam Al Taher, a senior aide, who saw him a day before his death said.

"Unity, unity, unity — that was his only message," said Al Taher.

To millions of Palestinians those were not solely the words of a political leader but also a soulful cry from a man described as "the conscience of the Palestinian revolution".

While obituaries in Western newspapers announced the death "of a radical Palestinian who resorted to terror tactics", to his people Habash was the unyielding bearer of their dream.

### Missing the point

The world that simply condemns him as "a terrorist" for orchestrating the hijacking of Western planes in the early 1970s, misses an important point: Habash was a product of the generation of the Nakba or catastrophe as Palestinians refer to the 1948 creation of the state of Israel.

After his life was shattered by the violent dispossession of his homeland, Habash was determined to fight back.

Inspired by the anti-colonial struggles, Habash believed that his people should not be forgotten. From his point of view and that of many of his generation, the world was impervious to the fate of a people dispossessed and deprived of their dignity, security and future.

As he repeatedly put it, the world needed to be awakened to the plight of the Palestinians; it had to be disturbed. Palestinians today may or may not agree with his tactics, but his generation remembers that Palestinians were off the

world's radar screens until the resistance made itself heard in the 1960s.

He belonged to a generation influenced by Franz Fanon, Mao Zedong, General Vo Nguyen Giap and later by Che Guevara. In their views, colonialism epitomised systematic, institutional violence and subjugation of people under its control.

The chronicle of his life mirrors the combined lives of many Palestinians and Arabs who were determined to put the colonial control of the Arab world behind by leading a movement for unity, justice and independence from foreign influence and domination.

After graduating as a medical doctor from the American University of Beirut, Habash co-founded the Arab Nationalist Movement in 1953 to give voice to a sweeping Pan-Arabism that sought unity as a guarantor of independence.

### Endorsing Marxism

In the early 1960s, George Habash, already a paediatrician in Amman known for treating the poor for free, endorsed Marxism as he grew convinced that the national struggle should not be separate from the struggle for social justice.

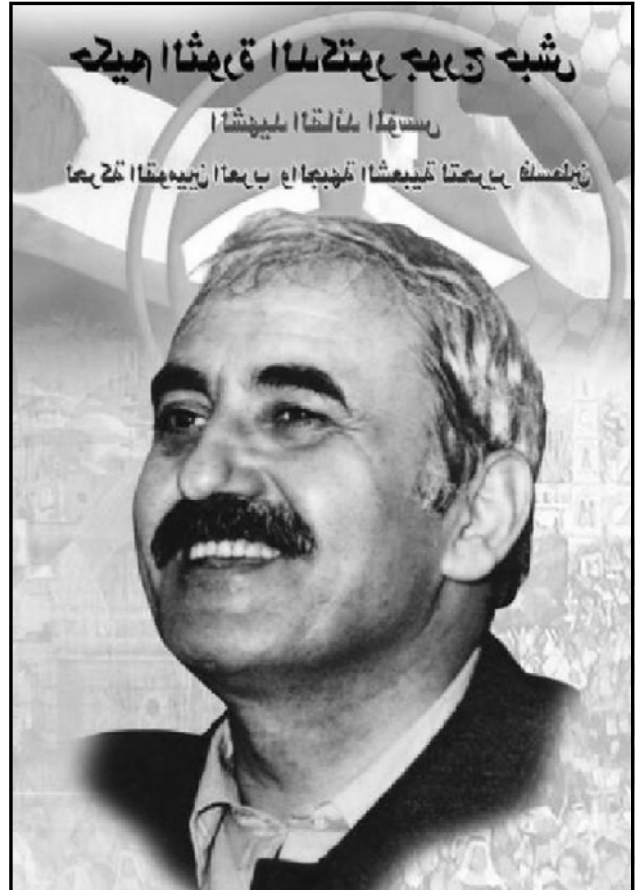
But it was when he founded the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a resistance movement advocating armed struggle, that the popular physician became a feared enemy of Israel and Arab governments.

His proclaimed aims of liberating Palestine and taking down Arab governments seen as "lackeys of imperialism" were also at the heart of both the Pan-Arab movement and leftist parties in the region.

The PFLP was able to weave ties with all leftist movements in the world, both political and armed, as it saw itself as part of a larger global struggle.

But it was not until the resounding defeat handed out by Israel to the Arabs in 1967 that Habash and his comrades turn from political activism to armed struggle.

The PFLP's actions, especially the hijackings of airliners, prompted the Jordanian govern-



ment to place a price on his head. The once compassionate doctor soon found himself on the wanted lists of many Arab and Western governments.

The PFLP gradually changed its tactics, finally dropping attacks against Western countries and target, but did not renounce armed struggle against Israel. It gained more strength and popularity after the PLO was forced to move to Lebanon from Jordan in 1970.

### Principled defiance

In the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, Habash emerged as the main political opponent of Yasser Arafat, the PLO leader. However, the two men never severed ties and continued a complex relationship of camaraderie and rivalry until the end. It was during those years, that Habash came to be seen by many Arabs as a symbol of principled defiance.

He rejected the idea of a two-state solution - the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel that was beginning to become part of the discourse that Arafat and other PLO groups were advocating.

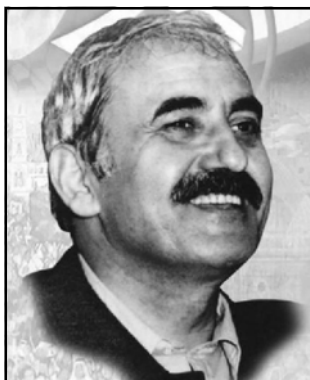
Habash's position was described variously as pure "idealism". But the idea of refusing to renounce the people's right to historic Palestine caught Palestinian and Arab imagination.

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# REMEMBERING GEORGE HABASH

## THE BEARER OF THE DREAM



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When Habash spoke, people listened. Not only did he speak from the heart but it also carried weight as the PFLP rose in strength to challenge the dominant Fatah movement within the

PLO.

Tall and handsome, Habash exuded a certain charisma that disarmed his distracters who admired his persistence but criticised what they saw as rigidity. A stroke that partially paralysed half of his body changed his appearance later but did not affect his ardour for the cause.

### Meeting Habash

It was that Habash that I saw and met for the first time in Tunis in 1983.

The PLO was expelled from Beirut too and most its leaders moved to this northern Mediterranean capital of Tunisia. Habash moved to Damascus, Syria instead.

On that day the PLO was holding a meeting. Most of the leaders had arrived and then there was a stir and silence. Habash entered slowly on crutches, hampered and subdued by his physical disability.

The hall, filled with hardened fighters, stood on their feet while Arafat hugged Habash and escorted him to his seat. When it was time for Habash to speak, his soft voice carried the warning that the military defeat in Lebanon should not be allowed to become a political defeat.

The PLO, feeling isolated after its loss of its last sanctuary in Lebanon, was pondering ways

in which to become an indispensable party in what appeared then as

an inevitable path to Arab negotiations with Israel.

Arafat's main argument was that unless the Palestinians made themselves a party in future negotiations, the two prevailing super powers, the US and the Soviet Union, would push for a historic deal without their representation or consent.

Many agreed with what was seen as Arafat's realism. Habash, while not doubting Arafat's commitment, was sceptical. His speech, though halting, was forceful in its message.

### Price of inclusion

His words resonated in the hall and beyond. People rose to their feet. Habash expressed their dream, but the majority that day voted for what they saw as a new "era of pragmatism" that required new strategy.

The PLO leaders, however, vowed that diplomacy would not preclude armed struggle against Israel

Habash did not relent. He remained a critical and foreboding voice, eventually opposing the 1993 Oslo accords between the PLO and Israel.

When in 1988 the Palestine National Council (PNC), the Palestinian parliament in exile, endorsed the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, Habash did not join the celebration.

A PLO leader, jubilant at the time about what he believed was a historic step towards independence, later told me that the pain that he saw in Habash's eyes reflected a lingering pain in his own heart. The leader, who became one of the fiercest advocates of the Oslo negotiating process with Israel, like Habash himself, was from a family expelled from their home in Palestine in 1948.

Over the years I saw and interviewed Habash in Algeria, Syria and Jordan: He repeatedly said that no Palestinian leader had the right to

kill the hope of the coming generations to realise the dream.

The Oslo accord and especially the events that followed only served to reinforce Habash's belief that Palestinians were being led to submission. But he was not a man who found satisfaction from "proving his point". He watched his people pursue an illusive peace with Israel with growing sadness.

### Distressed

He would get so distressed during conversations discussing the events in Palestine and most recently in Iraq, that his wife, and closest friend Hilda, would interfere to stop it.

When Israel besieged Arafat in 2002 in his compound in Ramallah, Habash stood by his rival. When Arafat died, amid Palestinian suspicion that Israel may have been involved, Habash deeply mourned him.

The few times I was able to see him over the last three years, he never stopped monitoring and learning every detail about Palestinian life. His physical ailment deepened the sense of soulful pain he internalized.

Those who were with him during his last days recall how disturbed he was by the rift between Fatah and Hamas. He opposed the strategy of Mahmoud Abbas, the current Palestinian president, of accommodating US and Israeli demands but did not endorse Hamas's military take over of Gaza.

His main concern was the damage brought upon the Palestinians by the most serious internal rift in their history.

Habash, as a political leader, will likely be subjected to the scrutiny of historians. His achievements and failures would be judged kindly and harshly as generations of Palestinian re-evaluate their past.

But as Palestinians bid farewell to Habash, affectionately called Al Hakeem (Arabic for doctor and alternatively, wise man), he will always be remembered as a man who embodied Palestinian and Arab aspirations.

## PFLP calls on Hamas, Fatah to start dialogue

### Special Xinhua report: Palestine-Israel Relations

GAZA, Feb. 24 (Xinhua) -- The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) on Sunday called on Hamas and Fatah movements to end their differences and start national dialogue. "They must return to the table of national dialogue to restore our cause's international dignity," the PFLP said in a statement faxed to the press.

"Both movements are asked to stop exchanging incitement and the poisoned media campaigns which contribute to widening the splitting," the statement added.

In June last year, Hamas ousted President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah movement and violently seized power of Gaza Strip. Abbas fired the Hamas-led government and formed a Western-backed administration ruling from West Bank.

The PFLP blamed the two sides on the political gap between the Hamas-ruled Gaza and the Fatah-dominated West Bank. The leftist faction called on Hamas "to step back from the military settlements that carried out in June to pave the way for good atmosphere."

Hamas says there are no talks with Fatah these days because Abbas insists the Islamic movement end its control on the strip before any dialogue starts.



# REMEMBERING GEORGE HABASH

EXCERPTS OF HABASH'S SPEECH AT  
PFLP CONGRESS JUNE 2000

Comrades! What I have lived through over the course of these militant decades, and the rich experience I have acquired is not a matter to be taken for granted. It is your right, and the right of coming generations to review the content and lessons of this experience with all of its many successes and failures. We cannot seize the future without having read our history well, not in order to be enslaved by that history, but in order to benefit from it as a necessary precondition for dealing with the future. The present is a qualitative extension of the past, while at the same time, it constitutes the material and intellectual foundation for the building of the future.

...

A basic question that continues to beat upon the wall of our reality, that comes from our past to reach our present and travel into our future is: "Why have we been defeated -- as a Front, as a liberation movement, as Arab states, and as the Arab Nation as a whole -- in spite of our sacrifice, our pain, and our suffering?" Although this is an important question, for it means a readiness to look critically at ourselves and re-read our history; it will only take us half way. Preparing to respond to the question is what will pave the rest of the way.

Let no one imagine that this is an easy, mechanical matter. It is a matter with complex and dialectic dimensions surrounded on all sides by difficulties and dangers. In itself, the question opens up the spheres of politics, the economy, and the organization, just as it opens these spheres in turn to their relationship with the overall social movement. It comes back to address the dialectic of thought, vision, and practice.

...

On the Subject of Women. The Palestinian woman, throughout the course of the long struggle, has played a pioneering and enlightening role. She has been mother, sister, wife, and comrade. She has carried weapons and fought. On many occasions she has been a model, more than the men. I am reminded now of the image of the Palestinian woman during the heroic Palestinian Intifada in the occupied homeland. The Intifada released the creativity of the woman and her hidden and repressed energies. She has an enormous strength that rises from the field of battle to take shape in epic examples of resistance, steadfastness, production, patient perseverance, giftedness, and martyrdom.

Now, in spite of that, the Palestinian woman is subjected to all sorts of oppression -- Palestinian and Arab oppression, class oppression, and male social oppression. What have we done in defense of the cause of the woman, her rights and freedom? On the theoretical level we have said much. But in practice there was a yawning gap in general between what we said and our

our midst.

The liberation of women and the release of their energy is basically a socio-economic, historical matter. Things like this don't happen just because we preach them. It is, in a reality, a matter of struggle to the end. Although it is linked with social structure and the development of productive labor, what have we, who call ourselves the progressive and leftist vanguards, done? Have we been able to present a higher example in our daily social practice? Have we succeeded in freeing ourselves from our role of masters over women? How can we attain real progress and approach the attainment of our national goals while we enslave and ignore the energies of half of our people? I don't want to review here the experience of other peoples and revolutions that have been victorious. Suffice it to remember the pioneering experience of Cuba in this area. This is a broad subject and a complex challenge. Indeed, it constitutes a criterion of the credibility of our program and our social vision. Any failure here shows that there is a structural failure and crisis in our vision and institution.

On the Subject of Youth. Youth are the generation of the future, the generation of victory. As statistics demonstrate, more than half of our society consists of young people. How we deal with youth is an indication of how serious we are about the future. It has the potential to be an expression of our continuity and development, or of our stagnation and annihilation. The subject of youth is also a great challenge lying before us. Young people are the leaven and energy of our society, who are characterized by their vitality and zeal. Let us remember the following examples:

- The role of the young generation, in fact of children, during the Intifada.
- The role of the student movement (the General Union of Palestine Students) and the student movement in the occupied homeland. It was consistently a factor heating up and enflaming the confrontation.
- The role of student and youth movements in the 1960s in Europe, which changed the face of the movement of societies at that time.

Young people, therefore, constitute another field where our program, institutions, and practices are to be tested. Will we be able to meet the needs of this vital group?

...

Now, as I come to the end of my speech, I would like to remember the martyrs of the Front, the martyrs of Palestine, and of the Arab Nation. I remember Wadi' Haddad, Ghassan Kanafani, the Guevara of Gaza, Shadia Abu Ghazzala, and Abu Jihad Khalil al-Wazir. I remember each of the martyrs, one by one, and without exception -- those martyrs to whom we are indebted, for whom we must continue the struggle, holding fast to the dream and holding fast to hope, and protecting

actual practice. All of us have heard or know of unfortunate stories about our treatment of the women in

the rights of the people for whom they shed their blood. Their children and their families have a right to be honored and cared for. This is the least we can do for those blazing stars in the skies of our homeland.

...

As a last word, I feel it necessary to say that I know well that the goals for which I worked and struggled have not yet been attained. And I cannot say how or when they will be attained. But on the other hand, I know in light of my study of the march of history in general, and of Arab and Palestinian history in particular, that they will be attained. In spite of this bitter truth, I leave my task as General Secretary of the Front with a contented mind and conscience. My conscience is content because I did my duty and worked with the greatest possible effort and with complete and deep sincerity. My mind is content because throughout my working years, I continually based myself on the practice of self-criticism. It is important to say also that I will pay close attention to all your observations and assessments of the course taken by the Popular Front while I was its General Secretary. I must emphasize that with the same close attention, if not with greater attention, I will follow and take to heart the observations and assessments of the Palestinian and Arab people on this course and my role in it.

My aim in this closing speech has been to say to you -- and not only to you, but to all the detainees, or those who experienced detention, to the families of the martyrs, to the children of the martyrs, to those who were wounded, to all who sacrificed and gave for the cause - that your sacrifice has not been in vain. The just goals and legitimate rights which they have struggled and given their lives for will be attained, sooner or later. I say again that I don't know when, but they will be attained. And my aim, again and again, is to emphasize the need for you to persist in the struggle to serve our people, for the good of all Palestinians and Arabs -- the good that lies in a just and legitimate cause, as it does in the realization of the good for all those who are oppressed and wronged. You must always be of calm mind, and of contented conscience, with a strong resolve and a steel will, for you have been and still are in the camp of justice and progress, the camp whose just goals will be attained and which will inevitably attain its legitimate rights. For these are the lessons of history and reality, and no right is lost as long as there is someone fighting for it.



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