

HAMAS AND THE UNITED STATES: CONFLICTING VISIONS AND
POLICIES IN PALESTINE FROM 1987 TO 2020

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POLICIES IN PALESTINE FROM 1987 TO 2020**

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ABSTRACT

HAMAS AND THE UNITED STATES: CONFLICTING VISIONS AND POLICIES IN PALESTINE FROM 1987 TO 2020

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As the First Intifada broke out in 1987, Hamas and the US appeared as two powerful actors in the Palestinian politics, while the former emerged domestically in opposition to the PLO the latter reasserted itself forcefully as an external power. This thesis aims to explore the question of how the interaction between these two distinct actors with very different objectives and methods have shaped the Palestinian politics. In so doing this thesis examines the conflicting visions and policies of Hamas and the United States regarding Palestine during the period stretching from 1987 to 2020 adopting a chronological narration and uncover the outcomes of this conflict for the Palestinian politics. The thesis argues that, in this period of thirty-three years, Hamas has largely followed a radical, militant and Islamist agenda but also proved many times to be a flexible and pragmatic movement in both its aims and methods, while the US acted as a peace broker between the parties claiming to be impartial, however, in critical junctures it seemed to have sided with Israel. The thesis also demonstrates that this sharp conflict between the visions and policies of Hamas and the US has influenced some developments in the Palestinian politics such as the signing of the Oslo Accords, the violence in the mid-1990s, Hamas' electoral victory in 2006, the division of power

in the Palestinian politics, the failure of the reconciliation attempts between Fatah and Hamas, and the destruction of Gaza by Israel's operations.

Key Words: Hamas, the United States, Palestine, Israel

ÖZ

HAMAS VE AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİ: 1987'DEN 2020'YE FİLİSTİN'DE ÇATIŞAN VİZYON VE POLİTİKALAR

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1987'de Birinci İntifada'nın başlamasıyla, Hamas ve ABD Filistin siyasetinde iki güçlü aktör olarak öne çıkmıştır. Hamas, Filistin Kurtuluş Örgütü'ne muhalif yerli bir hareket olarak ortaya çıkarken, ABD ise bir dış güç olarak Filistin siyasetinde varlığını daha güçlü bir şekilde hissettirmeye başlamıştır. Bu tez, birbirinden çok farklı amaç ve yöntemlere sahip bu iki aktör arasındaki etkileşimin Filistin siyasetini nasıl şekillendirdiği sorusuna yanıt aramaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, tez Hamas ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin 1987'den 2020'ye kadar uzanan dönemde Filistin'e dair çatışan vizyon ve politikalarını tarihsel bir anlatımla incelemeyi ve bu çatışmanın Filistin siyaseti için doğurduğu sonuçları incelemektedir. Tez, bu otuz üç yıllık süre boyunca, Hamas'ın genel olarak radikal, militan ve İslamcı bir siyaset izlemekle birlikte amaç ve yöntem bakımından aslında oldukça pragmatik ve esnek bir hareket olduğunu, ABD'nin ise İsrail ve Filistinliler arasında tarafsız olma iddiasındaki bir barış arabulucusu rolü oynamaya çalıştığı halde, kritik dönemeçlerde İsrail'in tarafında yer aldığını savunmaktadır. Tez ayrıca Hamas ve ABD'nin vizyon ve politikalarındaki bu sert çatışmanın; Oslo sürecinin başlaması, 1990'ların ortasında yaşanan şiddet olayları, Hamas'ın 2006'daki seçim zaferi, Filistin siyasetindeki bölünme, El Fetih ile Hamas arasındaki uzlaşma girişimlerinin şu ana dek başarıya

ulařamaması ve Gazze'nin İsrail operasyonlarıyla yıkıma uğratılması gibi olayların meydana gelmesinde etkili olduğunu ileri sürmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Hamas, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri, Filistin, İsrail

For my caressing and self-sacrificing mother...

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

API	Arab Peace Initiative
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DOP	Declaration of Principles
EU	European Union
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IHH	İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri İnsani Yardım Vakfı
MB	Muslim Brotherhood
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PFA	Palestinian Forces Alliance
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PMB	Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PNC	Palestinian National Council
PPF	Palestinian Police Force
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNLU	United National Leadership of the Uprising
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WMD	Weapon of Mass Destruction

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Historical and Regional Context of Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

The historical Palestine region is located in the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea and comprises today's Gaza Strip, West Bank and Israel. Starting from the first quarter of the sixteenth century, this region was ruled by the Ottoman Turks for almost four hundred years. Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War by the Allied powers, Palestine fell under the control of the United Kingdom. The UK officially began to administrate the region in the name of the League of Nations in 1922 under the name of the British Mandate for Palestine. The UK had made promises to both the Jews and the Arabs regarding a statehood in these territories to gain their support during the First World War. In 1917, Arthur Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, had written to the Lord Walter Rothschild, one of the important figures of the Zionist movement, that the UK would support the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine. At the same time, the British had promised the Arabs that it would grant them an independent Arab state in the Middle East including Palestine if the Arabs supported the British against the Turks. As a result, after the Mandate was established, the conflicts between the Arabs and the Jews began to take place as both claimed right to control over the region. The violence escalated as the number of the Jewish immigrants increased over the years (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 766-769). Between 1936 and 1939, the Arabs revolted against the British mandate, as they demanded independence and feared an independent Jewish state in Palestine (Britannica, February 2020). However, the rebellion was suppressed. Moreover, the Holocaust during the Second World War made the Jews more impatient for the

creation of a Jewish state in Palestine and legitimized the demands of the Zionists in the sight of the international community. In 1947, the UN Partition Plan proposed a two-state solution one for the Arabs with forty-three percent of land in the mandate and the other one for the Jews with fifty-six percent of the land. Jerusalem would be an international city. The Jews accepted the plan but the Arabs rejected it as they thought the plan was unjust because, as the people who were living there for thousands of years, they thought they were in a higher position than the Jewish immigrants. Nevertheless, in May 1948, the British Mandate for Palestine ceased to exist and the State of Israel was established (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 769-770).

Following the announcement of the independence of Israel, a coalition of the neighboring Arab states, namely Iraq, Syria, Egypt and Lebanon declared war on the nascent State of Israel. Saudi Arabia also supported the Arab coalition militarily. However, Israel managed to defeat the Arab coalition in almost nine months and obtained the control of the territories in whole Palestine except the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, which is known as the pre-1967 borders in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Office of the Historian, n.d.). Besides, in two years following the victory of Israel, at least 750.000 Palestinians out of 1.9 million left their homes and became refugees in neighboring Arab countries, which is the starting point of the refugee problem between Israel and the Palestinians. May 15, the day the deportations started, is commemorated every year as the day of *nakba* (catastrophe) by the Palestinians (Al Jazeera, May 2017). On the other hand, after the war, Egypt took the control of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank fell under the Jordanian administration.

In 1956, as Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser sought to nationalize the British-controlled Suez Canal, a military conflict broke out between Egypt and a coalition of the UK, France and Israel; which is the second Arab-Israeli War. Though Egypt lost the war in military terms, Nasser succeeded in nationalizing the Suez Canal. On the other hand, in the late 1950s, the Palestinian diaspora established a resistance organization named Fatah (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 357-358). The word *Fatah* means “conquest” or “opening” in Arabic and is also the acronym for *Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini* (Palestine National Liberation Movement) (Britannica,

November 2019). It was both a political party with Arab nationalist and socialist worldview and an armed organization carrying out assaults against Israel. The aim of Fatah was the liberation of Palestine from Israel and Palestinian independence. Its founders were Yasser Arafat, Salah Khalaf, Khalil al-Wazir and Khalid Hassan (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 357-358). In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization was founded by the Arab League and Egypt with the aim of the liberating Palestine, condemning “Zionist imperialism” and dissolving of Israel through use of armed force. It was an umbrella organization that included many Palestinian organizations struggling for the liberation of Palestine, but the leadership was undertaken by Fatah. Yasser Arafat, the leader of Fatah, became president of the PLO in the following years (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 781-784). The PLO was first based in Jordan until 1971, then in Lebanon until 1982 and finally in Tunisia until 1994 when its leaders returned to the West Bank (History, August 2018). For approximately twenty-five years from its foundation, the PLO carried out a military struggle against Israel and dominated the Palestinian politics as the sole leader of the Palestinian cause. Both Israel and the US designated the PLO as a terrorist organization until the peace process that began in the early 1990s.

In 1967, another war broke out between Israel and the Arab states as another chain of the long-term tension. In this war, which is known as the Six-Day War, Israel once again managed to defeat all of its enemies and quadrupled the territories it seized. It obtained the control of the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the Golan Heights from Syria. Thus, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Six-Day War brought the term “occupied territories” on the table referring to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. While Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in 1978, the other areas have been under Israeli occupation since then. In 1973, the fourth and final war between Israel and the Arab states, the Yom Kippur War, took place. The reason for the war was the desire of the Arab states to take back the territories that they had lost in 1967. However, they were unable to defeat Israel and retrieve their territories, though they did not suffer from a heavy loss either. In the following years, the occupation of the Palestinian territories persisted and the military conflicts between the PLO and Israel continued. Especially, during the

Lebanese Civil War fought between 1975 and 1990, the conflicts became more intense. The headquarters of the PLO was, then, located in Lebanon. Thus, to obliterate the PLO and punish Lebanon for its support to the PLO, Israel occupied southern Lebanon in 1982 (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 203). While the PLO headquarters was moved to Tunisia after the Israeli occupation, it took eighteen years for Israel to retreat from southern Lebanon. In rest of the 1980s, the PLO increased use of diplomacy at the expense of armed struggle and the moderated its stance towards a two-state solution (Gunning, 2007: p. 33). Meanwhile, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood was about to show up as a radical and Islamist actor in the Palestinian politics and would turn into Hamas in 1987.

The US, on the other hand, had always been an important ally of Israel for decades and designated the PLO as a terrorist organization. It acted as a mediator between Israel and the Arab states in the context of the broader Arab-Israeli conflict. For instance, after the Six-Day War of 1967, it attempted to mediate the conflict together with the UK, France, Russia, and the United Nations. Similarly, after the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the US acted as an important intermediary between Israel and the Arab states. In 1978, US President Jimmy Carter hosted the Camp David peace talks between Israel and Egypt, where the parties formally recognized each other and Israel agreed to retreat from the Sinai Peninsula. The Camp David Summit also paved the way for talks involving Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians for a Palestinian self-rule in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, starting from the late 1980s, the US began to make its presence felt in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict much more intensely. With the outbreak of the First Intifada, the US thought that a peace deal would be beneficial for American and Israeli interests and increased its involvement in the Palestinian politics (Council on Foreign Relations, November 2020).

1.2. Research Question and Arguments

As the First Intifada started in 1987, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict took on a new dimension with the emergence of Hamas as a domestic resistance movement and increased involvement of the US in the Palestinian politics as an external power. While

the US began to increase its interest in the conflict aiming to stop violence, reach a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians and promote democracy in the Palestinian politics, on the other hand, Islamist Hamas was founded as an armed organization in order to resist the Israeli occupation and set up an Islamic Palestinian state in the region of historical Palestine. That is to say, in that period, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict witnessed the growing involvement of two actors with fundamental differences in their aims and methods to solve the conflict. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the issue through the prism of the conflicting visions and policies of Hamas and the US regarding Palestine and the outcomes of this conflict in order to analyze soundly the developments which have taken place in the Palestinian politics since the beginning of the First Intifada. In accordance with this purpose, this thesis tries to find an answer to the question “ What are the conflicting visions and policies of Hamas and the US regarding Palestine and in what ways have they affected the Palestinian politics since 1987?”.

As an answer to the first part of the research question, the thesis argues that Hamas has always been an Islamist, militant and anti-Israeli movement but also pragmatic and flexible one in both its objectives and methods, while the US played the role of a nominally impartial peace broker in the Palestinian politics, however, in fact, with a strong pro-Israeli bias in almost all issues since 1987. As an answer to the second part of the research question, the thesis argues that, as both Hamas and the US have increased their power and influence in the Palestinian politics over time, their conflicting visions and policies have encountered many times in this period of thirty-three years, each time producing serious outcomes for the region. The fundamental differences between Islamist and radical Hamas and the pro-Israeli peace broker, the US, in their approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have had an impact on the occurrences of important developments such as the signing of the Oslo Accords, the Hamas violence in the mid-1990s, Hamas’ electoral victory, destruction of Gaza by major Israeli operations and the failure of the reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas.

1.3. Methodology and Scope

Hamas is a domestic non-state actor within the Palestinian politics that defines itself as a resistance movement and resorts to violence to reach its aims, which leads some states such as Israel, the US and Japan to designate it as a terrorist organization (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). On the other hand, the US is an external superpower with an increasing power and influence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the last decades. This thesis is a qualitative research describing the conflicting visions and policies of these two different entities, Hamas and the US, regarding the Palestinian politics and the outcomes of this conflict from 1987 to 2020 using a chronological narration.

In the making of the thesis, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. In the researches regarding Hamas, mostly secondary sources were used, especially the books and articles of Beverley-Milton Edwards, Tareq Baconi, Jeroen Gunning and Khaled Hroub, as well as many others. However, primary sources were also consulted such as online news outlets such as BBC News, Al Jazeera, Reuters and CNN International. Through these primary and secondary sources; the aims, methods and organizational structure of Hamas, the speeches of Hamas leaders, the writings on Hamas' publications, the bombing and rockets attacks perpetrated by Hamas, Hamas' attitude towards the US and many other policies of Hamas were explored. Concerning the researches regarding the US' policies, primary sources were significantly utilized such as US congressional resolutions from both the Senate and the House of Representatives, the speeches and press briefings in the online archives of the White House and the US Department of State, and many online newspaper articles like those on the websites mentioned above; as well as secondary sources such as the books of William B. Quandt, Daniel Kurtzer and Charles D. Smith. Through these sources; the US-led peace initiatives, the statements of the US officials on Hamas and the Palestinian politics, congressional resolutions, US policies and sanctions towards Hamas, and other actions and policies of the US regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts were explored from 1987 to 2020. Thus, the visions and policies of Hamas and the US are investigated as well as the outcomes of these conflicting policies and visions.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter is the introductory one where the historical and regional context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is explored, the research question and the main argument of the thesis is specified, thus, the need for this study is justified, the methodology used in the making of the thesis is explained and the structure of the thesis is outlined.

The second chapter is a brief summary about Hamas. It is not included in the chronological narrative between 1987 and 2020 and only provides a general insight about Hamas. The first section of this chapter covers Hamas' historical roots in the PMB and its transformation into an armed organization. The second section is about the major characteristics of Hamas and gives information about its founding fathers, organizational structure, ideology and cause, and the methods it uses to achieve its objectives. The final section describes the place of Hamas in regional and international context, and discusses its international relations.

The third chapter scrutinizes the policies of Hamas and the US covering the period between 1987 and 2000. In the first section, the years between 1987 and 1993, namely, the period of First Intifada, is examined. After a brief information about the outbreak and unfolding of the Intifada, the policies of Hamas and the US in the early years of the Intifada is explored. Then, Hamas' militarization process and Yitzhak Shamir's peace plan is discussed. Finally, the Madrid Process is covered with an emphasis on Hamas and US policies. The second section covers the years between 1993 and 2000, namely, the Oslo process. This section describes the Hamas and US policies during the signing and implementation of the Oslo I Accord, the Cairo Agreement and the Oslo II Accord. Then, the final years and the collapse of the Oslo process is examined.

The fourth chapter describes the Hamas and US policies in the years between 2000 and 2007. The first section covers the period of Second Intifada between 2000 and 2005. In this section, the outbreak and progress of the Second Intifada, 9/11 attacks and post 9/11 policies, the Road Map peace initiative of the US and assassination of

Hamas leaders are examined through the eyes of Hamas and the US. The second section is about the local and legislative elections in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Hamas' success in these elections, the reaction of the US to the electoral victories of Hamas, and the division between Hamas and Fatah in 2007 are explored in this section.

The fifth chapter encompasses the period between 2007 and 2020, focusing on the Hamas and US policies regarding the reconciliation attempts between Hamas and Fatah, three major Israeli operations into the Gaza Strip and the US-sponsored peace plans. The first section is about the initial policies following Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip and first attempts for reconciliation and Operation Cast Lead of 2008-2009. The second section covers the continuing efforts and some agreements signed for reconciliation, as well as Obama's early years in office. The third section includes Operation Pillar of Defense of 2012, John Kerry's peace initiative, the formation and dissolution of the Palestinian unity government in 2014 and Operation Protective Edge of 2014. The final section in this chapter explores the recent years focusing on the Trump policies and his peace plan expounded in 2020, as well as touching upon the signing and failure of the agreement between Fatah-Hamas in 2017.

Finally, the sixth chapter is the conclusion where the findings of the research are briefly resubmitted and analyzed, and the arguments of the thesis, which are occasionally mentioned in the course of the thesis, are put together and reasserted as answers to the research question.

CHAPTER 2

HAMAS: ITS FOUNDATION, IDEOLOGY, OBJECTIVES AND METHODS

2.1. Foundation of Hamas

2.1.1. Earlier Roots of Hamas

The roots of Hamas date back to mid-20th century. The Muslim Brotherhood, the biggest Islamist organization in the world which was founded in 1928, opened up its Palestinian branch in Jerusalem in 1946. The aim of the Muslim Brotherhood was to establish Islamic states in the Muslim World through Islamization of society, and the nascent PMB did not deviate from this overall objective of the Brotherhood (Hroub, 2006: p. 7-11). The PMB grew quickly, it had thirty-eight branches and over ten thousand members by 1947 in Palestine. The members of the PMB also participated in the 1948 War against Israel even though they were not very effective for being inexperienced and unconsolidated (Hroub, 2002: p. 18).

After the 1948 War, the PMB avoided carrying out a violent resistance for the liberation of Palestine for decades (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 16). That was mainly because of their strategy of focusing on raising new generations who are smart, educated and knowledgeable, especially in the field of Islam. They view was that uneducated and weak Muslims could serve neither Islam nor Palestine, so they adopted a patient, non-violent and even non-political method (Hroub, 2006: p. 14-16). This effort for spreading and strengthening Islam among people and reshaping the society around Islamic values through various activities is called *dawa* (cause) and what the PMB engaged in was mostly *dawa* in these years (Levitt, 2006: p. 16-17). The political

conditions in the region were also not conducive for PMB to take up arms for the Palestinian liberation. Following the 1948 War, the West Bank was annexed by Jordan and the Gaza Strip was controlled by Egypt. The PMB in the West Bank carried out political activities as a political party running in parliamentary elections during the 1950s and the 1960s, but they were also in alliance with Jordanian regime against pan-Arabism which was the predominant ideology in the region in that period (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 16-17). On the other hand, the PMB in the Gaza Strip was initially more free in their activities and more militant for liberation. However, it was forced to turn into a clandestine organization as Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser outlawed the MB in Egypt in 1954 and launched a crackdown on the organization after an attempted assassination (Hroub, 2002: p. 23; Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 17). The situation remained in this way until the 1967 Arab-Israeli war when, with the defeat and further occupation of the Palestinian lands Arab nationalism was largely discredited.

After the Six-Day War in 1967, there were opportunities which led the PMB to rise. For instance, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were occupied by Israel that initially introduced a more relaxed environment for sociocultural activities which presented an opportunity for the PMB (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 18). Likud administration's support for a traditionalist Islamic movement among Palestinians as an antidote to the passionate national liberation view of the PLO was another factor that helped the growth of the PMB (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 104).

On the other hand, Islamism was rising in the world and secular Arab nationalism was in decline. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the Islamic resistance against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the same year fueled the Islamist sentiments in the region and among Palestinians (Gunning, 2007: p. 32). Moreover, after the death of Nasser in 1970, the imprisoned MB members in Egypt were released. Hence, the PMB gained new members and leaders who strengthened the organization (Tamimi, 2011: p. 14). Finally, the PLO, despite its dominance of the Palestinian politics for years, was going through a decline, which was accelerated after the Camp David Accords of 1978-79. The PLO's shift to adopt diplomacy as a means to achieve its goals and its increasingly positive view of a two-state solution to the Palestinian question created a resentment

towards it among the Palestinians (Gunning, 2007: p. 33). Then, the PLO's defeat in Lebanon in 1982 caused a frustration and led to internal disputes within the PLO as to its ideological and organizational bases, which further weakened its position among the Palestinians (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 14-15).

In all these years, the PMB intensified its activities in the way of *dawa* by educating people and raising new generations for Islam. In 1967, they founded *al-Jam'iyah al-Islamiyah* (The Islamic Society) to carry out religious, social and recreational education. In 1976, *al-Mujamma' al-Islami* (The Islamic Center) was also founded in Gaza in order to provide medical, educational and social services. The scope of *Mujamma* was very broad and it had an enormous network of mosques, nurseries, medical centers and schools. The PMB even founded the first university in Gaza which is called the Islamic University (Tamimi, 2011: p. 36-39). However, the PMB was still out of the resistance in the 1970s only providing social services. Yet, the radicalization of the movement would arrive in the 1980s.

2.1.2. Causes of Radicalization

The transformation of moderate PMB to radical Hamas in the 1980s was facilitated by several reasons. First, in Israel, the right-wing party Likud was founded and came to power for the first time in 1977. Though they gave a free hand to Islamists in their activities to some extent, the Likud administration carried out oppressive policies against the Palestinians especially after 1985 which is known as the "iron fist" policies of Yitzhak Rabin, the Minister of Defense (Rigby, 1991: p. 54). Extreme security measures, arbitrary arrests and detentions, mental and physical tortures in prisons, travel and working restrictions were among these policies. Likud also authorized the first Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip where the number of Israeli soldiers was also increased (Tamimi, 2011: p. 12-13). Moreover, Likud had increasing religious claims on both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the construction of the Jewish settlements was partly inspired by these claims (Gunning, 2007: p. 33). At the same time, Likud implemented heavy economic restrictions on Palestinians. As a result, serious economic problems emerged in the lives of the Palestinians such as poverty

and unemployment (Gunning, 2007: p. 34-35). These hardships imposed by the Likud administration led Palestinians to look for new tools to eliminate this oppression, facilitating the outbreak of the First Intifada which prompted the PMB to embark on an open armed struggle.

Second, in the early 1980s, another Islamist group was founded in the Gaza Strip: Islamic Jihad. This group was founded by former PMB members who were critical of the PMB's unwillingness to join the Palestinian resistance. Islamic Jihad was a militant organization and their priority was the liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation rather than Islamization of the society. They believed that waging jihad against the occupation was a religious obligation linking Islam to Palestinian national movement (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 117-119). That is to say, Islamic Jihad combined the Islamism of the MB and the Palestinian nationalism of the PLO, feeding its military resistance against Israel with an Islamic discourse (Hroub, 2006: p. 11). As a result, Islamic Jihad shook the position of the PMB as the center of Islamism in the Palestinian politics. Fearing that it could lose its standing and power in Palestinian cause and get marginalized, the PMB eventually decided to establish an armed organization and join the ranks of Palestinian resistance (Gunning, 2007: p. 36).

Third, the young Muslim generation that the PMB had been struggling to raise for years began to appear in the 1980s. Among these, there were a number of high school and university students who joined the PMB thanks to its student clubs and charitable societies, as well as their other social services (Hroub, 2002: p. 31). This new Islamist youth had a more nationalist and militant view of the Palestinian politics than the quiet and conservative previous generation and they began to dominate the PMB in the 1980s, working as an internal force which facilitated the radicalization of the organization and eventually the creation of Hamas (Gunning, 2007: p. 37).

2.1.3. Hamas Founded

The radicalization of the PMB was not a sudden decision but a process that developed gradually in the 1980s. The leaders of the PMB, triggered by the reasons explained

above, began to think of launching an armed resistance against Israeli occupation in the early 1980s. In 1983, a secret meeting was held in Amman in which the representatives of the PMB from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the US, many other neighboring Arab states and European countries participated. In this meeting, the representatives took the decision that the PMB would wage *jihad* against Israel and all possible logistic and financial support would be provided for this aim (Tamimi, 2011: p. 45). Thus, the ideological shift of the PMB from bare Islamism to a Palestinian nationalist and Islamist militancy was taking place, however, not making concessions from social change efforts. In 1985, the PMB called all of its members to participate in, organize demonstrations and confront the occupying forces. Following this call, mass demonstrations started to take place against Israel (Hroub, 2002: p. 35-36). In the same year, a body called *Jihaz Filastin* (The Palestinian Apparatus) (Tamimi, 2011: p. 49) was founded in order to secure the connection between the leading figures in Hamas in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip as well as other countries and to facilitate logistic, military and financial support for *jihad*. In the meantime, the PMB began to prepare for armed resistance by establishing a small and secret military organization to acquire arms (Hroub, 2002: p. 33), which started to stockpile arms and munitions in Gaza (Baconi, 2018: p. 19).

On December 8, 1987, the mass protests known as the First Intifada broke out as a result of a road accident where an Israeli truck killed four and wounded nine Palestinian workers. The following day, seven leading people from the PMB came together and decided that it was the right time to put their militant thoughts into practice determining the struggle against Israeli occupation as their number one priority. A declaration was written which called the Palestinian people to join the Intifada in order to reject the occupation and oppression with a special emphasis on martyrdom and sacrifice. In the following days, the declaration was distributed in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank (Hroub, 2002: p. 39-40). Although this declaration was not written under the name of Hamas and this name would formally come in 1988, it is accepted as the first declaration of Hamas (Abu-Amr, 1993: p. 10). Hence; Hamas, which means “zeal” in Arabic (Chehab, 2007: p. 34) as well as being the acronym for

Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (The Islamic Resistance Movement), was founded in December 1987, at the beginning of the First Intifada.

2.2. Major Characteristics of Hamas

2.2.1. Actors and Organization

Hamas was initially founded as a separate branch of the PMB. However, it has overshadowed its mother organization in time and became the center of Islamist activism in the following years by incorporating the institutions and the leading figures of the PMB (Gunning, 2007: p. 37). The seven members of the PMB who were present in the meeting on December 9, 1987 are accepted as the founding fathers of Hamas. The first of them was Sheikh Ahmed Yassin (Chehab, 2007: p. 34). Even though he had been quadriplegic for years due to a childhood accident and was nearly blind, Sheikh Yassin had a sound Islamic education and knowledge (BBC News, March 2004), as well as being a charismatic and ascetic man (Chehab, 2007: p. 34). Besides, he was the founder of *Mujamma* and already an important figure in the PMB by 1987. Thus, he became the spiritual leader and central figure of Hamas based in Gaza and stayed in that position until he was assassinated by Israel in 2004. The other six members are as follows: Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi (physician), Ibrahim al-Yazuri (pharmacist), Salah Shehade (university instructor), Issa al-Nashar (engineer), Muhammad Hassan Shama'a (teacher) and Abdul Fattah Dukhan (school principal) (Abu-Amr, 1993: p. 10).

Hamas, in the foundation phase, had a relatively simple organizational structure than it has now. It had wings restructured or newly founded. The political wing was the center headed mostly by the founding fathers such as Ismail Abu Shanab, Ibrahim al-Yazuri, Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi and Mahmoud Zahar (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 148). *Jihaz Filastin*, which had already existed, was managed by a group of three: Khaled Mashal, a student living in Kuwait; Musa Abu Marzuq, a PhD student in the US and Ibrahim Ghosheh, a refugee of Jerusalem living in Jordan (Baconi, 2018: p. 19). A military wing had already been established too, but it was restructured under the name

of *al-Mujahidun al-Filastiyun* (The Palestinian Mujahidin) and Salah Shehade was assigned by Sheikh Yassin as the head of this new military wing. It was the forerunner of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades that would arrive in the early 1990s. An intelligence wing named *Majd* (Glory) had also been founded before the Intifada. Sheikh Yassin had assigned Yahya al-Sinwar and Rawhi Mushtaha as the heads of *Majd* at that time (Tamimi, 2011: p. 50). A youth wing called *al-Ahdath* (The Events) was also newly founded to appeal the very young Palestinian men (Chehab, 2007: p. 30-31).

The mass arrests of Hamas leaders by Israel in 1989 led to a reorganization process within Hamas. After that, Hamas' organizational structure became a more hierarchical one. Besides, even though Sheikh Yassin's Gaza-based spiritual leadership of Hamas continued until his death in 2004, the power of the external leadership increased over the internal leadership. There are now two supreme organs of Hamas based outside the Palestinian territories. One of them is *Majlis Shura* (The Advisory Council) where the major policies of Hamas are supervised morally and religiously (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 161). It functions as the legislative power regarding general policies of Hamas, and has the final say in major issues. It also elects (or disbands if it wishes) the Political Bureau (Gunning, 2007: p. 99-100), the second supreme organ outside the occupied territories. The Political Bureau is the executive body of Hamas. It also carries out the international contacts of Hamas and finds economic funds from outside. Important figures of Hamas such as Musa Abu Marzuq and Khaled Mashal chaired the Bureau in different periods (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 161-163) and Ismail Haniyeh is the current leader. He is the exception for being the Gaza-based leader of the Bureau (Haaretz, December 2019) because the members of both of these supreme authorities have generally lived in the neighboring Arab states and Iran. Apart from outside leadership, Hamas also has inside leaderships in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank whose activities are supervised by the Bureau's local offices in these regions. The local bodies are dealing with everyday issues and more local problems within the occupied territories (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 161-163). Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi are among the former leaders of the Gaza Strip (Satloff, 2006: p. 5) while

Yahya al-Sinwar is now in charge in the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip (Britannica, February 2020).

One of the most important components of Hamas, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, was formed as the military wing of Hamas against the occupation in 1991 and Salah Shehade became its first leader. The Brigades was named after the Muslim cleric who was killed while fighting for the liberation of Palestine from the British and the Zionists in the 1930s. It is known that it is a disciplined and well-organized army but there are few information about the internal structure as the Brigades gives importance to secrecy and security (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 112-118). It also enjoys a degree of autonomy from political leadership in terms of operational and strategic affairs (Roy, 2011: p. 79). The current leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades is Mohammed Deif (ECFR, n.d.).

2.2.2. Ideology

Hamas issued its first charter in August 1988 where it declared its worldview, mission and strategy. In the Charter of 1988, it is stated that Hamas is a branch of the PMB consisting of Muslims who are loyal to Allah. According to the Charter, Islam is the core element of the system of thought of Hamas, being the source of its ideology, its worldview, its fundamental precepts and its value judgments. The mission of Hamas is specified as “raising the banner of Allah” throughout the Palestinian territories under which people from different religions can live in peace. Without Islam, the Charter states, what will take place is destruction, oppression, battles and wars (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 123-124).

The Charter of 1988 also clarifies the approach of Hamas to Palestine. In the Charter, Palestine is defined as “the heart of the earth”, “the meeting of the continents” and the “lure of the avaricious since the dawn of history” (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 133). The Hamas Charter asserts that the Palestinian cause is a religious cause. It is an Islamic *waqf* (trust) on all the Muslim generations until the Day of Resurrection as it was deemed so by 'Umar ibn al-Khatab, the caliph who conquered Palestine. As a result; no special

person, organization, state or statesman can sacrifice it, partially or completely. Moreover, Palestine is a sacred site of Islam where the Masjid al-Aqsa where Prophet Muhammad made a night journey (*'Isra*) and then ascended to heaven (*Mi'raj*) are located. Therefore, the Charter states that liberation of Palestine is mandatory for every Muslim, and Islam is the framework through which the Palestinian cause must be evaluated (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 125-127). To Hamas, the Palestinian cause consists of three circles as the Palestinian circle, the Arab circle and the Islamic circle; each of which is obliged to struggle for the liberation of Palestine (Tamimi, 2011: p. 278-279). These expressions indicate that the ideology of Hamas is not pure Islamism but a mixture of Palestinian nationalism and Islamism (Hroub, 2006: p. 27-28). For that reason, in the Charter, the PLO is praised as it struggles for the liberation of Palestine but it is also criticized for being secular (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 130-131).

Hamas' view of the State of Israel is one of its most important and controversial characteristics. In many parts of the Charter of 1988, the state of Israel is associated with Zionism and it is stated that the Palestinian territories are under Zionist occupation. The Charter claims that, by referring to Israel, "the nation of evil" was established and all the Arab and Muslim countries, as well as Palestinians, must struggle against this Zionist enemy. The goal of Hamas is determined as to conquer and annihilate this nation of evil, so that the truth will be prevailed and the Islamic State can be founded (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 124-126). This means that, according to the Charter of 1988, Hamas does not recognize Israel and aims to eradicate it, and the ultimate aim of Hamas is to establish an Islamic State on the territories including the Gaza Strip, the state of Israel and the West Bank. Additionally, the Charter has a harsh tone against the religion of Judaism and the Jews as well as Zionism and Israel. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is evaluated as an interfaith conflict between Islam and Judaism. Moreover, in many parts of the Charter, expressions like "the Jewish occupation of Palestine" or "the Nazism of Jews" are visible. In the Charter, the Jews are also accused of being behind many of the wars and revolutions in history thanks to their wealth and worldwide organizations established for controlling the world (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 128-129).

Hamas is not friendly to the Western world either. Hamas' view of the West as a civilization is the same as the MB: appreciating the scientific and administrative developments in the West, but denouncing their secular way of life and values. In the political sphere, Hamas criticizes the West for its supportive role in both the creation period of Israel and the later periods, as Israel has acquired economic, technologic and military advantages thanks to this support (Hroub, 2006: p. 105). In its communiqués, Hamas calls the West as imperialist powers and denounces it for collaborating with the Zionists for mutual gains in order to weaken Muslims politically and economically (Hroub, 2002: p. 46). Likewise, the lack of any Western pressure on Israel to comply with the UN resolutions regarding Palestine is another source of resentment for Hamas. Nevertheless, Hamas has a pragmatic policy of not enhancing the line of combat. For that reason, Hamas does not regard the West as an enemy. In its statements and declarations, Hamas points out that its struggle is confined to Palestine and it regards Israel as its only enemy (Hroub, 2006: p. 106-109). In the official website of Hamas, in response to a question regarding Hamas' position towards the US, the US is harshly criticized for its longstanding support to Israel. However, it is also underlined that the occupying state of Israel is the only enemy and Hamas is willing to build "constructive relations with all countries and entities based on mutual respect and interest" (Hamas Islamic Resistance, n.d.). Likewise, in response to a question about the EU, Hamas states that the EU should play a bigger role to end the occupation by sanctioning and boycotting Israel. Nevertheless, Hamas also expresses its eagerness for "open and positive relations with the EU and the EU member states in reaching peace and stability in the region" (Hamas Islamic Resistance, n.d.).

In the following decades; the policies, written declarations and verbal statements of Hamas performed important deviations from the Charter of 1988, which is a proof that Hamas is a flexible and pragmatic organization (Kear, 2019: p. 58-59). Khaled Mashal stated in the early 2000s that the Charter was just a historical document providing insights about the philosophy of Hamas in the foundation period and it did not reflect the overall vision of Hamas. Likewise, Ibrahim Ghosheh once said that the Charter was not a sacred text and it can be revised as long as the new policies did not contradict the main ideas of the organization (Tamimi, 2011: p. 149). Indeed, Hamas revised its

position in many issues mentioned in the Charter. For instance, Hamas' insistence on destroying Israel and establishing an Islamic State in that region reduced to a large extent. In the 1990s, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin first stated that Hamas was ready for a *hudna* (long-term truce) in return for an independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 8). In the 2000s, Khaled Mashal and Ismail Haniyeh also made statements signifying that a Palestinian state with the pre-1967 borders was acceptable. That is to say, Hamas' traditional discourse of establishing an Islamic state by destroying Israel was replaced by a discourse emphasizing the resistance against the occupation (Long, 2010: p. 137-139). Another example of Hamas' flexibility is that Hamas gave up the anti-Jewish rhetoric that it adopted in the Charter. Starting from the 1990s, Hamas began to make a distinction between the Jews and the Zionists, identifying only the latter as their enemy. Hamas made statements which were underlining that it was only fighting against the Israeli occupation and Zionism, not against the Jews or the religion of Judaism (Hroub, 2006: p. 33-34).

In 2017, Hamas issued a new charter reflecting the changes in its mentality. Even though it does not replace or invalidate the Charter of 1988, it is an important document that reveals the new position of Hamas in many issues. In the new charter, Hamas accepts a sovereign Palestinian state within the pre-1967 borders where Jerusalem is the capital on the condition that the refugees and the displaced ones will return to Palestine. However, there is no change in Hamas' unrecognition of Israel. Zionism maintains its place as the enemy, but it is also emphasized that Hamas's struggle is against only the Zionists and the occupation, not against the Jews. Moreover, the conspiracy theories about the Jews in the Charter of 1988 are removed. Another important point in the Charter of 2017 is that, even though Islamism and Palestinian nationalism are still key points for the ideology of Hamas, the values such as democracy, pluralism, dialogue, human rights and cooperation are also highlighted. Finally, Hamas' affiliation to the MB is not mentioned in the new charter (Middle East Eye, May 2017).

2.2.3. Methods

Hamas is a multi-faced movement. It is an armed organization that uses violence to reach its political objectives, thus considered a terrorist organization by some states. On the other hand, Hamas is also an NGO providing social services to the Palestinian people such as health, education, charity and infrastructure. Finally, it is also a political party within the Palestinian politics running in the local and legislative elections and currently in power in Gaza. To Hamas, all of these faces of Hamas are parts of its *jihad* (struggle). That is to say, Hamas has multiple methods to achieve its objectives in its Palestinian cause.

In many of its communiqués issued, Hamas stated that it regarded *jihad* as the only viable means in the way of liberating Palestine. In the Charter of 1988, the concept of *jihad* is repeated many times and it is stated that Hamas is a link in the chain of the longstanding *jihad* against the Zionist occupation of Palestine. Moreover, it is asserted that *jihad* becomes “an obligation for every Muslim man and woman” when the enemy is on the Muslim territories (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 124-125). The efforts for a peaceful solution through international conferences and initiatives are condemned by Hamas in the Charter of 1988 as they lead to concessions and serve the interests of the unbelievers in the Muslim lands (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 126-127). In its Introductory Memorandum issued in 1993, Hamas clarifies its understanding of *jihad*:

Hamas believes that the Zionist colonization scheme only can be extirpated through a comprehensive holy struggle in which armed struggle is a basic instrument. Hamas also sees that the best way to conduct the fight with the Zionist enemy is to mobilize the resources of the Palestinian people to raise the banner of struggle in Palestine and to keep the embers of conflict burning until the conditions for a decisive battle with the enemy are complete. These include the rising of the Arab and Islamic nation, the acquisition of the elements of power, the mobilization of its energies and resources, and unification of its will and political decisions. (Hroub, 2002: p. 296).

In the same document, Hamas also explains its main strategies for confronting the occupation with four points:

1. The Palestinian people, being the primary target of the occupation, bears the larger part of the burden in resisting it. Hamas, therefore, works to mobilize the energies of this people and to direct it toward steadfastness.

2. The field of confrontation with the enemy is Palestine, the Arab and Islamic lands being fields of aid and support to our people, especially the lands that have been enriched with the pure blood of martyrs throughout the ages.

3. Confronting and resisting the enemy in Palestine must be continuous until victory and liberation. Holy struggle in the name of God is our guide, and fighting and inflicting harm on enemy troops and their instruments rank at the top of our means of resistance.

4. Political activity, in our view, is one means of holy struggle against the Zionist enemy and aims to buttress the struggle and steadfastness of our people and to mobilize its energies and that of our Arab Islamic nation to render our cause victorious. (Hroub, 2002: p. 296-297).

In the Charter of 2017, unlike the Charter of 1988, the concept of *jihad* is mentioned only once but it maintains its significance for Hamas as the way of liberating Palestine: “Resistance and jihad for the liberation of Palestine will remain a legitimate right, a duty and an honour for all the sons and daughters of our people and our Ummah” (Middle East Eye, May 2017). However, in the Charter of 2017, Hamas does not completely shut the doors for non-violent initiatives, agreements or settlement projects which do not contradict their Palestinian cause and violate the rights of the Palestinians (Middle East Eye, May 2017).

As an armed organization, the military action of Hamas is one of its distinguishing features in the Palestinian politics. In one of its memorandums issued in 2000, Hamas states that military action is the only way of keeping the struggle against the occupation alive and it is “the real expression of the legitimacy rejecting the occupation and resisting its existence” which is derived from religion, history and international rules (Tamimi, 2011: p. 279). Likewise, in the Charter of 2017, Hamas states that military action is the heart of the resistance and it is “the strategic choice for protecting the principles and the rights of the Palestinian people” (Middle East Eye, May 2017). As mentioned earlier, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades is the military wing of Hamas.

Incorporating the preceding military wing *al-Mujahidun al-Filastiniyun* and intelligence wing *Majd*, the Brigades has been the main tool of the military action of Hamas since 1991. Since then, the Brigades has perpetrated many deadly attacks against Israel resulting in both military and civilian casualties, making its peak especially during the Second Intifada. Bombing attacks, suicide bombing, mortar fires, shootings attacks and Qassam rockets attacks are included the repertoire of action of the Brigades (Levitt, 2006: p. 11-12). However, in its another memorandum issued in late 1990s, Hamas states that it does not endorse the killing of civilians but sometimes this is the “only option” to retaliate the killing of Palestinian civilians (Tamimi, 2011: p. 268). In recent years, Hamas has renounced using suicide bombings, which was once popular, and begun to rely heavily on mortar fires and rocket attacks from the Gaza Strip into Israeli territories (Israel MFA, *The Hamas Terror War Against Israel*, n.d.)

The social services provided by Hamas constitute another important characteristic of the organization. As explained in Introductory Memorandum (Hroub, 2002: p. 296), Hamas’ has a broad understanding of *jihād*. In the Charter of 1988, Hamas emphasizes that *jihād* is not only armed resistance saying: “*Jihad* is not only carrying weapons and confronting the enemy. The good word, excellent article, beneficial book, aid, and support, if intentions are pure, so that the banner of Allah is the most-high, is a Jihad for the sake of Allah”. The necessity of educating the youth according to Islamic doctrine is also stressed (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 127, 131). That is to say, the *jihād* of Hamas has a social dimension as well and Hamas did not renounce the PMB’s *dawa*: the aim of Islamizing the society. Besides, social welfare activities also continued and it is mentioned in the Charter of 1988 as the responsibility of providing material and spiritual aid to those in need (Maqdsi, 1993: p. 129). Therefore; the educational, medical and social service network of the Islamic institutions mainly *Mujamma* and *Jam’iyah* have been maintained and improved by Hamas in many terms. This social side of Hamas also helped its base of support to expand, especially during the First Intifada (Roy, 2011: p. 79).

Finally, as well as its military and social struggle, Hamas is a political party in the Palestinian politics. However, Hamas acquired this political party identity especially after 2006. Following the Oslo Accords of 1993, the first general elections of the PNA were held in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip in 1996 but Hamas did not participate in the elections. However, Hamas decided to participate in the next elections in 2006. This decision was interpreted as Hamas' shift from armed resistance to democracy and pluralism. However, these claims were rejected by Hamas leaders (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 66). Mahmoud Zahar, one of the leaders of Hamas, once claimed that Hamas had never been against elections in principle and their boycott of the elections in 1996 had other reasons such as the Israeli occupation, the Oslo Process framework of the elections and the autocratic administration of the PNA by Arafat (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 66). A set of changes like Arafat's death, Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, people's resentment to the corrupted PNA, the failure of the peace process and Hamas' success in the municipal elections in 2005 provided a more suitable setting for Hamas. Therefore, Hamas decided to run in the elections in 2006 (Tamimi, 2011: p. 210-211).

Hamas does not see any problem in waging armed resistance and participating in the elections as a political party at the same as its understanding of *jihad* is a broad one which encompasses both methods as explained in Hamas' Introductory Memorandum of 1993 (Hroub, 2002: p. 296). Its political activities are, in this regard, part of their *jihad* as well as its armed resistance and *dawa*. That was clarified by Khaled Mashal prior to the elections in 2006:

There is no conflict between this and that. To end the occupation, Hamas would take all measures, including reforming the political establishment, participating in decision-making, and partaking in municipal elections. These are steps aimed at serving our main strategic goal which is to rid ourselves of the occupation and to help the Palestinian people live a life which is aligned with resistance; a life which equips them for steadfastness and for the continuation of their long struggle till the occupation is removed from our lands. (Baconi, 2018: p. 80).

Hamas won the legislative elections in 2006 but has been governing only in the Gaza Strip due to disagreements with Fatah, the biggest party under the umbrella of the PLO (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 69-70). Since then, the political power in Palestine has been divided: Hamas rule in the Gaza Strip and internationally recognized Fatah-led PNA rule in the West Bank (CFR, August 2014).

2.3. Hamas and the World

2.3.1. Hamas and Israel

Israel designates Hamas as a terrorist organization (Israel MFA, *The Hamas Terror War Against Israel*, n.d.) and it has been carrying out a struggle against Hamas since the First Intifada during which Hamas was founded. This struggle includes all branches of Hamas from political leadership to the Brigades. Detention, deportation, assassination, embargo and military offensive are among Israel's methods to cope with Hamas. For example, in 1989, many important leaders of Hamas including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin were arrested en masse (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 160- 161). Likewise, in 1992, Israel deported many primary, secondary and tertiary figures of Hamas such as Hassan Yousef, Husayn Abu Kuwik and Fadil Salih (Abu-Amr, 1993: p. 10). Israel also perpetrated many assassinations against Hamas leaders including three of the founding fathers, namely Salah Shehade, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin and Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi. Other important figures assassinated by Israel are Ahmed Jabari, Ismail Abu Shanab and Said Siyam (BBC, May 2017).

Embargo and major military offensives came after Hamas seized the Gaza Strip forcibly in 2007. Israel immediately stated that the Gaza Strip under Hamas rule was a hostile entity and launched an embargo on the Gaza Strip which is still in effect. The embargo has various aspects such as closing the border, restricting imports and power cuts, which heavily deteriorates life conditions in the Gaza Strip (Britannica, January 2019). Moreover, Israel carried out three major military offensives to the Gaza Strip with the stated aim of stopping the attacks from this region in 2008, 2012 and

2014. Military conflicts between two parties still take place from time to time and there is no change in their respective positions towards each other.

2.3.2. Hamas and the Region

Hamas is a popular movement in general among the Muslim countries in the Middle East. The closest allies of Hamas in the region are Qatar, Iran and Turkey. Qatar has been a loyal supporter of Hamas for years calling it a “legitimate resistance movement”. As well as its very generous economic aids to the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, Qatar also hosts many Hamas leaders within its territories. Likewise, Iran has been one of the biggest financial and military supporters of Hamas since the 1990s. Their relationship strained after the Syrian Civil War broke out in 2011, because Iran and Hezbollah sided with the Assad regime while Hamas supported the Syrian rebels against Assad. As a result, Iran’s aids to Hamas severely diminished. However, they renewed their ties in 2017 and Iran now continues to support Hamas. Hamas’ current leader in the Gaza Strip, Yahya al-Sinwar, said that Iranian aid is strategic for them and Iran is the largest supporter of Hamas financially and militarily. In January 2020, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif stated that Iran would continue to support “the Palestinian people’s rights and resistance in defense of its land and holy sites”. Turkey, another close ally of Hamas, does not regard Hamas as a terrorist organization and it also has economic and political ties with Hamas. Hamas members are also allowed to carry out activities in Turkish cities. Besides, Hamas leaders occasionally go to Turkey and meet with President Erdoğan who recently stated that Turkey would continue to support its brothers in Palestine (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.).

Apart from continuous supporters, in spite of years of discord, Hamas is now in good terms with Egypt, a country, like Israel, closed its border to the Gaza Strip in 2007. After a short period of amelioration in the relations during the Morsi period, the coup in 2013 weakened the ties (The National, March 2019). In 2013, Egypt closed the tunnels on the border of the Gaza Strip where Hamas transferred goods, weapons and people as a way of breaking the blockade, which heavily damaged the economy in the

Gaza Strip. In 2014, Hamas was banned in Egypt and it was declared a terrorist organization in 2015, a decision that was cancelled in the same year (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). Despite all, their relationship has been improving in recent years, the opening of the borders in 2017 and continuing bilateral relations are the signs of improvement. In 2019, Ismail Haniyeh stated that Hamas had “a strong and strategic relationship with Egypt” (The National, March 2019).

On the other hand, there are some countries in the region which were once supportive of Hamas, but not anymore. Syria is one of them. Syria used to be an ally of Hamas until the Syrian Civil War allowing Hamas’ transfer of money and weapons through its territories and hosting Hamas leadership (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). However, Hamas’ support for anti-regime groups during the civil war caused Syria to cut ties with Hamas and no rapprochement has taken place since then despite Hamas’ efforts (The Jerusalem Post, June 2019). Similarly, Jordan is not in a very good terms with Hamas. Jordan also used to be an ally of Hamas hosting its political leadership until 1999 when it banned Hamas and expelled its leaders as a result of American and Israeli pressure. Over twenty years, Hamas’ offices in Jordan have never been reopened (The Times of Israel, October 2017; Kardelj, 2010: p. 37). Finally, Saudi Arabia also supported Hamas financially during the Second Intifada and after the Israeli attack in 2008 (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). However, the Saudis declared the MB a terrorist organization in 2014 and after that point their attitude towards Hamas turned negative. Currently, the parties have no political or economic ties (MEMO, May 2019).

2.3.3. Hamas and Great Powers

Most of the important actors in world politics do not have a positive approach towards Hamas, but there are also those which are more moderate. The US has designated Hamas as a terrorist organization since the 1990s and does not regard the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip as legitimate. The US also recognizes some of the top-level Hamas leaders as terrorists such as Khaled Mashal, Musa Abu Marzuq and Ismail Haniyeh. Likewise, the European Union has listed Hamas as a terrorist organization

since 2003 and it froze Hamas' European assets in 2005 as many member states of the EU did before. Japan, New Zealand, Australia and Canada are other states which designate Hamas as a terrorist organization. The United Kingdom has also designated the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades as a terrorist group since 2001 but not Hamas as a whole. On the other hand, Russia has a moderate approach towards Hamas. Russia does not regard Hamas as a terrorist organization and maintains direct talks with Hamas to convince it to stop violence and recognize Israel (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). Similarly, China does not designate Hamas as a terrorist organization and it recognizes the legitimacy of the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip stating that the representatives of the Palestinian people should be respected (The Jamestown Foundation, March 2019).

CHAPTER 3

HAMAS AND US POLICIES DURING THE FIRST INTIFADA AND OSLO PROCESS

3.1. Period of First Intifada

3.1.1. The Intifada

Intifada, which literally means “shaking off”, refers to the two Palestinian uprisings that aimed to end the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and establish an independent Palestinian state on these territories. On December 8, 1987 the First Intifada started. Even though the protests and violence began after a road accident where several Palestinian workers died and wounded, there were important underlying causes for the uprising. As mentioned in the second chapter, the harsh policies of Israel’s Likud administration such as repression on Palestinians, increasing expropriation of land and construction of new settlements on the occupied territories was one of most prominent reasons that triggered the Intifada. Besides, the emergence of alternative Islamist powers in the Palestinian politics against the monopoly of the PLO served as a facilitating factor (Britannica, June 2014). Finally, the economic hardships and unemployment among Palestinians largely contributed to the outbreak of the Intifada (Gunning, 2007: p. 35).

In the days following the road accident, the protests grew rapidly spreading from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. Thousands of people took the streets spontaneously and without any leadership to organize protests and demonstrations against the occupation. However, in the following weeks, the Intifada came under the control of the United

National Leadership of the Uprising, which was an umbrella organization including different elements of the Palestinian politics affiliated with the PLO (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 145). Starting from January 1988, the UNLU became the main force behind the protests carrying out activities in civil society, providing certain basic services for people and controlling the use of force. The methods embraced by the protesters in the Intifada were diverse: throwing stones and Molotov cocktails, waving flags, constructing barricades on the roads, screaming slogans, burning tires and targeting Israeli properties and vehicles were included in their repertoire of action (Rigby, 1991: p. 19, 55).

3.1.2. Policies in the Early Times of the Intifada

After the meeting of the leading PMB members where Hamas was founded and the decision to participate in the Intifada was taken, Hamas' initial policies regarding the Intifada began to be implemented. In the early times of the Intifada, Hamas avoided organizing big mass protests and engaging in intense military activity against Israel because it was thought that a direct confrontation with Israel could damage the nascent and fragile organization (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 55-57). Instead, Hamas aimed to undertake a national leadership role in the first place. Both the PLO, which directed the uprising under the name of the UNLU, and Islamic Jihad had strengthened their positions in the Palestinian politics thanks to the pivotal role they had played during the first days of the Intifada. Hamas wanted to create an alternative power by challenging these groups, especially the monopoly of the UNLU (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 147-148).

Hamas' activities in the Intifada were diverse. The political leaders of Hamas were writing and distributing leaflets, communiqués and other publications (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 148). *Al-Ahdath* was encouraging the young men to participate in the strikes and demonstrations, informing the Palestinian people about the Intifada and activities with graffiti on walls, supporting the families of the martyrs and finding scholarships for students. The members who were responsible for communication were informing local and foreign journalists about the news regarding Hamas and the

course of the Intifada (Chehab, 2007: p. 30-31). The strike committees were carrying out the daily Intifada activities such as blocking roads, throwing stones and going on strikes (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 55). At the same time, Hamas continued to provide social services to the Palestinian people with the efforts of *Mujamma* and *Jam'iyah*, which helped Hamas to rise in the sight of the people during the Intifada (Roy, 2011: p. 79).

In its leaflets, Hamas shared the same calls as the other groups to mobilize people for the uprising to end the occupation. However, the language of Hamas was purely Islamic (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 148). Likewise; the slogans, graffitis and the magazine of Hamas had a strong religious tone as reflected in the Charter of 1988. Moreover, Hamas was organizing strikes, demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience of its own independent from the agenda of the UNLU. Thus, Hamas succeeded in instilling a new religious dimension to the Intifada and presenting itself as an alternative power in the course of the uprising (Baconi, 2018: p. 25), in the spheres of both discourse and practice. Besides, Israeli authorities left Hamas relatively free in its activities thanks to its docile attitude in the early times of the Intifada. According to Israel, Hamas, then, was still a moderate Islamic movement aiming at social reform like the PMB. The aim of marginalizing and counterbalancing the PLO was another important reason for Israel not to suppress the activities of Hamas. So that, Israeli officials held regular meetings with Hamas leaders to talk about the Intifada (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 151).

On the other hand, the US had already been a continuous supporter of Israel financially and diplomatically for decades. Their shared Cold War strategy against the Soviet-influenced Arab allies in the region, common political values based on democracy and the strong Israel lobby in the US are some of the factors that have made these two countries closer to each other (Zunes, May 2002). However, the US had not been directly involved in the conflict in the previous decades. Nevertheless, the Reagan administration had been, until the First Intifada, following a heavily Israel-centered policy with a particular antipathy towards Palestinian nationalism and trying to undermine the legitimacy of the PLO (Christison, 1999: p. 202). However, during the

First Intifada, as the sufferings of the Palestinian people were seen more closely, the Palestinians gained a certain degree of sympathy in the American public opinion. For the first time, it was observed that the Palestinians were a distinct group of people with national aspirations who were trying to get rid of an occupation (Christison, 1999: p. 236). Moreover, the Israeli violence to suppress the Intifada and human rights violations were criticized in the international community. As a result, the Reagan administration thought that a peace project would be beneficial for wider US interests in the region (Rigby, 1991: p. 10). Nevertheless, the US initiatives in that period were, in fact, designed to contain the Intifada and reduce the power of the PLO rather than to provide a real peace. That is to say, by pioneering a peace project, the US did not actually deviate from its strategy of supporting Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In February 1988, George Shultz, the Secretary of State, came with a peace plan proposing a revival of the project of a limited autonomy for the Palestinians agreed at the Camp David Accords of 1978-79. It included a five-year transitional period with limited Palestinian self-rule as well as talks between Israel and a joint delegation that consisted of Jordanians and non-PLO Palestinians for the final status of the occupied territories (Rigby, 1991: p. 10-11). According to Naseer Aruri (2003), the plan aimed “to reaffirm U.S. custodianship over the Middle East, to marginalize other serious plans for settlement, and to protect Israel’s image” (p. 65), a view shared by the Palestinians (Rigby, 1991: p. 10). As Israel’s Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir was also a hard-liner and not in favor of a peace process (Quandt, 2005: p. 330), all the parties rejected the plan and Jordan even relinquished all of its say on the West Bank (Rigby, 1991: p. 10-11).

The PLO-led Palestinian National Council declared the independence of the State of Palestine in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in late 1988, with East Jerusalem being the capital. Most importantly, the PLO also took an important decision and proclaimed that it renounced terrorism, recognized Israel’s right to exist and accepted the relevant UN resolutions and the principle of “land for peace” (Baconi, 2018: p. 23-24; Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 1042-1043). There were a few motives for the PLO to take such an important decision. First, the US did not negotiate with the PLO, as it regarded the

PLO as a terrorist organization at that time. The US had had a longstanding policy of stipulating that the PLO accepted Israel's right to exist and the UN Resolutions 242 and 338 to enter negotiations with US and get a formal US recognition. These conditions had been set in 1975 by Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State of the Ford administration (Gwertzman, 1982). Therefore, Jordan had been the voice of the Palestinians for years. When Jordan abandoned the issues of the West Bank, the US was now unable to find an interlocutor for peace talks (Rigby, 1991: p. 10-11) and the PLO aimed to fill this gap to continue the negotiations. Second, the PLO was losing ground in the Palestinian politics while Islamists such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad were on a rise (Smith, 2007: p. 423-424). As a result, the PLO sought to obtain international recognition to maintain its leadership of the Palestinians, which was a sign that Hamas had a role in the PLO' declaration of independence, recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence.

As the US demanded further clarification, Arafat repeated PLO's recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and acceptance of UN Resolutions 242 and 338 in the UN General Assembly. Then, the US accepted to hold direct talks with the PLO stating that its conditions were met to start a diplomatic dialogue (Rigby, 1991: p. 11). However, as the US also aimed to counterbalance the power of the PLO, it used Hamas as a leverage during the Intifada, similar to the Israeli policy. The US made contacts with Hamas through its ambassadors in the region with a stated aim of exploring the characteristics of this nascent movement. Hamas, even though its view of this state was not positive, acted pragmatically and did not object to such informal and indirect messages from the US (Hroub, 2006: p. 110). That was required by Hamas' policies of not antagonizing other states except Israel and undermining the power of the PLO. Moreover, the common antipathy of Hamas and the US towards the PLO made the parties closer to each other.

3.1.3. Hamas' Militarization and Shamir's Plan

As the Intifada continued, the adoption of different approaches to the Intifada by Hamas and the UNLU raised the tension between them. Ideological differences,

Hamas' independence from the UNLU and the UNLU's increasing support for a peaceful solution were among the main problems between the two sides (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 53-54). The parties criticized each other through their communiqués and leaflets. The tension increased when the PNC declared independence as Hamas did not welcome the concessions made by the PLO regarding the scope and method of the Palestinian cause. The PLO's softening policy provided Hamas with an opportunity to take over the mission of liberating all Palestine through armed resistance (Baconi, 2018: p. 23-24).

Starting from the second year of the Intifada, Hamas abandoned its early policy of avoiding large-scale military operations and began to carry out serious armed attacks against Israel. In Hamas' thinking, that was necessitated by its competition with the other nationalist groups in the Palestinian politics (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 53). *Al-Mujahidun al-Filastiniyun* was targeting the Israeli soldiers and the Jewish settlers; while *Majd* was identifying, interrogating and executing the Palestinian collaborators of Israel (Tamimi, 2011: p. 50). Hamas' shift to violence against Israel ended the short-lived honeymoon between the two parties. In 1989, Hamas kidnapped and killed two Israeli soldiers named Avi Sasportas and Ilan Sadon in different times. That was a turning point in the Hamas-Israel relations as Hamas was accused of organizing an armed attack on Israeli military targets for the first time. Following the killings, Israeli authorities arrested three hundred Hamas members including Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, Mahmoud Zahar and other important figures, which forced Hamas to reorganize the movement and establish the Council and the Bureau outside Palestine. However, all the senior members were released the following year except Sheik Yassin who was sentenced to a lifetime plus fifteen years in prison in 1991. In December 1989, Hamas was banned and the Hamas-Israel relations broke down irreversibly (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 152-153, Tamimi, 2011: p. 63). Yet, the US did not cut off contact with Hamas immediately and maintained the ties for a certain time (Hroub, 2006: p. 110).

On the American side, President Bush took office by replacing Reagan in early 1989. The Bush administration had a pragmatic view of foreign policy. Neither President Bush nor Secretary of State James Baker had any emotional bonds with Israel and

attached any special importance to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, the new administration did not take any decisive steps for peace for one and a half years (Christison, 1999: p. 242-243). However, it maintained talks with the PLO, which began after the PLO met the American conditions for negotiations. The talks between the US and the PLO were taking place in Tunisia, where the PLO leadership was in exile at that time. In these talks, the US maintained its efforts to sideline the PLO and prioritize Israel's interests. However, no progress was made on any issue. The US was also holding meetings with Egypt and Israel and urging them to devise a plan proposing an election schedule in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to elect a delegation for peace talks with Israel (Christison, 1999: p. 257). As a result, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir offered a new peace plan in mid-1989. The plan was offering free elections in the occupied territories to elect a delegation for the negotiations with Israel for a temporary self-rule. However, it was refusing direct talks with the PLO and establishment of a Palestinian state (Rigby, 1991: p. 11-12). Furthermore, according to the plan, Israel would retain its control on the issues of security, foreign affairs and kinds of policy about the settlers in the occupied territories. The Bush administration supported the plan, but no Palestinians were willing to accept it: neither the ones in the occupied territories, nor the Tunisia-based PLO (Smith, 2007: p. 425-426). According to Charles D. Smith (2007), similar to Shultz's plan, Shamir's plan was also designed to strengthen Israel's position in the region rather than to attain a real and long-lasting peace (p. 425). Then, due to Israel's rejection of recognizing the PLO, the PLO's insistence on involvement in the process and the Palestinians' opposition to Shamir's plan the peace process came to a point of stalemate. Moreover, the US suspended the talks as Arafat did not condemn an assault perpetrated by the PLO factions in Tel Aviv. Arafat's decision to support Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was a development that further weakened the ties (Rigby, 1991: p. 12-14).

The failure of the peace talks caused, among the Palestinians, another loss of influence for the PLO and a loss of confidence in the PLO-led diplomatic efforts. On the other hand, Hamas' prestige rose up as it rejected diplomacy and increased military operations against Israel (Smith, 2007: p. 423-424). On the other hand, Hamas

gladdened the Gulf States by condemning the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq, so the Gulf States redirected their funds from the PLO to Hamas (Baconi, 2018: p. 27). However, Hamas also denounced the US-led intervention in Kuwait stating that Arabs could solve the problem among themselves (Muslih, 1999: p. 20-21). Thus, even though the Gulf War forced Hamas leadership to move from Kuwait to Jordan (Tamimi, 2011: p. 71-72), starting from 1990, Hamas became a strong and independent actor in the Palestinian politics extending its base of support and intensifying its activities (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 153).

3.1.4. Madrid Process

After the Gulf War, the US decided that it was the right time to revive the Middle East peace process in a greater scope, in terms of both the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the problematic relationships between Israel and the other neighboring Arab states. There were both internal and external factors for this decision. In internal affairs, President Bush aimed to boost its votes in the oncoming elections by providing peace in the Middle East. Besides, he had a relative political freedom against Israel and the Jewish lobby due to their relatively low electoral support (Christison, 1999: p. 265). Finally, President Bush had a vision of “new world order”, which refers to the necessity that the US support peace, democracy and stability in every corner of the globe. Thus, the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict that would bring about stability in the region was very important to the Bush administration (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 63). The external factors also provided a convenient environment for the US to initiate a peace plan. The PLO was suffering from a political and financial weakness as it sided with Saddam Hussein after the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and during the war. On the other hand, Iraq’s military capability threatening Israel had been destroyed and Israel was “thankful” to the US, which made it closer to a collaboration with the US. Another point that facilitated the American involvement was that the Soviet Union was in a period of demise (Christison, 1999: p. 264-265). Therefore, the US obtained a great chance to stamp out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and even the broader Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with American and Israeli interests (Aruri, 2003: p. 71-75).

Secretary of State James Baker, supported by the Soviets, made eight trips to the Middle East between March and September 1991 in order to convince the relevant parties to hold an international conference for Middle Eastern peace (Aruri, 2003: p. 75). On October 30, 1991, the joint Palestinian-Jordanian, Israeli, Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian delegations gathered in Madrid, Spain under the co-chairmanship of the US and the Soviet Union. Officials from Egypt, the EU and the Gulf Cooperation Council were also present in the conference. At the end of the three days conference no official agreement was signed. Rather, it aimed to start bilateral and multilateral talks between parties (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 657; Office of the Historian, n.d.). The two principal objectives of the bilateral talks were to achieve peace treaties between Israel and Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan; and to establish an interim Palestinian self-government in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Britannica, March 2020). The multilateral talks, on the other hand, would focus on other concerns such as water, environmental issues, refugees, economic development and arms control (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 657). According to the Madrid framework, the talks between Israel and a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation would take place in order to establish an interim Palestinian self-government. Then, during this limited self-government period, the negotiations including the “major issues”, namely Jerusalem, refugees, borders of Palestine and Israeli settlements would take place to achieve a final settlement (Khalidi, 2013: p. 35-36). During the talks, the Palestinians would again be represented by delegates from the occupied territories as part of a joint Palestinian-Jordanian delegation due to Israeli rejection of direct negotiations with the PLO (Office of the Historian, n.d.).

Hamas’ view of holding a peace conference between Israel and the Palestinians was extremely negative. It strongly rejected any negotiations with Israel and labeled the oncoming conference as selling out the Palestinian territories. Similarly, in its communiqués and leaflets, Hamas underlined that the US-led new world order was just an American system which aimed to weaken the Islamic and Arab worlds, suppress the Islamic awakening and strengthen the European-American-Israeli positions. Hence, to Hamas, any negotiations under the supervision of the US were unacceptable (Muslih, 1999: p. 32; Nüsse, 2005: p. 93-94). However, in the meantime,

Hamas and the US were holding talks in the US and Jordan. Even though Israel had banned Hamas, the US was still in touch with it maintaining the policy of counterbalancing the PLO whose legitimacy was increasing in the international arena. In these talks, the US State Department tried to convince Musa Abu Marzuq, then leader of the Political Bureau of Hamas, to support the participation of a Palestinian delegation in the peace talks. However, Hamas' negative stance on the negotiations did not change (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 119-120).

In mid-1991, Hamas' rejectionist position once again led to a rise of tension with the PLO-affiliated factions. Before the conference, to protest the PLO's support for the participation of a Palestinian delegation in the conference, Hamas ordered a general strike, and it bluntly condemned the Palestinian delegates with a *fatwa* (a statement explaining the view of Islamic law on a specific issue) (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 156). When the Madrid Conference started, Hamas denounced the conference stating that the peace process was designed to grant legitimacy to the "Zionist entity" and to allow the "Greater Israel" to be established. On the final day of the conference, together with some other organizations in Palestine, Hamas issued a document rejecting the Palestinian participation in the conference and calling for the escalation of the Intifada through military actions (Nüsse, 2005: p. 96, 101). Indeed, amidst these disputes and conflicts with the PLO, Hamas further developed its military capabilities in 1991 and formed a military unit: the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, which perpetrated deadly attacks on Israeli targets in the following years (Baconi, 2018: p. 27).

Bilateral talks started in Washington in December 1991 and multilateral talks began in Moscow in January 1992 within the Madrid framework (Office of the Historian, n.d.). Nevertheless, throughout the year 1992, these bilateral talks were far from producing the desired results. The Palestinians' aspirations for an independent state rather than autonomy after the interim stage and Israel's insistence on autonomy prevented any progress (Smith, 2007: p. 432-433). Moreover, the Shamir government was continuing to construct settlements in the occupied territories as the bilateral talks were taking place. However, the US, in the letter of invitation for the Madrid Conference that it sent to the Palestinians, had stated that the Israeli settlement activity in the occupied

territories was an “obstacle to peace” (Peace Agreements Database, n.d.). Therefore, the Bush administration was annoyed by the continuation of the settlements and asked Israel to stop it. Upon Shamir’s insistence on constructing settlements, the Bush administration undermined the hard-lined Shamir government by cutting loans to Israel; which assisted the Labor Party’s victory in the elections in June 1992 under the leadership of Yitzhak Rabin. Rabin was more willing for a peace process. He had a more moderate position for direct talks with the PLO and was seemingly more cautious on the settlements issue. However, there was still no remarkable progress in the talks in Washington (Smith, 2007: p. 432-433). Moreover, the Rabin government continued to build settlements when the Bush administration decided to take a less confrontational position about the suspension of the loans to Israel in the following months (Khalidi, 2013: p. 46). According to Rashid Khalidi (2013), the Madrid process delayed any permanent resolution including the major issues, while Israeli settlements in the occupied territories continued to expand (p. 65).

Hamas’ objections and violent protests against the continuing peace talks were another factor that was undermining the process. As well as the armed conflicts between Hamas and the PLO forces on the streets, the newly created Brigades were organizing frequent assaults against Israeli soldiers and settlers. After another assault by Hamas in December, Israel launched a crackdown on the organization and deported more than four hundred Hamas and Islamic Jihad members to southern Lebanon, which was a big blow to Hamas. The international community criticized Israel and demanded the return of the deportees, while the sympathy for Hamas was rising again among the Palestinians. The PLO, having ties with the Palestinian delegation, also suspended the participation of the delegation in the peace talks after the deportation. Besides, the deportation did not stop the attacks of the Brigades, which perpetrated many new assaults through guns, stabbings, and vehicles in 1993 (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 156-160). However, the newly elected Clinton administration did not accept that the deportation was illegal and prevented the UN from sanctioning Israel claiming that the Israeli offer to repatriate 101 out of four hundred Palestinians was enough to meet Security Council Resolution 799, a resolution demanding the immediate return of all those who were deported (UNISPAL, n.d., Aruri, 2003: p. 87-88). Nevertheless, with

Israeli approval, the US was still in contact with leading Hamas figures at that time and holding meetings during Clinton's early times in office in 1993. In these meetings that were taking place in the US embassy in Amman, the US attempted to change the views and strategies of Hamas as its military operations intensified. These were the final efforts of the US to turn Hamas into a suitable rival to the PLO. However, as the meetings caught much public attention and Hamas did not change its position, the Clinton administration terminated the contacts. Hamas denounced the US decision to end the contacts. Weeks after cutting the ties, the US labeled Hamas as a terrorist organization in a report on global terrorism in April 1993 (Hroub, 2006: p. 110). Thus, the rupture between Hamas and the US took place. On the other hand, as a result of the international pressures, stalls in the peace talks and the continuing Hamas violence, all the deportees were returned intermittently within the year 1993 (Tamimi, 2011: p. 69-70).

To sum up, during the period stretching from the start of the First Intifada to the late Madrid process, the Reagan and Bush administrations tried to implement peace initiatives but these were far from meeting the aspirations of the Palestinians for ending the occupation and securing a Palestinian statehood. Moreover, in response to the concessions of the PLO such as renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and accepting pre-1967 borders, the US did not try to convince Israel for any significant concession on the road to peace except for a small and short-lived sanction to the Shamir government. Settlement activities and land confiscation continued during the peace talks. Nevertheless, the US initiatives in this period paved the way for the forthcoming direct talks between the PLO and Israel. Islamist Hamas, on the other hand, strengthened its position among the Palestinians and began to shake the PLO's leadership in the Palestinian politics, which was a factor for the PLO's recognition of Israel. It increased its power in this period and began to spoil the peace initiatives that it rejected, after a short period of convergence with the US to undermine the PLO. Even though they had different visions and policies, between 1987 and 1993, both the US and Hamas served the moderation and decline of the PLO, while the power of Hamas increased.

3.2. Oslo Process

3.2.1. Oslo I (DOP)

When Clinton replaced Bush as the President of the US in early 1993, on the continuing peace process, Secretary of State Warren Christopher declared that the US would “play an active role as facilitator, honest broker, good offices, bridging gaps and asking difficult questions of the parties” (Kurtzer, Lasensky, Quandt, Spiegel and Telhami; 2013: p. 37). However, by the summer of 1993, it was obvious that the Washington-based Madrid talks on Palestine had been deadlocked because of the Hamas violence, the deportation incident, mutual disagreements on Palestinian statehood and the PLO weakness. However, the Madrid talks had already been replaced by secret and direct talks between Israel and the PLO in Oslo since January (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 160-161). The talks in Oslo were not initiated by the US. Even though it knew about these secret talks, the US did not get involved directly as it still refused to hold direct negotiations with the PLO since its unilateral suspension in 1990 and thought that the talks in Norway would not produce anything (Smith, 2007: p. 450-451; Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 177). For months, the Norwegians informed the US about the progress of the talks, but the Clinton administration showed no tangible interest for involvement (Christison, 1999: p. 291).

Despite the US’ rejection of direct involvement in Oslo talks, in June, Christopher issued a statement of principles regarding the Palestinian politics, which redefined the American approach to Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this statement, the principle regarding the major issues was the same being the subjects of only the future talks for the final status. However, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were defined as “disputed” rather than occupied territories. Likewise, the principle of land for peace prescribed by the Resolution 242 and any Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank were not mentioned. That is to say that the Clinton administration, contrary to its claim of being impartial, severely revised the American position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in favor of Israel. Similarly, the Clinton administration refused to call the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as illegal or an obstacle to peace, unlike

its discourse in times of Madrid Conference. Instead, it used the expression of “complicating factors”. In the UN General Assembly, for the first time, the US also refused to vote for the Resolution 194 which was about supporting the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes on the condition that they would live in peace with Israel (Christison, 1999: p. 278-279).

The role of the US in the Oslo Process did not start before the day the agreement was signed. On September 13, 1993, the Oslo I Accord or the Declaration of Principles was officially signed in Washington in the presence of Arafat, Rabin and Clinton. Thus, the US became the guarantor of the peace process and the following talks would now continue under US auspices (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 756). According to the DOP, for a five-year interim period, Israel would “redeploy” its forces from some parts in the occupied territories: the Gaza Strip and the area of Jericho in the West Bank. The Palestinians would have a limited authority in these places and also form a legislative council. The Palestinian authority would be responsible for only domestic issues such as public security, education and health (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 161; Israel MFA, *Declaration of Principles*, n.d.). The Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would receive an economic assistance of \$2.1 billion from twenty-five foreign governments (Roy, 2011: p. 33). The negotiations on the final status covering the major issues would also start during this five-year interim period. In return, the PLO once again declared its recognition of Israel and renunciation of violence (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 161). However, neither Palestinian statehood nor any permanent withdrawal of Israel was implied in the DOP, similar to Christopher’s statement of principles (Smith, 2007: p. 451-453). Apart from that, the framework was very broad, which blurred the course of the future negotiations. Kurtzer et al. (2013) defines the DOP as “a case study in ambiguities and of different expectations of the two parties” (p. 49).

The DOP did not have any serious advantages for the Palestinians compared to the Madrid process and its predecessors (Khalidi, 2013: p. 59). Likewise, The US’ position was, as explained, even more pro-Israeli than before. However, the PLO signed the DOP because the public support for Hamas was on the rise and it was becoming

stronger day by day. Whereas, the PLO was in a political and financial crisis due to its decision in the Gulf War (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 160). By signing the DOP, the PLO hoped to restore its power as the leader of the Palestinians in both outside and inside (Aruri, 2003: p. 84). Indeed, with the advent of the DOP, Israel and the PLO formally recognized each other under the US brokerage and Hamas was completely excluded from the peace process, while the PLO reasserted its position as only official and legitimate representative of the Palestinians (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 161).

Hamas immediately rejected and denounced the DOP, regarding it as a capitulation given to the “Zionist entity” and a way of legalizing the occupation. To Hamas, the agreement was just “another face of the occupation” and a “new security belt for the Zionist enemy”. For signing such an agreement, Hamas accused Arafat of having totally accepted the “US-Zionist plans” and selling the Palestinian national territories and institutions “part after part” for a low price hoping to become the “mukhtar” of Gaza and Jericho (Nüsse, 2005: p. 109-113). Hamas’ reaction was caused by several reasons. As well as its objection to the American role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and recognition of Israel in the DOP (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 71), Hamas complained that the agreement only allowed for a self-rule under Israeli control on a tiny part of Palestine. Besides, the major issues were not worked out in favor of the Palestinians. Moreover, to Hamas, Israel had also other aims in this agreement such as establishing ties with the boycotting Arab markets and stopping *jihad* actions (Nüsse, 2005: p. 109-111). Finally, Hamas was aware that it had become the common enemy of all and thought that it should undermine this process (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 162). As a result, Hamas saw no reason to stop the armed struggle and stated that *jihad* would continue “as long as one day follows the other” (Nüsse, 2005: p. 109-111).

Hamas, however, had to face the reality that the DOP dramatically boosted the popularity of the PLO among the Palestinians. According to a poll conducted right after the DOP, seventy-three percent of the Palestinians were supportive of the agreement and the forthcoming talks. Similarly, sixty percent was content with the PLO leadership, while the support for Hamas was only seventeen percent (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 163). Therefore, in the early post-DOP period, considering these

new conditions, Hamas once again acted pragmatically. It adopted a policy of “national unity” and avoided any direct confrontation with the PLO in order not to appear as a divisive element in the Palestinian politics and cause a domestic disorder which might further decrease the support to Hamas. Instead, it sought to protect its social institutions and extend its base of support among the Palestinians. However, in its leaflets and communiqués, Hamas continued to criticize the DOP and the PLO without trying to cut the ties (Roy, 2011: p. 34-35). Another example of this pragmatist approach was that, for several months following the DOP, Hamas seriously discussed its participation in the oncoming political entity despite its harsh criticism and rejection of the DOP. The organization was divided on this issue and many Hamas leaders thought that the new institutions that were going to be established would be beneficial for reaching out the Palestinian people (Schanzer, 2008: p. 40). Sheikh Ahmed Yassin also thought this way and sent a letter to Hamas leadership from his prison cell. In this letter, he called Hamas members to reach a *hudna* with Israel and “oppose the institution from within” by participating in the elections on the condition that Israel withdrew from the occupied territories (Nüsse, 2005: p. 115). However, for the time being, Hamas preferred to avoid getting involved in the oncoming institutions while the internal debate was continuing (Nüsse, 2005: p. 122). Instead, it formed an alliance with nine other Damascus-based rejectionist groups called Palestinian Forces Alliance or the Damascus Ten in January 1994. The PFA included the liberal and socialist groups that left the PLO as well as Islamic Jihad (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 162).

Despite its avoidance from direct conflict with the PLO, Hamas did not make any concessions from its *jihad* against Israel. The Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades continued to carry out attacks resulting in military and civilian casualties in the post-DOP period (Roy, 2011: p. 35). As the talks were continuing between Israel and the PLO, an incident led Hamas to be more fervent in its rejection of the DOP and further increase and diversify its attacks: On February 25, 1994, a Jewish settler named Baruch Goldstein opened fire on praying Muslims in the Ibrahimi Mosque in the West Bank city of Hebron, which resulted in 29 deaths and over 100 injuries (Baconi, 2018: p. 29). Following the incident, Hamas stated in a leaflet that it would take the revenge of the Muslims who were killed (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 162). On April 6, a member

of Hamas with a suicide vest detonated himself near a bus stop and killed seven Israeli civilians in Afula, a city in northern Israel. A week later, another suicide bomber detonated his explosives and killed five Israelis at a bus stop in Hadera, another city in northern Israel. These were the first suicide bombing attacks of Hamas in its history. Goldstein's massacre was, in this regard, a turning point for Hamas as it now embraced suicide bombing attacks as its glorious self-sacrifice operations and began to perpetrate assaults within Israeli territories (Baconi, 2018: p. 29-32). In the days following the second attack, Hamas issued a statement where it once again condemned the DOP, claimed responsibility for the two attacks, and pointed out that it would continue "*jihad* and martyrdom" until the whole of Palestine was liberated (Hroub, 2002: p. 302-305). Many Hamas leaders also made statements to justify the suicide bombing attacks on religious grounds referring to the principle of an "eye for an eye", while some other leaders of the movement emphasized tactical necessity and reciprocity (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 79). Israel responded by launching a long-term crackdown on Hamas and arresting hundreds of Hamas members, as well as closing borders with the Gaza Strip and the West Bank periodically (Roy, 2011: p. 36).

3.2.2. Cairo Agreement and Creation of the PNA

In the midst of the Hamas violence and the crackdown, the talks between Israel and the PLO were continuing since the signing of the DOP. The US only played the role of a facilitator and was not directly involved in these talks (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 46). As the Oslo framework was not drawn by the US and the parties were then making progress in the negotiations, they had less reason to ask the US for help (Quandt, 2005: p. 330). In May 1994, Israel and the PLO signed the Cairo Agreement. The agreement mainly provided the redeployment of the Israeli Defense Forces from Jericho and almost the whole of the Gaza Strip. It formally created the PNA which would assume various domestic responsibilities in these regions by establishing new institutions. The PNA was at the same time expected to end any support for terrorism against Israel and actively participate in an anti-terror campaign. The agreement also started the five-year transitional period during which the negotiations for a final settlement would take place (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 179; Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 248-249). On

July 1, Arafat and the leadership of the PLO officially returned to the Gaza Strip from their exile in Tunisia as the administrators of the PNA (Schanzer, 2008: p. 40; Baconi, 2018: p. 32).

On the other hand, Israel's crackdown on Hamas was not enough to stop Hamas' assaults. On the contrary, the attacks intensified and the crackdown even led to a rapprochement between the Palestinian Islamists, namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad, against the PNA (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 176). By mid-1994, Hamas and Islamic Jihad had launched a long and unprecedented wave of violence by carrying out many bloody attacks against Israel in various forms such as suicide bombing, kidnapping soldiers and armed attack which killed mostly civilians (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 166-170). Moreover, Hamas' relations with the PNA heavily deteriorated in mid-1994. The PNA's participation in the crackdown against Hamas with its newly established Palestinian Police Force was a critical factor in this deterioration. The increasingly authoritarian rule of Arafat and the establishment of the secular-nationalist institutions of the PNA, which weakened the position of Hamas' Islamists institutions, were among the other important factors. Therefore, Hamas abandoned the early discourse of national unity and accused the PNA of collaborating with Israel. Protests and demonstrations against the PNA were now underway (Milton-Edwards, 1996: p. 174-176). After Israeli and American pressures (Smith, 2007: p. 460), the PNA took further steps against Hamas and even established additional paramilitary and intelligence organizations to cope with it. The PNA forces also suppressed the activities of Hamas' charities and other social institutions (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 41). As a result, conflicts began to take place on the streets. The tension made its peak when the PPF officers opened fire on Islamists who were planning a demonstration after the prayer on November 18. Fifteen people were killed in the incident while two hundred were injured, and hundreds were arrested (Roy, 2011: p. 36).

The Hamas violence was continuing in late 1994 and early 1995, which caused serious interruptions in the peace talks between the PNA and Israel (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 1438). Besides, Israel was unwilling to fulfill its obligations regarding the peace process pointing out the violence of Hamas. In that period, Hamas carried out many

attacks against Israeli targets using methods like suicide bombing and bus bombing. The US, the guarantor of the peace process, became increasingly worried about the continuing Hamas violence. To the Clinton administration, Hamas was now the greatest threat to the ongoing peace process (Schanzer, 2008: p. 43-44). Moreover, it was revealed that Hamas had been carrying out activities of recruitment and fundraising in the US since its establishment. As a result, the US took action to stop Hamas (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 41). Acting together with Israel, they asked Jordan, where Hamas leadership was located for several years, to crackdown on the organization, as well as putting an enormous pressure on the PNA to aggravate the current crackdown and dismantle the military wing of Hamas (Schanzer, 2008: p. 43; Hroub, 2006: p. 111). On January 24, 1995, The US Department of the Treasury designated Hamas as a Specially Designated Terrorist Organization and prohibited financial transactions between US citizens or charities and Hamas with the Executive Order 12947 (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). In this document, Hamas was put on the list of “Terrorist Organizations Which Threaten to Disrupt the Middle East Peace Process” together with some other organizations in Palestine (US Department of the Treasury, January 1995). The US Department of the Treasury also listed Sheikh Ahmed Yassin as a Specially Designated Terrorist and, likewise, prohibited financial transactions between US citizens or charities and him (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.). In May, Musa Abu Marzuq was expelled from Jordan as a result of American and Israeli pressures (Tamimi, 2011: p. 87). He was a permanent US resident who lived there for years. When returning to the US on July 25, Marzuq was arrested in New York and put in jail where he would stay for twenty-two months without any official charge and trial (Muslih, 1999: p. 37; Chehab, 2007: p. 159). The following month, he was also listed as a Specially Designated Terrorist (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.), accused unofficially of helping to finance and organize Hamas’ assaults in Israel (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 72). In the meantime, Khaled Mashal replaced Marzuq as the leader of the Political Bureau (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 51).

Despite the crackdown, the Hamas assaults dominated the first half of 1995. Between January and July, ninety-five Israelis died in the assaults of Hamas and Islamic Jihad

(Enderlin, 2003: p. 365). When it comes to the US, Hamas maintained its policy of not extending the line of combat and avoided any military operation against American targets despite the US' moves of containment (Muslih, 1999: p. 32). However, it continued to dislike and criticize the US for its corruption, imperialism and support to Israel. The US' concern in these years was to protect the ongoing peace process, so it concentrated on crushing Hamas.

3.2.3. Oslo II

The Oslo II Accord was initially planned to be signed on July 25, 1995, but then postponed due to a suicide bombing attack perpetrated by Hamas the day before the agreement was signed. After a short suspension by Israel, the talks between the PNA and Israel continued for several months (Quandt, 2005: p. 336). In the talks preceding the agreement, the US maintained in its position of a third-party facilitator and broker (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 178). On September 28, 1995, the agreement was formally signed in Washington in the presence of Rabin, Arafat, Clinton, Hosni Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan (Quandt, 2005: p. 336). The Oslo II Accord formed three zones in the West Bank as A, B and C. Zone A comprised seven cities where the PNA would be responsible for both security and civil administration. In Zone B, the PNA would be in charge of civil administration but not security, which would remain in Israel's hands, and Zone C was the area where Israel would enjoy total sovereignty (Enderlin, 2003: p. 13). The agreement also proposed further Israeli redeployments in the following years. Palestinian elections were also scheduled for January 1996 (Quandt, 2005: p. 336). Finally, the PNA would cooperate against the violence against Israel and change the PLO Charter, which included articles about destroying Israel (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 180). However, On November 4, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Jewish extremist indicated that the peace process would not be easy (Shlaim, 2014). Following Rabin's assassination, President Clinton stated that "a senseless act of violence has deprived the United States and the world of a statesman, a brave fighter for peace." (Enderlin, 2003: p. 5).

Even though Hamas was still opponent to the peace process, it suspended its assaults in mid-1995 for almost eight months for several reasons. First, the intense pressure and control by the PNA and Israel did not give Hamas the opportunity to attack. Second, being a pragmatic organization, Hamas considered the support for peace process among the Palestinian people and avoided any attacks in order not to be blamed for preventing the Israeli withdrawals following the Oslo II Accord (Roy, 2011: p. 36). Third, Hamas and the PNA held talks to calm the situation of violence and normalize the relations firstly in Khartoum in October then in Cairo in December. In Cairo talks, the bigger one of the two, the PNA tried to convince Hamas to halt its attacks and to participate in the oncoming elections. On the other hand, Hamas demanded the release of its members in the Palestinian prisons and a condemnation of the repression of the PPF. The Cairo talks did not produce a temporary rapprochement and eliminate of all the problems between the parties. Nevertheless, both sides made some promises. The PNA promised to release the detainees and relieve the crackdown on Hamas (Hroub, 2002: p. 105-106). Hamas refused to participate in the elections and cease the attacks against Israel (Tamimi, 2011: p. 194). However, it promised not to undermine the elections by any boycotting campaign and declared that it would not place the PNA in an embarrassing position, implying that it could temporarily freeze its assaults (Hroub, 2002: p. 106).

By the end of 1995, in accordance with the Oslo II Accord, Israel had redeployed its troops from six big cities except Hebron (Smith, 2007: p. 468-469). However, on January 5, 1996, Yahya Ayyash, known as the “Engineer”, was assassinated by Israel. Ayyash was the person who masterminded the suicide bombing attacks of Hamas (Shlaim, 2014). The assassination had a big impact on the Palestinian people. Thousands of people in Gaza who considered Ayyash as a hero mourned him and protested the assassination (Schanzer, 2008: p. 45). After the assassination, Hamas also declared Ayyash a martyr and vowed to take the revenge (Shlaim, 2014). However, Hamas did not take action immediately and waited for the Palestinian elections that would be held on January 20 (Enderlin, 2003: p. 23).

Despite its rejectionist position, the issue of participation in the elections was still debated intensely among Hamas leaders. In fact, that was because of the two camps that emerged within the organization: the inside leadership based in the occupied territories and the outside leadership, namely the Advisory Council and the Political Bureau. While the former was in favor of political participation and social development, the latter had a hard-liner position and favored the continuation of the armed resistance (Jensen, 2009: p. 26). For example, important figures in the occupied territories such as Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud Zahar were in favor of participation. Haniyeh claimed that such a move was not against the fundamental principles of the organization, and participation would prevent Hamas's exclusion, contribute to social development and allow Hamas to follow the final status talks. The PNA, the US and Israel were also in favor of Hamas' participation in the elections hoping that political participation would lead Hamas to give up armed struggle. Nonetheless, the outside leadership did not make any concession. Hamas did not participate in the elections but did not call for a boycott either (Hroub, 2002: p. 224-228). In January, in its semi-official journal, *Filastin al-Muslima*, Hamas stated that it did not reject elections in general, but rejected the Oslo framework of the elections (Nüsse, 2005: p. 123). In addition, the low public support that Hamas was receiving in the polls was also a factor in that decision (Roy, 2011: p. 37). In the elections, the voter turnout was as high as eighty-six percent, which was another sign of the Palestinians' support for the process (Hroub, 2002: p. 228). Arafat obtained eighty-eight percent of the votes and became president; while his party, Fatah, won the majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council controlling sixty-eight of the eighty-eight seats (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 83).

Similar to the election process, the inside and outside leadership of Hamas debated how to respond to the assassination of Yahya Ayyash. While the inside leadership was in favor of a truce with Israel in the peace process, the outside leadership and the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades were insistent on armed struggle. In the end, the hard-liners prevailed again (Muslih, 1999: p. 37-38). After the elections, Hamas launched a series of suicide bombing attacks to take the revenge for the assassination of Ayyash. On February 25, 1996, two suicide bombs exploded in Ashqelon and Jerusalem. On

March 3 and 4, two more suicide bombers detonated themselves in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. The total death toll in the incidents was about sixty (Nüsse, 2005: p. 124). Although the stated aim was to retaliate Ayyash's assassination, derailing the peace process by undermining the PNA and the Labor government under the leadership of Shimon Peres, the person who replaced Yitzhak Rabin, was also another motive of the attacks (Gunning, 2007: p. 211; Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 81). On the other hand, Peres blamed Arafat for the attacks and suspended the peace process (Smith, 2007: p. 469). He ordered the closure of the Palestinian territories and halted the negotiations for the Israeli redeployment from Hebron (Enderlin, 2003: p. 31). The PNA also launched another crackdown on Hamas (Tamimi, 2011: p. 195).

The escalation of the Hamas violence alarmed the US again for the future of the peace process. Four days after the suicide bombing attacks on February 25, the US Senate passed a resolution where it condemned the "terror attacks in Israel" (Congress.gov, July 1996, S. Res. 228). Following the second wave of attacks, this time the US House of Representatives passed a resolution on March 12. As well as condemning the terror attacks, this resolution urged Yasser Arafat to "apprehend and punish the perpetrators of terror attacks" and "eliminate the terrorist structure and terrorist activities of Hamas" (Congress.gov, July 1996, H. Con. Res. 149). The Clinton administration also secretly sent tens of millions of dollars to Arafat's paramilitary and intelligence organizations through the CIA to help him crush Hamas (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 41). Most importantly, following the attacks, Clinton called leaders of the world to organize an anti-terror summit (Nüsse, 2005: p. 124). On March 13, the Summit of Peacemakers took place in Sharm al-Sheikh, Egypt, in the presence of the leaders or representatives of twenty-seven countries (Shlaim, 2014), including Clinton, Peres and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (Enderlin, 2003: p. 34). In his speech, US President Clinton declared that the leaders expressed their support for the peace process and promised to fight terrorism (Tamimi, 2011: p. 88-89). He also called on the regional and international actors to "stop acts of terror". The summit was, in this regard, a declaration of war on Hamas by all (Schanzer, 2008: p. 45). Having perceived this declaration of war, Hamas immediately issued a communiqué where it claimed that its armed resistance was legitimate because of the unlawful Israeli occupation of

Palestinian lands and called the participant of the summit to adopt their “previous positions of demanding an immediate withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces and erasing all manifestations of occupation” (Hroub, 2002: p. 306-312). The summit led to the aggravation of the crackdown on Hamas by the PNA. Over one thousand Hamas members were detained and tortured in prisons, causing at least twenty-four deaths. Moreover, several social welfare institutions of Hamas were shut down (Tamimi, 2011: p. 195). Amidst the crackdown, Hamas launched protests against the PNA, accusing Arafat of doing the dirty work of Israel and collaborating with the US. It also complained about lack of democracy and denounced Arafat’s “dictatorship” (Nüsse, 2005: p. 124-127).

The latest crackdown severely weakened Hamas (Roy, 2011: p. 38). However, the Hamas assaults in February and March had such an immense effect on the peace process that Israel decided not to redeploy from Hebron (Enderlin, 2003: p. 39). Moreover, in the following months, it was revealed that Hamas also reached its aim of undermining the Labor government. On May 29, 1996, general elections were held in Israel and the Likud Party led by Benjamin Netanyahu obtained a narrow victory over Shimon Peres’ Labor Party (Enderlin, 2003: p. 41). The latest Hamas attacks was a significant factor for the horrified Israeli people to vote for Netanyahu, a right-wing hard-liner (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 195) Netanyahu had a security-first approach and slammed the Oslo Accords during his campaign for endangering Israel (Shlaim, 2014). He was also in favor of Israeli control of the lands, resources, security and foreign policy in the occupied territories. Furthermore, he was strictly rejecting any concessions in the major issues of the final status talks (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 195). Nevertheless, Netanyahu stated that he would not completely abandon the peace process and the negotiations with the PNA was conditional on total fulfillment of its obligations, especially in suppressing the violence by Hamas and Islamic Jihad (Shlaim, 2014), which was called a policy of “reciprocity” towards the Palestinians (Smith, 2007: p. 470).

Netanyahu coming to power was also a troublesome development for the Clinton administration which had expressed its support for Peres during the campaign period

(Smith, 2007: p. 470). This was so because Netanyahu had a hard-liner position towards the peace process and was skeptical of American involvement in Israel's relations with the Arabs. As a result, Clinton tried to find ways to continue the peace process with the new government. Having decided to increase its involvement as the broker of the process, in July 1996, Clinton hosted Netanyahu in the Oval Office in order to soften his position on the Oslo process (Quandt, 2005: p. 343). At the end of the meeting, Clinton and Netanyahu announced that they agreed on the point that the principle of "peace with security" was the best formula to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, they did not mention the principle of "land for peace" (Enderlin, 2003: p. 50). Netanyahu's rejection of an Israeli redeployment from Hebron and the bloody conflicts between the IDF and Palestinian forces following his decision to open an underground tunnel stretching from the Western Wall to the Dome of Rock led Clinton to hold another meeting to save the peace process (Enderlin, 2003: p. 53-58). In October; Clinton, Arafat, Netanyahu and King Hussein of Jordan came together in Washington resulting in a compromise on the continuation of talks for Israel's redeployment from Hebron (Quandt, 2005: p. 344-345).

By the end of 1996, even though the final status talks where the major issues would be settled had not even started yet, the peace process had already lost a significant amount of momentum. Hamas' attacks on Israel and the PNA's inability to eliminate Hamas' infrastructure permanently was an important factor for the Israeli side to lose confidence in the peace process. On the other hand, Israel and PNA's crackdowns and assassinations of Islamist figures from Hamas and Islamic Jihad increased the anger against Israel and the PNA. The expansion of Jewish settlements was another cause of resentment for the Palestinians. Between 1992 and 1996, the number of Jewish settlers seriously increased both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; which decreased the Palestinians' hopes for an independent Palestinian state (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 217-219). In that period, Israeli construction of roads and checkpoints, confiscation of Palestinian lands, homes and farms continued (Smith, 2007: p. 463-464; Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 1438). This means that the peace process did not eliminate the continuation and expansion of the occupation by the end of 1996. In the meantime, the broker of the peace process, the US, tried to keep the process alive but did not apply

any serious pressure on Israel to make concessions for peace (Christison, 1999: p. 293), but adopted and defended Israeli positions since the secret talks for the signing of the DOP (Christison, 1999: p. 275). As a result, when Clinton was reelected as president in late 1996, he was heavily supported by the Jewish voters (Quandt, 2005: p. 345). Regarding Hamas as the biggest obstacle on the Oslo process and prioritizing Israel's security, the Clinton administration preferred to contain Hamas rather than putting pressure on Israel to make concessions. On the other hand, Hamas was trying hard to spoil the process using a high level of violence, believing that armed resistance was the only way to liberation. It reached its aim to great extent and caused a lot of postponements and mistrust in the implementation of the process. However, its pragmatism prevented it from going too aggressive towards the US and the PNA.

3.2.4. Final Years of Oslo Process and Relative Hamas Quietness

On January 15, 1997, the PNA and Israel signed the Hebron Protocol after which Israel withdrew its troops from eighty percent of Hebron. The protocol also scheduled further Israeli redeployment in three phases from the Gaza Strip and West Bank until mid-1998 (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 438). An important point here was that American diplomat Dennis Ross added a "Note for the Record" in the protocol which stated that Israel would remain loyal to the Oslo II Accord on the basis of "reciprocity" (Quandt, 2005: p. 345). Similarly, Secretary of State Christopher sent Netanyahu a letter where he stated that Israel could decide the location and scope of further redeployments unilaterally to provide its security (Smith, 2007: p. 473-474; Aruri, 2003: p. 113). That is to say that the US accepted Netanyahu's policies of security and reciprocity. Moreover, in March, Netanyahu announced his plans to build 6,500 new housing units in East Jerusalem (Little, 2008: p. 302). In the UN Security Council, the US vetoed twice the resolutions against Israel's decision to construct new settlements. The UN General Assembly passed a resolution calling to stop all settlement activities in the occupied territories. Only three countries voted against: Israel, the US and Micronesia (Shlaim, 2014).

Hamas, on the other hand, had suspended its attacks for almost one year. That was partly because of its weakness as a result of the latest crackdown. However, the serious stalls in the process caused by the Netanyahu government also made Hamas think that military operations were now less necessary. There was now a degree of rapprochement between Hamas and the PNA stemming from the mistrust towards the Netanyahu government (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 77). Nevertheless, Hamas broke its silence on March 21. In a suicide bombing attack in Tel Aviv, three Israelis died and dozens wounded (Smith, 2007: p. 474). Hamas organized this attack in order to protest Netanyahu's policies of opening the tunnel under the Haram al-Sharif and constructing new settlements in East Jerusalem (Gunning, 2007: p. 214). To Mishal and Sela (2000), the attack was also a reaction to the continuing occupation and deteriorating economic conditions in the occupied territories (p. 77-78). In the months following the attack, the relationship between Israel and the PNA was tense and they made little progress in the negotiations (Quandt, 2005: p. 351) while Hamas continued its assaults on Israeli targets. On July 30, 1997, two suicide bombers from Hamas blew themselves up in Jerusalem, causing thirteen deaths and 170 injuries. On September 4, three Hamas members carried out another suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem, killing five Israeli civilians and wounding about 200 (Enderlin, 2003: p. 72). Hamas announced that the aim of the attacks was to block the Israeli settlement activities and the "Judaization" of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 78). The result was another paralysis in the talks between Israel and the PNA (Aruri, 2003: p. 115).

The US once again intervened in the talks for the process to continue. Madeleine Albright, the new Secretary of State of the Clinton administration, visited Israel in September (Quandt, 2005: p. 351) and supported the Israeli position that Arafat should try harder to cope with terrorism, but also said that Israel should stop its settlement expansion and land confiscation, which caused violence (Smith, 2007: p. 474). However, she also added, "There is no moral equivalence between killing people and building houses" (LoLordo, September 1997). The Netanyahu government did not halt settlement activities but Hamas faced another harsh wave of crackdown by the PNA, Israel and the US. To dismantle Hamas' infrastructure, the PNA closed down sixteen

Islamic institutions of Hamas, including *Mujamma* and *Jam'iyah* in September (Jensen, 2009: p. 25-26). Some of Hamas' political leaders were also arrested (Mishal & Sela, 2000: p. 78). In the same month, Israel's intelligence service Mossad attempted to assassinate Khaled Mashal, the Jordan-based leader of the Political Bureau of Hamas, by injecting a poison in his body. However, the operation failed and Jordanian officials arrested the Mossad agents. Mashal was hospitalized and King Hussein of Jordan convinced Netanyahu to send the antidote, which saved Mashal's life. Moreover, King Hussein also convinced Israel to release Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in return for the release of the Mossad agents. Thus, Sheikh Yassin's imprisonment of eight years was over (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 83-84). Nevertheless, the crackdown further weakened Hamas, forcing it to drastically reduce the frequency of its attacks and concentrate on social infrastructure works (Baconi, 2018: p. 34). In October, the Department of State of the US listed Hamas as a Foreign Terrorist Organization; which froze its assets in American financial institutions, banned the admission of its members to the US and prohibited to provide material support to Hamas (Counter Extremism Project, n.d.).

While the crackdown on Hamas continued, there was still no progress on the negotiations. As Netanyahu, who was already not keen on the peace process, refused to conduct redeployment as a result of Hamas attacks, the issue of PLO Charter and settlements led to the continuation of the prolonged stalemate (Enderlin, 2003: p. 80-84; Little, 2008: p. 303). Nevertheless, the Clinton administration still tried to break the stalemate by asking Netanyahu to implement the redeployments (Smith, 2007: p. 476) and even devising a plan that proposed an Israeli redeployment of another thirteen percent of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, Netanyahu rejected the plan and no agreement was reached until October (Quandt, 2005: p. 353). Needing a diplomatic success during the period of congressional election and the ongoing impeachment process, Clinton applied a serious pressure on Netanyahu for an agreement (Christison, 1999: p. 285). On October 23, 1998, Israel and the PNA signed the Wye River Memorandum. By this agreement, the PNA pledged to take further steps for Israel's security and revoke some parts of their charter. In return, Israel would make a series of redeployments and release a number of Palestinian prisoners. Then,

the final status talks would begin (Quandt, 2005: p. 353). The US also formally undertook the role of guaranteeing and monitoring the implementation of the agreement (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 1096). However, the agreement angered Hamas as the US would monitor the course of the agreement and the land transfer to the PNA was conditional on its combating terrorism. Then, Hamas and Islamic Jihad perpetrated other bombing attacks in the following days. In response, the PNA aggravated the crackdown, resulting in another loss of strength and another period of silence for Hamas (Roy, 2011: p. 39).

The PNA kept its promises by intensifying the crackdown and formally changing their charter in Clinton's visit of Gaza in December (Shlaim, 2014). Clinton had made this trip to Israel and Gaza to support the process (Quandt, 2005: p. 355). On the other hand, Israel had made a small handover of land in the West Bank to the PNA and released a number of prisoners after the agreement (Enderlin, 2003: p. 96-97). A few days after Clinton's visit, Netanyahu stated that the PNA should first do more for Israel's security (Quandt, 2005: p. 355-356) and suspended all the redeployments, which means, he once again pointed out the Hamas violence in order not to conduct redeployments. However, in the snap elections of May 1999, Ehud Barak's Likud Party came to power. Barak was in favor of the continuation of the peace process, however, also specifying the importance of caution (Shlaim, 2014). Barak's victory over the hard-liner Netanyahu was welcomed by the US and the prospects for peace increased (Quandt, 2005: p. 358-360). Hamas, on the other hand, maintained its usual position after the elections, putting forward that *jihad* was the only way to liberate the Palestinian territories. However, except for a few operations with little casualties, Hamas did not perpetrate any major violent attack until the Second Intifada that began in September 2000 (Baconi, 2018: p. 34-35; Schanzer, 2008: p. 47-48). In the meantime, increasing Israeli and American pressures led Jordan's new King Abdullah II to ban Hamas in the country and expel the top leaders of the organization. Then, Hamas' headquarters was moved to Syria (Baconi, 2018: p. 34; Kardelj, 2010: p. 37).

When the talks between Israel and the PNA restarted, Israel and the PNA signed the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum in Egypt on September 4, 1999. According to this

agreement, the final status talks that would settle the major issues would start no later than September 13, 1999. After the completion of a framework agreement within five months, the final settlement agreement would be signed by September 2000. The memorandum also proposed a timetable for additional Israeli redeployments from the West Bank and land transfers to PNA (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 115). In September 1999 and March 2000, even though behind the schedule, Israel made two stages of redeployment (Enderlin, 2003: p. 107-109). However, no progress was made on the final status talks as neither side was willing to make concessions on Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, the right of return of the Palestinian refugees and the borders of Palestine (Shlaim, 2014).

Perceiving the deadline approaching and having troubles with the opposition in the Knesset (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 227), Barak talked Clinton about holding a summit that would reach to a final settlement at once. Clinton agreed and also convinced Arafat to hold the summit even though Arafat first said the PNA was not ready and more time was needed for preparatory talks (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 132; Quandt, 2005: p. 364). Having limited days in presidency, Clinton also wanted to mark a historic peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 227). Thus, he arranged the time for the final status talks according to Barak's and his own schedule without considering Palestinian concerns (Christison, 1999: p. 301). Apart from that, Hamas reiterated its position on the ongoing process stating that every new chapter in that process was "a new temptation for Zionist intransigence" and justified this position by basing Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon on Hezbollah's armed struggle (Baconi, 2018: p. 35). Likewise, in one of its memorandums issued in June 2000, Hamas stated that all the agreements signed between Israel and the PLO contained unacceptable concessions for the Palestinians and were just designed to "liquidate the Palestinian issue", and legitimize and extend the occupation. Hamas also pointed out in the memorandum that the Palestinians could reach their liberty not "in the shade of weakness and capitulation" but "in the light of strength and steadfastness" (Tamimi, 2011: p. 281). When the PNA officials went to Washington for the summit, Sheik Yassin called the Palestinian delegation "to return to the resistance trench" (Baconi, 2018: p. 36).

On July 11, 2000, the Israeli officials and the PNA team convened in Washington under Clinton's mediation, thus the Camp David II Summit began (Quandt, 2005: p. 365-366). As a matter of fact, the summit was a set of offers to Arafat by Barak and Clinton where the latter presenting Israeli proposals together with Barak. In general terms, Barak and Clinton proposed an Israeli redeployment from ninety-one percent of the West Bank. However, that would not be a monolithic land but a cantonized one by settlements and roads annexed by Israel. In terms of Jerusalem, they offered a division but the Palestinians would not be sovereign on the Old City and the site of al-Aqsa Mosque. Israel would also annex the places where its settlements were located in East Jerusalem. Israel's proposal for the right of return for refugees for only a limited number of people was another point that did not meet the expectations of the Palestinians. Israel would also continue its control on the Palestinian economy. As a result, not satisfied by the offers, Arafat rejected the proposals and no settlement was reached in the summit that lasted two weeks (Smith, 2007: p. 503-509; Baconi, 2018: p. 36; Roy, 2007: p. 246-248). Even though Arafat was asked for large concessions regarding the major issues while Israel was to make only modest ones, Clinton blamed Arafat for the failure of the summit (Smith, 2007: p. 509). Thus, the Oslo Process ended without any Palestinian statehood, which was an important cause of the outbreak of the Second Intifada where Hamas would reappear. After the summit, Hamas called the PNA to join the Palestinian people to carry out a jihadist struggle (Baconi, 2018: p. 36).

During the whole Oslo process, the Clinton administration performed a pro-Israel policy and did not object to Israel's claims except for a few incidents. It prioritized Israel's security throughout the process, as a result of which, containing radical Hamas became its biggest concern and it did not ask Israel to make any major concessions. However, both the Camp David II Summit and the final status talks preceding it showed that Hamas' attacks were not the only problem, as the parties already had very different positions on many issues. Meanwhile, the occupation became more ingrained: Between 1993 and 2000, the number of the settlements almost doubled, the road network built on confiscated Palestinian lands also largely expanded and further

restrictions were put on the movement of the Palestinians (Smith, 2007: p. 500-501); which was another reason for the outbreak of the Second Intifada.

CHAPTER 4

HAMAS AND US POLICIES DURING THE SECOND INTIFADA AND PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

4.1. Period of Second Intifada

4.1.1. The Intifada

By the summer of 2000, the Palestinian public was in a serious discomfort. As the Oslo process of seven years failed to bring about a sovereign and independent Palestinian state, the Palestinians were heavily frustrated and lost a lot of confidence in the process. Besides, the absence of a favorable resolution regarding the major issues; namely refugees, borders, Israeli settlements and Jerusalem, was a great cause of resentment for the Palestinian people. Let alone reaching a fair resolution, the problems on these issues had deepened and Israeli occupation become even harder in the years of Oslo (Hroub, 2006: p. 48-49). Moreover, the continuing and expanding occupation led to a deterioration in the life quality and economic conditions of the Palestinian people (Baconi, 2018: p. 37). Finally, the Palestinians were sickened by the PNA's ineptitude. Its failure to establish viable institutions, continuing corruption and growing authoritarianism led to a high level of discontent against the PNA in the Palestinian public (Roy, 2007: p. 215).

Following the failure at the Camp David II Summit, the talks between the PNA and Israel continued. The US was devising its new peace plan in these days and not involved in these talks. Throughout the summer of 2000, the parties maintained the negotiations but no serious development took place (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 147-148),

which brought the Palestinians closer to an explosion. The last straw for the Palestinians was Likud's new hardliner leader Ariel Sharon's controversial visit to the Haram al-Sharif on September 28 accompanied by approximately one thousand Israeli police officers and soldiers. As a figure of hatred among the Palestinians, by visiting the Islamic holy place on the fifth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo II Accord, Sharon aimed to demonstrate his objection to land transfer to the PNA and to any concession regarding the major issues. The next day, the Palestinians who were angered by Sharon's visit launched violent protests after the Friday prayer. They threw stones to the Israeli soldiers and praying Jews in the Western Wall. The IDF fired into the crowd with live ammunition and killed four Palestinians (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 168-169). In the following days, the violence spread in Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, receiving a brutal response from the Israeli forces (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 248). Unlike the First Intifada, the protests very quickly turned into a very bloody storm of armed conflicts where the IDF, the PPF, Fatah's new armed factions such as "Tanzim" and the "Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades", and Islamist organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad were involved (Baconi, 2018: p. 37-38).

4.1.2. Policies in the Early Times of the Intifada

From the early days of the uprising, the US sought to appease the situation which was becoming more tragic day by day. The Clinton administration's efforts to bring Barak and Arafat together to end the conflicts and resume high-level negotiations resulted in the Sharm al-Sheikh Summit on October 16, in the presence of President Clinton, King Abdullah II of Jordan, Hosni Mubarak, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and EU representatives (Quandt, 2005: p. 373-374). In the Sharm al-Sheikh Summit, the parties pledged to make statements calling for an end to the violence, join in an international fact-finding committee to identify the causes of the violence, and to return to the negotiation table. However, no tangible outcome was achieved in the negotiations between Israel and the PNA following the summit (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 170).

In the meantime, George W. Bush from the Republican Party obtained a very narrow victory in the presidential elections in the US (Quandt, 2005: p. 374-375). In his last days in office, Clinton maintained his pro-Israeli policies and statements. On December 23, he made his last move for a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and presented his vision of a two-state solution to the Israeli and Palestinian delegations in the White House. His plan, known as the “Clinton Parameters”, envisaged a Palestinian state in all of the Gaza Strip and between ninety-four and ninety-six percent of the West Bank, as well as a land swap of one to three percent to this new state. For the Palestinian refugees, the Parameters identified different options: In the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and areas transferred to the Palestinian State through land swaps all the refugees would be welcome; while Israel and other countries would have to right to accept or decline the refugees (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 150). For Jerusalem, the Parameters proposed a Palestinian sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods including the Muslim and Christian parts of the Old City and the Haram al-Sharif. Israel, on the other hand, would enjoy sovereignty over the Jewish quarter and would maintain its control over the Western Wall and the Temple Mount (Quandt, 2005: p. 375). On the issues of settlement and security, the Clinton Parameters offered an Israeli annexation of eighty percent of the settlement areas and an Israeli withdrawal over three years. The State of Palestine would be non-militarized but it would have a strong security force. In addition, an international security force would also be inserted in this new state in order to to safeguard Palestinian sovereignty and Israeli security (Eisenberg & Caplan, 2010: p. 249).

According to Avi Shlaim (2014), in spite of its detailed nature, the Clinton Parameters had many ambiguities regarding the major issues and many points needed to be clarified (Ch. 17, Sect. The Clinton Parameters, para. 5). As a result, the parties had reservations about it. Israel initially accepted the plan as a “basis of discussion” (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 149) but Barak later stated that Israel would never accept any Palestinian sovereignty over the Temple Mount and the right of return of the Palestinian refugees to Israel (Israel MFA, PM Barak - Israel Has Proven its Commitment to Peace, n.d.). Arafat had also reservations about the right of return of the refugees, Israeli airspace over the State of Palestine and Israeli sovereignty over

the whole of the Western Wall (Quandt, 2005: p. 377). Similar to the case at the Camp David II Summit, Clinton blamed Arafat for the reservations on his Parameters, ignoring Barak's clear rejection of the plan in order to save him from internal criticism (Shlaim, 2014). Nevertheless, the Parameters stayed on the agenda for a time. In the Taba Summit that took place in January 21-27, 2001, the parties took the Clinton Parameters as the basis for the talks and made some progress to find a common ground on the major issues. (Pressman, 2003: p. 9).

On the other hand, Hamas leaders regarded the uprising as a divine intervention that derailed the peace process. In its publications, Hamas portrayed the uprising as a new phase in the Palestinian nationalism that started after the demise of the PNA's futile peace process. To Hamas, the Intifada proved the rightness of its armed resistance. A remarkable point was that Hamas specified the aim of the Intifada as ending the occupation rather than annihilating Israel, continuing its discourse of the mid-1990s. This aim was confirmed by Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi who stated that the Intifada could end the occupation just like the Lebanon case and a *hudna* could be reached. In this way, the occupation would come to an end and the complete liberation of Palestine would be postponed to a later time (Baconi, 2018: p. 38-41).

At the same time, the Second Intifada was a big opportunity for Hamas to revive after a few years of silence. Arafat's efforts for a national unity for the Intifada was a factor that helped Hamas to recuperate its strength. In the early days of the Intifada, Hamas was represented in a meeting of the PLO factions chaired by Arafat. After that meeting, about 350 Hamas and Islamic Jihad members were released from the PNA prisons (Baconi, 2018: p. 37). Another important factor which helped Hamas revive was that Israel held the PNA responsible for the escalation of violence and organized military operations against its institutions which led a political, social and economic vacuum. Hamas exploited this vacuum and reasserted itself as an important actor in the Palestinian politics (Natil, 2015: p. 38-39). A third factor was the corruption of the Fatah-led PNA, which facilitated Hamas' rise among the Palestinians as an organization closer to the wishes of the Palestinian people (Jensen, 2009: p. 38). Therefore, as happened in the First Intifada, Hamas began to shake the position of

Fatah in the Palestinian politics. It joined in the umbrella organization composed of different Palestinian groups named National and Islamic Higher Committee for the Follow-Up of the Intifada and became an important component of this organization. In that period, Hamas also accelerated its militarization to catch up with Fatah's Tanzim and the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades (Berti, 2013: p. 108), as it was still weak in military terms due to the crackdowns in the late 1990s, which forced it to use lighter methods for a certain time (Baconi, 2018: p. 38).

4.1.3. President Bush and Policies Until 9/11

In January 2001, President George W. Bush took office in the US. A key characteristic of the new president was that he was heavily influenced by neoconservative ideas, and neoconservative figures were already important components of his team. Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Paul Wolfowitz and Elliot Abrams were some of the famous apologists of neoconservative thought in the Bush administration. According to the neoconservative mindset, the US should use its power to spread American values of democracy and freedom in the world instead of using international institutions, international law and alliances. Hence, the neoconservatives had an agenda of democratic transformation in the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East such as Iraq and Syria rather than conducting diplomacy with them. Likewise, regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they thought that the problem could not be resolved through peace processes or diplomacy, but through American power and collaboration with the democratic and strongest party which happened to be Israel (Quandt, 2005: p. 387). On the other hand, most neoconservatives thought of militant Islamism as a physical security threat to the US. Therefore, on the groups such Hamas, Al Qaeda and Hezbollah, the neoconservatives had a very negative stance and viewed them all as terrorist threats that should be eliminated through spread of democratic values in the Middle East (Lynch, 2008: p. 192-193). Two important representatives of neoconservatism, David Frum and Richard Perle (2003) even equated Islamist militant groups with Communism and Nazism:

Like communism, this [militant Islamic] ideology perverts the language of justice and equality to justify oppression and murder. Like Nazism,

it exploits the injured pride of once-mighty nations. Like both communism and Nazism, militant Islam is opportunistic - it works willingly with all manner of unlikely allies, as the communists and Nazis worked with each other against the democratic West. (p. 43).

Under the influence of neoconservative ideas, in the early months of his presidency, President Bush chose to follow a more hands-off policy agenda regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Quandt, 2005: p. 387). An example of this new policy was that no Americans were present in the Taba Summit (Enderlin, 2003: p. 348). Similarly, in his early days in the office, Bush stated that the new administration would correct the imbalances of the previous administration and tilt back towards Israel (Maoz, August 2012), instead of forcing a peace (Quandt, 2005: p. 390). On a possible increasing Israeli violence towards the Palestinians, Bush said that sometimes “a show of strength by one side” could correct things (Khalil, December 2008). In February, this policy of the US was strengthened by the landslide victory of the Likud Party led by Ariel Sharon in Israeli snap elections. As well as his notoriety for his role in the massacres during the Lebanese Civil War, Sharon was a fervent nationalist championing the vision of Greater Israel. Naturally, he was against the Oslo process and concessions to the Palestinians on the major issues (Shlaim, 2014). Following Sharon’s electoral victory, the Bush administration declared that the Clinton Parameters was no longer US policy (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 157). Thus, the short-lived optimistic vibe in Taba came to an end.

The indifference of the Bush administration led the conflicts to deteriorate. Soon after his election, Sharon launched a bloody and destructive military offensive into the occupied territories, allegedly in order to provide Israel’s security. Having completed its militarization and already disliking Sharon, Hamas regarded this offensive as the last straw and it perpetrated its first suicide bombing attack since the beginning of the Intifada on March 4, 2001, killing three and wounding sixty-six. It also began to fire “Qassam Rockets” from the occupied territories into the Israeli settlement areas and Israel. In these days, Hamas declared its policy of “balance of terror” which referred to its retaliatory attacks against Israel killing women, children and the elderly. On the other hand, in that period, Israel was targeting PNA institutions rather than Hamas as it held the PNA responsible for the violence (Baconi, 2018: p. 41-45).

Following the increasing violence, President Bush began to voice his support for Sharon without getting involved in the conflict and stated that Sharon's struggle was against terrorism. Moreover, he was holding Arafat responsible for the violence of the Intifada while meeting with Sharon in the White House (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 172). The Bush administration even vetoed a UNSC resolution that proposed the formation of an unarmed international observer force to protect the civilian population in the occupied territories (Aruri, 2003: p. 180). Therefore, the violence by both the IDF and the Palestinian armed groups further escalated and the death toll increased. Upon this, the non-neoconservative Secretary of State Colin Powell convinced the President to try to end the violence and quit the hands-off policy (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 159). On April 30, the fact-finding committee that was formed after the Sharm al-Sheikh Summit submitted its report, known as the Mitchell Report, to President Bush. Underlining that five hundred people had died since the beginning of the Intifada, the report urged the PNA to do its best to curb the Palestinian violence and Israel to stop its settlement activities (Little, 2008: p. 305). The report did not put all the blame on the PNA or Israel for the emergence of the Intifada and stated that a return to the peace process was possible if these recommendations were implemented (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 177). The Bush administration endorsed the report, while Arafat and Sharon accepted its prescriptions reluctantly and with reservations (Quandt, 2005: p. 392).

Hamas was critical of the Mitchell Report. It rejected Israel and the Palestinians acting concurrently for a ceasefire, arguing that the conflict was between an occupier and an occupied, not two warring parties. In its publications, Hamas condemned this "equalization of power" and stated that the violence could only end if the occupation itself ended. As a result, believing in its necessity to end the occupation, Hamas perpetrated other assaults against Israel aiming to spoil any peace process that the Mitchell Report could bring. Between May and July 2001, Hamas carried out five suicide bombing attacks, more than the total number of bombings carried out by the other Palestinian factions (Baconi, 2018: p. 41-45). In the meantime, the Bush administration had been intensifying its efforts for the implementation of the Mitchell report in order to reach a ceasefire. However, the increasing violence and Sharon's

demands for an absolute ending of the Palestinian violence before diplomacy was preventing it from being successful (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 159-160).

In July, Hamas' Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades made a joint statement with Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades demanding the end of the Israeli persecution against the Palestinians and an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. In return, they pledged to end their operation within the territories of Israel. That is to say, they reiterated their acceptance of *hudna* in exchange for a return to pre-1967 borders. However, Sharon sought to maintain Israel's tight military grip until an absolute calm was reached (Baconi, 2018: p. 45-46). Besides, a return to pre-1967 borders was unthinkable for the Sharon government. As a result, Israel's response to Hamas' offer was to assassinate two important figures of Hamas, Jamal Salim and Jamal Mansur, which was the first case that Israel assassinated the leaders from the political wing of Hamas (Baconi, 2018: p. 45-46; Tamimi, 2011: p. 201). Following the assassinations, Hamas once again stated that the Palestinian people would continue their *jihad* regardless of their sacrifices and *jihad* was the only way to victory and liberation (Murgia, 2018: p. 206). In these days, Hamas' popularity also rose dramatically against Fatah. For the first time since the signing of the Oslo Accords of 1993, the polls showed that more Palestinians in the Gaza Strip supported Hamas than Fatah as a result of the frustration caused by the maladministration of the Fatah-led PNA (Jensen, 2009: p. 38). On August 9, Hamas carried out a suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem resulting in fifteen deaths and more than ninety injuries, which was both a retaliation for the assassinations and a spoiler for the efforts for a return to diplomacy. This assault prompted Israel to increase the attacks against the PNA institutions and invade the West Bank city of Jenin (Baconi, 2018: p. 46-47).

After Hamas' attack in Jerusalem, Bush condemned the assault and said, "Nothing is gained through cowardly acts such as this. The deliberate murder of innocent civilians is abhorrent to all, a threat to peace and inconsistent with the parties' signed agreements to put aside violence." (CNN International, August 2001). He also blamed the Palestinians for the violence and supported Sharon saying that Israelis would not negotiate under terrorist threat, contradicting the Mitchell Report and efforts for

ceasefire. However, Saudi Arabia's crown prince Abdullah wrote a letter to Bush urging the US to do more for a peace in the region for the continuation of the ties between them and the US (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 160-161). Bush sent a reply to Abdullah where he stated that the US was committed to a peace settlement. He even wrote, "I firmly believe the Palestinian people have a right to self-determination and to live peacefully and safely in their own state" (Barbalat, n.d.). However, as Kurtzer et al. (2013) stated, this letter was written in order to appease the Saudis rather than expressing a genuine American sympathy or readiness for a sovereign Palestinian state (p. 161). This means that despite American calls and efforts to end the violence, the Bush administration was still letting Sharon continue its violence and destroy the PNA, which facilitated Hamas' rise in the social and political area.

4.1.4. 9/11 and After

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 had a very important effect on American foreign policy. After that incident, President Bush launched a global war on terror (Shlaim, 2014). In one of his speeches following the attacks, Bush emphasized that the US would make no distinction between the terrorists and those who harbored them. He also described the American war on terror would be a "lengthy campaign" which may include "dramatic strikes" or "covert operations" and they would cut the funding of the terrorists and pursue nations that provide "aid or safe haven to terrorism" (The Washington Post, September 2001). In a couple of weeks, the US formed a coalition and launched a war against Afghanistan.

The effect of the 9/11 attacks on the Israeli/Palestinian conflict manifested itself as a continuous American support to Israel in its operations against the PNA and Hamas. The PNA condemned the attacks but Sharon lost no time to present the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an Israeli anti-terror campaign. Just two days after the 9/11 attacks, he said to Colin Powell, "Arafat is our Bin Laden" (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 90). Bush embraced the Israeli position and increased his support to Israeli operations after the 9/11 attacks. For instance, the assassination of the Minister of Tourism of Israel in October by a Palestinian armed faction other than Hamas

prompted Israel to start another offensive against the West Bank. The Bush administration did not object to the operation asserting that it was as an Israeli self-defense against terror (Baconi, 2018: p. 48). Nevertheless, in his speech he gave at the UN in November, he also once again expressed his recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination and statehood (The White House, November 2001). A couple of days later, Powell further clarified the Bush administration's position on the two-state solution in his speech calling for the end of the occupation in accordance with the UN resolutions 242 and 338, as well as urging Israel to accept a viable State of Palestine where the Palestinians live in dignity and security (Voice of America, October 2009). However, Kurtzer et al. (2013) think that, similar to the letter sent to Abdullah, these speeches were just stated policies rather than a real commitment to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in such a way (p. 163).

The day the 9/11 attacks were carried out, Sheik Yassin said, "No doubt this is a result of injustice the US practices against the weak in the world." (CNN International, September 2001). However, in a statement it issued one week after the 9/11 attacks, Hamas condemned the incident (Murgia, 2018: p. 200). Nonetheless, in the same statement, Hamas called on Arab and Islamic countries not to give any support to the American war on terror asserting that such a war would disrupt the *umma* (Murgia, 2018: p. 139). On the other hand, after the attacks, the US put Hamas in the same bag with al-Qaeda and began to reflect it as just a part of the global terror, fulfilling the Israeli requests to ignore the national liberation dimension of the organization (Hroub, 2006: p. 111). For example, Bush issued the Executive Order 13224 authorizing the US to act domestically and in cooperation with international actors to block the activities and the financing of a list of specially designated global terrorist persons and organizations. Hamas was added in this list in October. The Hamas-affiliated Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development was also included in the list in the following months (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 42). The US also froze two Hamas-linked financial institutions: the al-Aqsa International Bank and the Beit al-Mal Holdings Company (Levitt, 2006: p. 214-215). Likewise, the EU drew up its own terror list in December and included Hamas' armed wing Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades in that list (Jensen, 2009: p. 38). The American and Israeli lobbying efforts

were critical for the EU to take this decision (Kardelj, 2010: p. 45). In the meantime, the latest Israeli offensive led Hamas to launch another wave of suicide bombings, together with Islamic Jihad. Hamas carried out eight attacks between October and December (Baconi, 2018: p. 48). Under international pressure, the PNA attempted to apply another crackdown on Hamas, but it was too weak to dismantle the infrastructure of Hamas (Berti, 2013: p. 109). Eventually, Hamas declared a unilateral short-term ceasefire in December following another Israeli offensive with airstrikes aiming at the PNA institutions and a military mobilization near the headquarters of the PNA which led to the confinement of Arafat. Hamas explained this decision as a measure “not to give the enemy the chance to undo the Palestinian front” (Baconi, 2018: p. 49).

On January 3, 2002, Israeli naval forces captured the ship *Karine A* in the Red Sea. The ship was loaded with fifty tons of lethal weapons and, according to Israel, was sailing from Iran to the PNA. Even though Arafat denied any PNA involvement, this incident led President Bush to embrace further the Israeli idea of sidelining Arafat, with whom he was not already in good terms (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 95). The incident also was a factor for Bush to include Iran in the “axis of evil”, a term referring to the countries allegedly with WMDs, together with North Korea and Iraq in his famous speech in January 2002 (Smith, 2007: p. 514). Hamas and Islamic Jihad were also mentioned in this speech:

Our military has put the terror training camps of Afghanistan out of business, yet camps still exist in at least a dozen countries. A terrorist underworld - including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed - operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities. (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008: p. 105).

Therefore, the Bush administration supported the new offensives launched by Israel into the West Bank in February and March. The offensives were against Hamas to a large extent. According to Tareq Baconi (2018), the targeting of Hamas by Israel was a sign that the importance of the organization increased during the Intifada (p. 50-52). In the meantime, the US diplomats were in the region looking for a ceasefire but the situation was very tense (Quandt, 2005: p. 397).

In March, Saudi Arabia offered a peace plan known as the Arab Peace Initiative proposing a Palestinian state within pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital. The PNA accepted to negotiate the plan and the meeting was held on March 27 among the Arab leaders. However, Hamas was opposing the API as it included Palestinian concessions such as recognizing Israel. As a result, it decided to derail the API with an assault (Baconi, 2018: p. 52-53). On the same day the meeting was held, Hamas perpetrated one of the deadliest attacks in its history: A suicide bomber detonated himself in the Israeli city of Netanya, killing thirty Israeli civilians (Berti, 2013: p. 109). This attack prompted Israel to reoccupy the PNA-controlled major Palestinian cities on March 29 under the name of Operation Defensive Shield with the declared aim of dismantling the terror infrastructures (Shlaim, 2014). However, the operation once again targeted and destroyed the PNA institutions rather than Hamas or the other organizations, even the PNA headquarters in Ramallah was demolished. Moreover, hundreds of Palestinians were killed, thousands were detained and the homes of thousands were demolished (Baconi, 2018: p. 53). The Bush administration supported the operation and did not do anything serious to restrain Israeli operations as the key American officials and President Bush were appalled by Hamas' attack (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 167). In his memoir, on Israeli operation, Bush writes, "My views came into sharper focus after 9/11. If the United States had the right to defend itself and prevent future attacks, other democracies had those rights, too." (Bush, 2010: 401-402). In one of his speeches in April, Bush reiterated his support to Israel's right to defend itself and scapegoated Arafat for what was happening, claiming that he was not fulfilling his obligations to confront the terrorists (The White House, April 2002).

On the other hand, even though Hamas likened the ongoing Israeli violence to "Nazi massacres" in one of its statements (Murgia, 2018: p. 206), it was, in fact, content with the escalation of the violence as it dropped the API from the agenda and destroyed the PNA institutions, which further strengthened Hamas' position for the leadership of the Palestinian politics (Berti, 2013: p. 109-110). Hamas' view of the operation was summarized by Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi: "The continued presence of the occupation means the continued presence of resistance" (Baconi, 2018: p. 53). Furthermore, the growing support for Hamas against Fatah once again made the organization think

about challenging Fatah in the parliament (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 105). That is to say that the American support to Israeli violence was now further raising the strength and reputation of Hamas among the Palestinians. Besides, Hamas' efforts to derail the peace initiatives brought more US-supported Israeli violence, creating a cycle of violence and popularity for Hamas.

4.1.5. Road Map for Peace and Assassination of Hamas Leaders

Secretary of State Powell's efforts to build a broad international consensus for a ceasefire and resume negotiations led to the formation of the "Middle East Quartet" including the US, the EU, the UN and Russia in April. The Quartet began to work in the following days to produce international policies for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 168). In the meantime, Israel began to build a security barrier in the West Bank with the stated aim of protecting itself from the suicide bombing attacks. However, this security wall also established new borders for the country and led to the expropriation of more Palestinian lands, contradicting the American discourses of the two-state solution. The US directed limited criticism to Israel and did not do anything else to stop the Israeli government from constructing the barrier (Shlaim, 2014). In one of their meetings at that time, Bush even declared Sharon "a man of peace" from whom he learnt new things each time (Aruri, 2003: p. 205).

On June 24, 2002, Bush gave an important speech in the Rose Garden of the White House. In this speech, ignoring Powell's warnings and accepting the advices of the neoconservatives such as Rumsfeld and Cheney, Bush declared his full embracement of the Israeli idea that the Palestinians needed a new leadership other than Arafat, which would fight terrorism and carry out reforms (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008: 133-138; Quandt, 2005: p. 398). In return for this change that would provide Israel's security, Bush promised to "support the creation of a Palestinian state, whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement in the Middle East" (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008: 133-138). On the other hand, Bush also stated that Israel must stop settlement construction and withdraw from the territories

reoccupied during the Intifada. On Hamas, Islamic Jihad and their international supporters, he said:

Every nation actually committed to peace will stop the flow of money, equipment and recruits to terrorist groups seeking the destruction of Israel - including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Hezbollah. Every nation actually committed to peace must block the shipment of Iranian supplies to these groups, and oppose regimes that promote terror, like Iraq. And Syria must choose the right side in the war on terror by closing terrorist camps and expelling terrorist organizations. (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008: 135-136).

In a meeting that brought many secular and Islamic Palestinian groups to discuss the recent events, Hamas stated that it rejected such an “Americanized reform”. Nevertheless, it suspended its attacks for a certain time. However, in that period, Israel launched an assassination campaign against Hamas and Islamic Jihad leaders. It assassinated Salah Shehade on July 22, one of the founding fathers of Hamas and the leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Baconi, 2018: p. 55). Hamas announced the assassination as such: “With the green light from America, and under the Arabic, Islamic and international silence, the Zionist authorities committed a new crime” (Murgia, 2018: p. 130). Then, violence burst again in the following months. As well as the struggle against Israel, there was also conflicts among Hamas and Fatah as Hamas resisted the reform process (Baconi, 2018: p. 55-56). In October, the US issued the draft version of a peace plan proposing a two-state solution, known as the Road Map for Peace, with the support of the Quartet (Tucker & Roberts, 2008: p. 1486-1487). As the US-led Quartet stipulated that an initial period of silence was necessary before the implementation of the plan, the US urged Egypt to broker negotiations among different Palestinian groups. In these talks that lasted a few months, Fatah tried to convince Hamas to accept suspending its attacks for three months in return for Israel stopping the assassinations. However, the talks failed as Hamas did not accept to stop its attacks against Israel and insisted that *jihad* would continue (Schanzer, 2008: p. 73-75).

As well as adopting a provisional constitution and following a reform program prescribed by the Quartet (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 176), when the US was preparing to

launch the Iraq War in March 2003, the PNA announced the assignation of a prime minister: Mahmoud Abbas, a prominent and moderate figure of Fatah. Thus, the governmental reform in the Palestinian politics took place (Quandt, 2005: p. 401). On April 30, the Quartet officially issued the Road Map. It was a performance-based plan that required both the PNA and Israel to act simultaneously in three phases: The first phase required the PNA to stop all violence unconditionally and carry out further political reforms. Israel would also withdraw from all the reoccupied areas since the beginning of the Intifada and freeze all the settlement activity (Shlaim, 2014). In the second phase, an independent State of Palestine would be created and it would have provisional borders, attributes of sovereignty, elections and strong institutions (Quandt, 2005: p. 402). The third phase referred to the period in which the major issues would be resolved permanently by the end of 2005 (Shlaim, 2014). The PNA accepted the plan, so did Israel but with serious reservations regarding the refugees and settlements, which were very critical issues for the Palestinians (Roy, 2007: p. 229-230). Nonetheless, the parties continued with the plan reluctantly (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 107).

Unsurprisingly, the Road Map angered Hamas as it thought that armed resistance was the only way of ending the occupation and the PNA pledged to stop all the military activities. However, Hamas did not refuse to get involved in ceasefire negotiations as the organization was weakened by targeted assassinations and it was believed that *hudna* would be beneficial for the Palestinian public (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 107). Moreover, Hamas' conditions for a *hudna* was, only this time, not an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories but more modest ones such as Israel releasing prisoners and stopping targeted assassinations (Baconi, 2018: p. 58).

In order to launch the Road Map formally, Bush went to the Middle East in early June. He first went to Egypt where he met with Arab leaders including Abbas (Quandt, 2005: p. 403). Then, he went to Jordan to participate in the Aqaba Summit together with Sharon, Abbas and the King Abdullah II of Jordan (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 179). In the summit, Abbas stated his commitment to ending the violence and adopting peaceful means for Palestinian goals, while Sharon agreed to remove settlement

“outposts” and to support a State of Palestine with “territorial contiguity” (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 177). In the summit, Abbas stated that a ceasefire agreement with Hamas was near and he needed Israeli cooperation for that. However, in the following days, Israel did not cooperate but attempted to assassinate Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi. Hamas retaliated with a suicide bombing attack the following day. Nevertheless, the talks between Abbas and Hamas continued and culminated in Hamas’ acceptance of a *hudna* for ninety days on June 29 in return for the demands mentioned above. Hamas underlined that *hudna* was unilateral and did not mean its acceptance of the Road Map (Baconi, 2018: p. 59-60). However, Israel complied with the conditions of neither the Road Map nor *hudna*. It freed some prisoners and dismantled some checkpoints, but continued its targeted assassinations, settlement activities, demolition of houses, curfews and other restrictions, as it was reluctant for both the Road Map and *hudna* (Shlaim, 2014). Therefore, violence escalated again.

On August 15, Israel assassinated a leader of Islamic Jihad, another party of *hudna*. In response, Hamas carried out a bloody suicide bombing attack in Jerusalem. Then, Israel assassinated Abu Shanab, one of the most important figures of Hamas and the person behind Hamas’s acceptance of a *hudna*. Thus, the short-lived *hudna* came to an end (Baconi, 2018: p. 60). In that period, the US did not apply any pressure on Israel to keep its promises (Shlaim, 2014), but put six Hamas leaders including Sheikh Yassin, Khaled Mashal and Musa Abu Marzuq in the list of Specially Designated Global Terrorists on August 22. It froze their assets and prohibited its citizens to make financial transactions with them (Levitt, 2006: p. 215; Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 42). Similarly, the EU, another component of the Quartet, designated Hamas as a whole as a terrorist organization in September (La Guardia, September 2003).

On September 6, having failed to convince the parties to stop violence, Abbas resigned. The same day, Israel carried out an attempt to assassinate Sheikh Yassin but only wounded him. A few days later, Mahmoud Zahar was targeted but he also survived. In the following days, violence continued (Baconi, 2018: p. 61). By the end of 2003, the Palestinian public did not favor Fatah anymore due to its administrative weaknesses. Hamas exploited the spaces that the PNA could not fill in both the civilian

and security areas, thus enhancing its base of support (Milton-Edwards & Crooke, 2004: p. 41). Apart from that, Hamas was suffering from Israel's military operations and its targeted assassinations, both of which forced Hamas to declare unilateral ceasefires (Baconi, 2018: p. 61). However, the targeted assassinations was also a factor behind the rising reputation of Hamas in the Palestinian public. As a result of the extension of its base of support thanks to the US-supported Israeli violence, Hamas leaders were convinced that *jihad* could continue in a different form: by challenging Fatah politically, as Mahmoud Zahar stated in early 2003 that Hamas was "absolutely" ready to replace Arafat and take over leadership of the Palestinians "politically, financially, and socially" (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 239). That is to say that the American support to Israel for destroying the PNA and targeting Hamas leaders not only helped Hamas rise and eclipse Fatah, but also convinced it to think about carrying out its struggle in the political area.

By late 2003, it was obvious that the Road Map would not be successful because of Israeli infringements and Palestinian retaliatory attacks. Nevertheless, Sharon took further steps to sideline the Road Map: After informing the US in November, Sharon announced his plan to disengage from the whole of the Gaza Strip in December (Smith, 2007: p. 526). This disengagement referred to a total Israeli evacuation of this region through both military withdrawal and dismantling of the settlements (Ghanem, 2010: p. 30). Increasing Palestinian population and continuous attacks from Hamas and Islamic Jihad had made the Gaza Strip too costly for Israel. However, the most important motives for Sharon to make such a concession was to get American support for annexing the Israeli settlements in the West Bank permanently (Tamimi, 2011: p. 205) and make sure that the US would not put pressure on Israel for the right of return of the Palestinian refugees in any final status talks (Quandt, 2005: p. 406). The Bush administration was initially hesitant about the unusual Israeli disengagement plan, but it embraced the plan in the following months with little changes such as adding a symbolic withdrawal from a few settlement blocs in the West Bank as well (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 179-180). Hamas, on the other hand, was aware that the disengagement plan aimed to consolidate the occupation of the West Bank, which would make a Palestinian state within pre-1967 borders impossible. Hamas underlined that Israel's

disengagement did not mean liberation but it still celebrated the decision of disengagement and was quick to reflect it as a victory of its armed resistance (Baconi, 2018: p. 65-66).

In early 2004, Israel's assassination campaign continued. On March 22, 2004, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was assassinated in Gaza together with nine bystanders while returning home from a mosque where he performed his early morning prayer (Baroud, 2006: p. 96-97). The IDF carried out the assassination through a missile strike from a helicopter (Schanzer, 2008: p. 80). The assassination was condemned internationally by many countries from the Muslim World and the West. The EU also condemned the assassination for being extra-judicial (Al Jazeera, March 2004). However, the US refrained from condemning the incident. Bush expressed his support for Israel's right to defend itself and said he would have done the same thing to the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks if he had known about it beforehand (Baconi, 2018: p. 67-68). Furthermore, the US vetoed a UN resolution condemning the assassination (CNN International, May 2004). As well as mourning its founder and spiritual leader in its publications (Baconi, 2018: p. 67-68), these developments prompted Hamas to criticize harshly and even threaten the US. Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, who replaced Sheikh Yassin as the leader of Hamas in Gaza, said, "Bush is the enemy of God, the enemy of Islam, an enemy of Muslims" and "America declared war against God. Sharon declared war against God and God declared war against America, Bush and Sharon" (CNN International, May 2004). Musa Abu Marzuq also stated, "We have never targeted an American target or American interests despite its hostility. Until now we did not. I am talking about now. In the future, God knows." (ADL, May 2011). Finally, in one of their statements, Hamas stated,

The Zionists didn't carry out their operation without getting the consent of the terrorist American Administration, and it must take responsibility for this crime. All the Muslims of the world will be honored to join in on the retaliation for this crime. (ADL, May 2011).

However, Hamas perpetrated no suicide bombing attacks on American or Israeli targets as it was weakened by Israeli operations, the PNA's crackdowns and the

sanctions of the US and the EU (Baconi, 2018: p. 69). Besides, the longstanding policy of not extending the line of combat also stopped Hamas from targeting the US.

On April 14, President Bush took a huge step in supporting Israel's policies in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In their meeting in the White House, Bush gave Sharon a letter where he declared his complete embracement of Israeli positions on two important issues. First, he supported Israel possessing settlements in the West Bank:

In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities. (The White House, April 2004).

Second, he accepted Israeli demand that the Palestinian refugees should not be allowed to return to Israel:

It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel. (The White House, April 2004).

The letter also mentioned a sovereign State of Palestine and commitment to the Road Map (Smith, 2007: 527). Thus, the US gave Sharon what he wanted in exchange for Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Another component of the Quartet, the EU, reacted to Bush's letter very negatively. Describing the letter as "a stab in the back of the peace process" (Shlaim, 2014: Ch. 19, Sect. Unilateralism and the Bush-Sharon Pact, para. 18), it declared that it did not recognize the decisions taken by the US regarding the borders and refugees. Russia and the UN, the other two members of the Quartet, also stayed committed to the Road Map (Shlaim, 2014). However, the US maintained its support to the disengagement plan. As a matter of fact, the US bypassed the Quartet when it did not approve of American policies.

Three days later, on April 17, Israel assassinated Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi by using the same helicopter missile method (Schanzer, 2008: p. 81). Hamas mourned Rantisi calling him “the symbol of resistance”, “Zionist’s worst enemy,” and “the Lion of Palestine”. Once again, Hamas adopted a revanchist language in its publications but little military operations took place due to its weakness and the Brigades’ new policy of protecting its infrastructure (Baconi, 2018: p. 70). The security barrier that Israel was constructing was another factor that led to a decrease in the number of Hamas’ operations (Schanzer, 2008: p. 92). However, the assassination of two important figures of Hamas, namely Sheikh Yassin and Rantisi, intensified the debates on participating in the electoral process within the organization and significantly contributed to Hamas’ ongoing evolution to a political party (Kear, 2019: p. 112). Moreover, the assassinations further boosted the popularity of Hamas in the Palestinian public: In a poll conducted in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank after Rantisi’s death, in case of an election, thirty-one percent said they would vote for Hamas, while the support for Fatah was only twenty-seven percent (Jefferis, 2016: p. 57). In addition, following the assassination of Sheikh Yassin and Rantisi, Hamas decided to hide the identity of the new leader in Gaza to protect him from Israeli attacks. Khaled Mashal, the Damascus-based leader of the Political Bureau, became the new public face of Hamas (Schanzer, 2008: p. 82).

According to Azzam Tamimi (2011), in these days, Israel had an aim to weaken Hamas in the Gaza Strip before the disengagement (p. 205). With that motivation, in addition to targeted assassinations, Sharon launched a new operation in May in the Rafah Refugee Camp in the Gaza Strip after a Palestinian attack. The operation resulted in the death of approximately forty Palestinians, nine of whom were children. President Bush once again stated that Israel had the right to defend itself (Baroud, 2006: p. 99-100). In June, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution supporting the fight of the PNA and Israel against the terrorists (Congress.gov, June 2004, H. Con. Res. 460). The next day, the US Senate passed a resolution on the same issue, but also referring to the Road Map and the-two state solution (Congress.gov, June 2004, S. Res. 393). In August, in the midst of the discussions over political participation, Hamas perpetrated its final suicide bombing attack in the Second Intifada in Beersheba, killing

sixteen people. Tariq Baconi (2018) claims that Hamas' attack "bolstered its claims to being a resistance movement as its engagement in the political establishment advanced" (p. 75). In response, Israel launched another operation against Hamas in September where eighty-six Palestinians were killed, one-third of which were civilians (Baconi, 2018: p. 75).

4.2. Palestinian Elections

4.2.1. Local Elections and the Road to the Legislative Elections

In November 2004, President Bush was reelected by a narrow margin. Soon, the non-neoconservative Secretary of State, Colin Powell, resigned. Condoleezza Rice, whose worldview was closer to that of Bush's neoconservative team, replaced him in the following days (Quandt, 2005: p. 407-408). In its second term, the Bush administration maintained its neoconservative vision of democratization in the world. In the Israeli Palestinian conflict, it continued to call for political reforms in the PNA and support the disengagement plan (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 192-193). In the summer of 2004, in the G8 Summit, Bush had already introduced the Greater Middle East Initiative, which would require the PNA to carry out major political reforms. On November 11, Yasser Arafat, the veteran leader of the PLO, died in Paris. The death of such an influential figure of Fatah also encouraged Hamas to challenge Fatah politically (Quandt, 2005: p. 407-408; Baroud, 2006: p. 139). Following Arafat's death, the Bush administration urged the PNA to hold free and fair elections for democratization and the continuation of the peace process (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 43; Zunes, May 2011). Hamas, which had already been discussing political participation within itself, decided to participate in the oncoming local elections that would be held in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank in four rounds (Baroud, 2006: p. 139).

Hamas stated that armed resistance was still its principal means and would continue but it also aimed at the social development of the Palestinian people through politics. During its campaign prior to the local elections, Hamas emphasized change, social progress, transparency, social welfare and anticorruption. It also named its list of

candidates as “Change and Reform” (Berti, 2013: p. 112). In the first round of the local elections that was held in December 2004 and January 2005, Hamas did quite well: In the West Bank, Hamas took the control of nine municipalities out of twenty-six and gained thirty-five percent of the votes, while Fatah obtained seventeen municipalities and gained thirty-eight percent of the votes. In the Gaza Strip, Hamas took the control of seven municipalities out of ten and gained sixty-five percent of the votes, while Fatah obtained only two municipalities and gained twenty-two percent of the votes (Jefferis, 2016: p. 95; Tamimi, 2011: p. 209-210). This success encouraged Hamas members, especially those in the Gaza Strip, to participate in the next legislative elections (Tamimi, 2011: p. 210). On the other hand, Hamas decided to boycott the presidential elections in January 2005 as the future president would be required to negotiate with Israel. Besides, Hamas aimed to do well in the legislative elections before running for presidency (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 241-242). In the absence of a Hamas candidate, Fatah’s candidate Mahmoud Abbas obtained a clear victory in the presidential elections over other six candidates. Following the elections, Bush announced his contentment from Abbas’ victory (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 182). The next month, Abbas and Sharon met in Sharm al-Sheikh in the presence of Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah II of Jordan, and declared their commitment to end the violence, thus marking the end of the Second Intifada (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 193).

Even though it asserted for years that *jihad* was the only way to liberate Palestine and condemned the PLO for carrying out negotiations with Israel and the US, Hamas performed another example of pragmatism on March 12 and announced that it would participate in the legislative elections which was then planned to take place in July 2005 (Berti, 2013: p. 112). In its announcement of participation, Hamas explained its objectives as such:

...in desire to consolidate our conduct in service of our Palestinian people in every possible field, safeguard its affairs and interests, protect its rights and properties, in support of building institutions of Palestinian society on solid foundations, curing every corrupted and unbalanced aspect, and realizing a complete and real national reform, so that our people be able to face the Occupation and the aggressions...
(Murgia, 2018: p. 220-221).

Hamas justified its decision by once again claiming that its boycotting of the elections in 1996 was not ideological but because of the unjust Oslo framework, which was dead by 2005 (Tamimi, 2011: p. 210). To Hamas, political participation would not require it resort to a change of strategy by abandoning armed resistance. Khaled Mashal clarified this by stating that Hamas' participation in elections was not a political transformation as they had never been far from politics and resistance was a term that encompassed politics (Baconi, 2018: p. 84). However, as explained in the second chapter, the real reason for Hamas' decision was the suitable setting that emerged as a result of Arafat's death, the people's resentment to the PNA due to the failure of the peace process and corruption, the Israeli disengagement plan and Hamas' recent success in the municipal elections (Tamimi, 2011: p. 210). Hamas' increasing popularity due to its commitment to *jihad* and the social services it had been providing was another major reason for Hamas to participate in the legislative elections. Its weakness caused by the Israeli attacks, assassinations and international sanctions also led the organization to carry out its struggle in the political scene as well (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 43-44). Finally, Hamas aimed to get rid of the sanctions of the West by getting international recognition through the legislative elections (Tamimi, 2011: p. 215). On the other hand, the US had a great share in setting such a suitable setting for Hamas. Its unconditional support to Israel for the destruction of the PNA and assassination of Hamas leaders, which led to the weakening of the PNA and the politicization of Hamas, was significant in the emergence of such a context. Likewise, the democratization and reform program of the Bush administration was the main force for holding both local and legislative elections in the occupied territories, which made Hamas a stronger actor in the Palestinian politics. That is to say, the "Americanized reform" that Hamas rejected, in fact, helped it rise politically.

Another important development for Hamas that took place in March 2005 was the Cairo Declaration. As a culmination of the dialogues that began after Arafat's death, thirteen Palestinian factions including Fatah and Hamas came together in Cairo in the mediation of Egypt and issued the Cairo Declaration (Kear, 2019: p. 116). Through this declaration, the ceasefire with Israel was renewed, leading to a period of relative quiescence for more than one year. This period of quiescence allowed Hamas and the

other factions to focus on the legislative elections and the remaining rounds of the municipal elections (Berti, 2013: p. 112-113). The Cairo Declaration also approved the Palestinian people's right to resist against the occupation "until such time that a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital is established, and all refugees have been accorded their right of return" (Jefferis, 2016: p. 98). Thus, the military resistance of Hamas was legitimized in the sight of Egypt and Fatah, which strengthened Hamas' position in the Palestinian politics. Most importantly, the document proposed future reforms in the PNA to make it more inclusive and representative, paving the way for Hamas to rise politically (Berti, 2013: p. 112-113). According to Benedetta Berti (2013), the Cairo Declaration was a strong sign of Hamas's increased political importance (p. 113). Indeed, in the second round of the local elections held in May 2005, Hamas did well again: Hamas won twenty-eight municipalities out of eighty-four, while Fatah won fifty of them (Tamimi, 2011: p. 213). Even though there seems to be a big gap between Hamas and Fatah, the fact that Fatah's municipalities were mostly small ones while Hamas was successful in the major population centers proves that there was no such a big gap between these two parties (Gunning, 2007: p. 146-147).

Hamas' consecutive successes in the local elections alarmed the US. In May, Bush hosted Mahmoud Abbas in the White House. He was very warm to Abbas and declared his support for Fatah in the oncoming legislative elections (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 247). On Hamas, he stated, "Our position on Hamas is very clear, it's a well-known position and it hasn't changed about Hamas: Hamas is a terrorist group, it's on a terrorist list for a reason." (The White House, May 2005). On the possibility that Hamas win the elections, he said, "I don't think they're going to get elected, because I think Palestinian moms want their children to grow up in peace." (The White House, May 2005). In June, Secretary of State Rice visited President Abbas in Ramallah. In a joint press conference, she stated that the US still regarded Hamas as a terrorist organization. In response to a question on what the American policy would be like if Hamas became a part of the Palestinian government, she said:

I frankly don't think that it is the dream of mothers and fathers around the world that their children will be suicide bombers. I don't think it is

the dream of people around the world that their children will have no future but one of violence. And so this is a man of peace (Mahmoud Abbas), his government is a government that is seeking peace. And it is the goal and the policy of the United States government to support a Palestinian leadership that is, we believe, determined to come to a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (US Department of State Archive, June 2005).

Fatah was also alarmed by Hamas' rise in politics. In June, Abbas postponed the legislative elections with American approval, fearing a possible Hamas victory. So that, Fatah would have more time to prepare. Hamas protested the decision and stated that it was a blow to democracy and against the Cairo Declaration. To Hamas, Abbas was "bowing to international pressure to curb Hamas' political ambitions" (Baoni, 2018: p. 85-86). Even though Bush had said that Hamas should not be allowed to compete in the elections, and if it won, its victory should not be recognized (Tamimi, 2011: p. 214), in fact, there was no serious pressure by the Bush administration on Fatah to exclude Hamas from the electoral process as both the Bush administration and Fatah believed that defeating Hamas in the elections would have been more efficient for its exclusion (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 199). On August 20, after a series of discussions between Hamas and Fatah officials, the new date for elections were set as January 25, 2006 (Tamimi, 2011: p. 216). On the other hand, the American pressure on Fatah was for the issue of Hamas' disarmament. In August, Rice said that she expected the PNA to move quickly to disarm militant factions and added, "That is their obligation under the Road Map." (Financial Express, August 2005).

On the other hand, in August and September, Israel implemented the disengagement plan, withdrawing all of its soldiers from the Gaza Strip and dismantling the Jewish settlements in that region (Tamimi, 2011: p. 206). Hamas continued to celebrate the end of the occupation in the Gaza Strip and reflect it as the result of its armed struggle, as expressed by Mahmoud Zahar: "Hamas said that resistance is the solution, and events have proved it was correct." (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 245). However, in fact, Israel's control on the Gaza Strip continued through tight restrictions on entrance and exit from the region, despite the signing of the Agreement of Movement and Access between Israel and the PNA in November, which was supposed

to ensure the access of the Gaza Strip to Egypt, Israel and the West Bank (Baconi, 2018: p. 90; Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 195).

In the third round of the local elections held in September, Hamas' performance was relatively weak as it gained thirty-six percent of the votes, while Fatah obtained fifty-seven percent. However, in the fourth and final round that took place in December, Hamas achieved a great success obtaining fifty percent of the votes, while Fatah only had thirty percent (Baconi, 2018: p. 90; Jefferis, 2016: p. 95). Meanwhile, the US was maintaining its pressure on the PNA to disarm Hamas before the elections. In a meeting with Sharon in November, Rice stated that if Abbas did not disarm Hamas, he would lose both American and international support. She added that the US would never hold contacts with Hamas or Islamic Jihad even if they were in the government, emphasizing that the US would never support a situation in which terrorist organizations that remain armed participate in the PNA (Israel MFA, PM Sharon Meets with US Secy of State Condoleezza Rice, n.d.). However, Hamas rejected any disarmament (Baconi, 2018: p. 92). Then, the US House of Representatives issued a resolution in December stating, "Hamas and other terrorist organizations should not participate in elections held by the Palestinian Authority, and for other purposes" (Congress.gov, December 2005). The Quartet also declared, "...A future Palestinian Authority Cabinet should include no member who has not committed to the principles of Israel's right to exist in peace and security and an unequivocal end to violence and terrorism." (US Department of State Archive, December 2005). In addition, during the campaign period of the legislative elections, the US made a financial assistance of \$2 million to Fatah to use on the fields of media, public outreach and public services; aiming to boost its public profile (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 44).

In January 2006, Hamas issued its electoral manifesto using the same name: Change and Reform. The program emphasized the indivisibility of the historic Palestine, the return of the displaced Palestinian people and the right to resist the occupation. However, in the manifesto, Hamas once again repeated its acceptance of "transitional stages" within pre-1967 borders with Jerusalem as the capital. An important point is that Hamas stressed that it was Islamic principles through which it would deal with

those issues. On social issues, the program underlined the need for constitutional reforms in the PNA, fighting corruption, restructuring the security forces and judicial system. There would also be reforms in the social, educational and economic consistent with Islamic values (Baconi, 2018: p. 92-93). Free speech, social welfare, protecting civil society, political freedom and national unity were the other important themes Hamas mentioned in its electoral program (Jefferis, 2016: p. 96). During all of its electoral campaign, Hamas took advantage of the frustrations of the Palestinian public about Fatah and criticized the corruption, lawlessness and insufficient social services of its rival. Hamas also portrayed Fatah as a servant of Israel and the US. On the other hand, Hamas presented itself as a movement with a strong social infrastructure and honest, highly educated and skillful candidates (Baconi, 2018: p. 94). Finally, during its electoral campaign, Hamas emphasized that political participation never meant the end of *jihad*. In a rally prior to the elections, Ismail Haniyeh said, “The constants and the strategy of Hamas do not change according to circumstances. Hamas will stay faithful to jihad, to resistance, to guns, to Palestine and to Jerusalem.” (ADL, May 2011).

4.2.2. 2006 Legislative Elections and Division of Palestine

On January 25, 2006, the Palestinian Legislative elections, which were declared free, fair and transparent by the monitoring NGOs and international actors, were held (Brenner, 2017: p. 30). The result was a decisive Hamas victory: Hamas gained forty-four percent of the votes and seventy-four seats out of 132, while Fatah obtained forty-one percent of the votes and forty-five seats (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 259). Hamas’ victory surprised all. Even though international community had predicted that Hamas would do well in the elections, general opinion was that Fatah would have the majority and Hamas would be in opposition in the PLC (Tamimi, 2011: p. 217). Even the leaders of Hamas were surprised by the results. One Hamas official, Osman Hamdan, stated that their aim in the elections was either to participate in a national unity government or to be a strong opposition rather than form the government by themselves (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 69). However, as shown in the polls above, Fatah’s popularity had already decreased as a result of insufficient social services and failed

peace process, while Hamas' reputation greatly rose due to its armed struggle and sophisticated social services. Then, the American democratization efforts set the means for a Hamas domination in the Palestinian politics.

Israel and the US gave similar reactions to the election results. Ehud Olmert, who had replaced Sharon as the prime minister of Israel in early January due to Sharon's serious health problems (Shlaim, 2014), stated that Israel would not negotiate with a Hamas government. Moreover, he immediately began to apply financial restrictions on the PNA (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 261-262). On the American side, Secretary of State Rice admitted her surprise by Hamas' victory saying, "I don't know anyone who wasn't caught off guard by Hamas's strong showing" (Weisman, January 2006). President Bush, on the other hand, accepted the results but also stated, "'I have made it very clear, however, that a political party that articulates the destruction of Israel as part of its platform is a party with which we will not deal (CNN International, January 2006) and "I don't see how you can be a partner in peace if you advocate the destruction of a country." (CNN International, January 2006). Indeed, in the post-election period, the Bush administration abandoned the democracy promotion policy in Palestine and sought to undermine the PNA governments that included Hamas through diplomacy and generous economic and military support to Fatah (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 97).

On January 30, the US-led Quartet issued a statement where it declared that all future assistance to the PNA would be cut if a Hamas-led government did not fulfill three conditions: commitment to non-violence, recognition of Israel and acceptance of previous agreements (Pina, 2006: p. 11). However, Hamas showed no sign of compliance and stated that the US should put pressure on Israel to end the occupation rather than Hamas if it wanted to see a real peace in the region. Upon this, the US, the EU and Israel launched a global diplomatic campaign against Hamas by trying to convince states not to recognize, fund and negotiate with a PNA government led by Hamas. However, this strategy failed to a great extent. In that period, Hamas leaders established contacts with many states and visited some of them including Russia, a member of the Quartet, and Turkey, an ally of the US (Tamimi, 2011: p. 225-227;

Zoughbie, 2014: p. 100). Russia explained that its purpose with hosting Hamas officials in Moscow was to persuade Hamas to accept the conditions of the Quartet, while Turkey offered mediation between Israel and Hamas (Natil, 2015: p. 97).

On the other hand, Abbas and his party Fatah accepted their defeat in public. However, in fact, they followed policies aiming to isolate Hamas politically and economically, hoping to make it fail in the government (Kear, 2019: p. 132). In late February, Abbas sent Hamas a letter of appointment granting it the task to form the government. However, in his letter, Abbas specified the three conditions of the Quartet as the policies that he wanted Hamas to include in its government program (Kear, 2019: p. 125). Then, Hamas invited Fatah to form a national unity government in order to share the governmental responsibility. However, Fatah did not have any intention to help Hamas (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 69). Furthermore, Abbas put pressure on Fatah members not to be a part of the new government if Hamas did not agree the three conditions. As the conditions were unacceptable for Hamas, it formed a government on its own. The new Hamas government took office on March 29th (Tamimi, 2011: p. 228) under the premiership of Ismail Haniyeh (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 69). However, Fatah was unwilling to handover its authority over media, border crossing and security, which created two *de facto* governments at the same time (Tamimi, 2011: p. 205)

In the following days, the Quartet suspended all the economic aid and diplomatic ties with the Hamas government. Israel also continued its harsh restrictions on the Palestinian economy (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 70). The sanctions resulted in a serious deterioration in the economy of the PNA and even triggered an economic crisis. Besides, the sanctions caused total isolation of the Hamas government (Brenner, 2017: p. 32). Bush stated that the American aid to the Palestinians would continue but not through the Hamas government. Instead, the US would deliver funds through NGOs and other institutions such as the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 106). In the following months, Temporary International Mechanism was founded for the same purpose (Natil, 2015: p. 100). All these efforts were, in fact, parts of the secret “train and equip” program of the US, designed to support Fatah and President Abbas against Hamas. The program aimed to fund and train the military

force of Fatah, and strengthen its social services (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 104-106). The plan was that, in the face of a strong Fatah, Hamas would either accept the Quartet's conditions or fail in the government (Kear, 2019: p. 136).

Thanks to the external support, Abbas established a new presidential guard of ten thousand men (Tamimi, 2011: p. 229). Upon this, Minister of Interior Said Seyam founded a new security force with three thousand members under the direct control of the Hamas government, which led to bloody conflicts between the two parties on the streets (Youngs & Smith, 2007: p. 11). To end the political and economic crisis and form a unity government (Natil, 2015: p. 101), Palestinian faction leaders in an Israeli jail such as Abdelkhaleq al-Natsh from Hamas, Marwan Barghouti from Fatah, Abdelraheem Malluh from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Bassam al-Saadi from Islamic Jihad issued the "Prisoners' Document" (BBC News, May 2006; Hardy, June 2006). The document proposed a Palestinian state in pre-1967 borders, the right of return of the refugees and the right to resist within the occupied territories (Baconi, 2018: p. 114). It also pointed out the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinians and recognized Israel implicitly (Tamimi, 2011: p. 237). Although Abbas and Fatah put heavy pressure on Hamas to accept the initiative and even threatened Hamas to hold a referendum for the document if it did not accept, Hamas initially dismissed the document (Hardy, June 2006; Natil, 2015: p. 101). However, with little amendments, Hamas made a concession and accepted the document in June (Tamimi, 2011: p. 241).

Further talks on the document was prevented by the conflicts between Hamas and Israel. Hamas' external leadership opposed the Prisoners' Document and ordered rocket fires to Israel, ending the ceasefire of 2005 (Baconi, 2018: p. 115). Besides, Hamas conducted a raid near the Kerem Shalom border crossing of the Gaza Strip, which resulted in the deaths of two Israeli soldiers and the capture of one. Then, Israel launched an operation into Gaza codenamed Operation Summer Rains in order to free the captured soldier and force Hamas to stop rocket fire (GlobalSecurity.org, July 2011). During the operation that lasted until November, 416 Palestinians were killed, 58 of whom were children. The Israeli losses were five soldiers and six civilians. The

IDF also targeted the Gaza's infrastructure such as roads, bridges and the power plant (IMEU, November 2012). Moreover, Israel detained most of Hamas' ministers and parliamentarians in the West Bank, which undermined the functioning of the PLC (Natil, 2015: p. 102). The US defined the operation as an Israeli self-defense (Zanotti & Blanchard, 2010: p. 57). In the autumn of 2006 and early 2007, talks between Hamas and Fatah continued. Even though the Hamas government partly accepted the Quartet's conditions as it was isolated financially and politically, its rejection of recognizing Israel explicitly despite Fatah's insistence prevented any permanent solution. In addition to the political and economic crises, bloody conflicts between Hamas and Fatah forces took place on the streets. Even Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh was targeted in an armed attack but he survived, while Hamas held Fatah responsible for the incident (Baconi, 2018: p. 119-121).

In that period, the US objected to any political settlement between Hamas and Fatah until Hamas completely recognized the Quartet's conditions and continued its efforts to isolate Hamas and strengthen Fatah (Baconi, 2018: p. 119-121). The Bush administration encouraged Abbas to act more resolutely and urged him to dismiss the Hamas government and form a new government if it continued to reject the Quartet's conditions. Moreover, the US enhanced its train and equip program and increased its military support to Fatah in the forms of both arms and funds. To oversee the military trainings, the US even assigned General Keith Dayton from the US army (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 213), while Secretary of State Rice tried to convince various Arab states to equip Fatah with small arms (Kear, 2019: p. 137). Hamas interpreted all these developments as preparations for a coup and vowed that it would do all it could to defend its electoral victory (Brenner, 2017: p. 35). Indeed, General Keith Dayton explicitly called the Quartet to support President Abbas "by whatever means necessary" to defeat Hamas (Baconi, 2018: p. 124).

To stop the violence, Saudi Arabia brokered talks between Hamas and Fatah. On February 8, 2007, the parties signed the Mecca Agreement. Based on the Prisoners' Document, the agreement stressed Palestinian national unity, ending intra-Palestinian violence, confronting the occupation, reforming the PLO and the necessity of forming

a unity government (Schanzer, 2008: p. 102-103). According to Benedetta Berti (2013), by accepting a unity government, Hamas acted very pragmatically as its support was in decrease in the Palestinian public due to economic and political crises. Besides, Berti argues that Hamas regarded a unity government as an opportunity to end its isolation and get rid of the external sanctions (p. 119). The US was not satisfied with the Mecca Agreement as the Quartet's conditions were not fully accepted (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 121). The Bush administration responded to the developments by stating that it would not deal with a PNA including Hamas, while the other members of the Quartet welcomed Mecca Agreement, hoping to moderate Hamas (Baconi, 2018: p. 127-128). The unity government that included ministers from Hamas, Fatah, other factions and independents took office on March 17 with Ismail Haniyeh as the prime minister (Shehata, 2012: p. 192). In addition to accepting a State of Palestine within pre-1967 borders, Hamas made another concession by stating that the new government "respected" the past agreements signed by the PLO (Baconi, 2018: p. 128). However, there was still no explicit recognition of Israel by Hamas (Youngs & Smith, 2007: p. 14). Therefore, despite Hamas' expectations in that direction, the unity government did not get an international recognition and sanctions remained in effect, though some Western states and the Quartet appreciated its establishment. The flow of money to Fatah, however, continued through indirect channels (Hovdenak, 2009: p. 69, Shehata, 2012: p. 192).

The unity government could not stop the disagreements between Hamas and Fatah. Soon after the unity government took office, President Abbas assigned Mohammed Dahlan as the head of the Palestinian National Security Council. He was a Fatah official with strong ties with the US and the CIA, and a figure of hatred for Hamas, as Hamas kept him responsible for torturing and killing its members in the 1990s and attempting to kill Ismail Haniyeh in 2006. Then, bloody conflicts took place again between Hamas and Fatah forces, accompanied by a governmental crisis. On the other hand, the US accelerated its train and equip program in the spring of 2007 and allocated \$59 million for it (Youngs & Smith, 2007: p. 15-16). The violence continued for months.

By June, the coalition of the US, Israel, Egypt and Fatah was about to stage a coup to oust the unity government and nullify Hamas' electoral victory by recapturing the power (Shlaim, 2014). Having noticed this cooperation and anticipated that a coup was imminent, Hamas launched an operation to capture the Gaza Strip on June 7. Within one week, after deadly conflicts, Hamas obtained complete control in the Gaza Strip. In response, Abbas dissolved the unity government and declared a state of emergency (Brenner, 2017: p. 37-41). Under the premiership of Salam Fayyad, an independent member of the PLC favored by the Bush administration, a new government was formed in the West Bank (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 218). Both parties also embarked on terminating one another's military, political and infrastructural presence in their respective areas of control (Shehata, 2012: p. 192). Thus, the political power in the Palestinian politics was divided into two: Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Fatah in the West Bank; each not recognizing the other and claiming to be the legitimate ruler of the Palestinian people (Brenner, 2017: p. 41). The PLC, on the other hand, lost its function due to this division (Kuttab, December 2018).

The Bush administration characterized Hamas' takeover of the Gaza Strip as a coup (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 125). Condoleezza Rice defined the incident as an "illegal seizure of Gaza" (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 288). However, as Daniel Zoughbie (2014) asserts that the division of Palestine was, in fact, a good development for the US because it reached its aim of eliminating a PNA government that included Hamas. Besides, as Hamas was locked up in the Gaza Strip and as the West Bank was clear from Hamas, the US was now able to differentiate "good" Fatah from "bad" Hamas, and deal with each of them in different ways (126-127). Therefore, it ardently supported Abbas and the new Fayyad government, and lifted the sanctions on the Fatah government in the West Bank, so did Israel and the EU (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 192). However, the same thing did not happen for the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. The US supported Israel and Egypt hardening the conditions in Gaza by applying a total blockade with severe economic and geographical restrictions, leading to a humanitarian crisis in the coastal enclave (Baconi, 2018: p. 135-136).

CHAPTER 5

HAMAS AND US POLICIES FROM 2007 TO PRESENT: HAMAS-FATAH RECONCILIATION ATTEMPTS, ISRAELI OPERATIONS INTO THE GAZA STRIP AND US-SPONSORED PEACE PLANS

5.1. First Attempts for Reconciliation and Operation Cast Lead

5.1.1. Initial Policies Following Hamas' Takeover of the Gaza Strip

After capturing the Gaza Strip, under the sanctions of the international actors and a heavy blockade by Israel and Egypt, the top priority of the Hamas government was to consolidate its power over the Strip. Applying a severe crackdown on Fatah members including unlawful detentions and killings, carrying out operations against criminal organizations, challenging traditional families and clans which possessed arms, reinforcing the capabilities of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades and other domestic security forces (Berti, 2013: p. 120-121), suppressing the activities of Al Qaeda-linked Salafi-Jihadist groups (Kear, 2019: p. 154) and appointing Hamas-affiliated new bureaucrats and civil servants (Brenner, 2017: p. 40) were among the steps that Hamas took to this aim. Apart from that, to maintain daily life in the Gaza Strip despite the blockade and sanctions, Hamas developed a tunnel-based economy. Through the tunnels it dug under the Rafah border between the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, Hamas transferred many basic supplies and goods, as well as weapons (Baconi, 2018: p. 142). Hamas also aimed to gain international recognition to get rid of the sanctions. For instance, in July 2007, to show that it was a responsible and elected government, Hamas put pressure on the Gaza-based Salafi-Jihadist organization Army of Islam to release Alan Johnston, a BBC journalist that was kidnapped in March (Natil, 2015: p.

121). When Johnston was freed 117 days later, Foreign Secretary of the UK, David Miliband, "fully acknowledged the crucial role" played by Hamas and Ismail Haniyeh. Moreover, a group of British parliamentarians called for international engagement with Hamas (BBC News, July 2007). However, such endeavors of Hamas did not result in a recognition in either the UK or any Western state (Natil, 2015: p. 121). Another important point about the Hamas government is that, even though Islam had always been the main reference of Hamas for the Palestinian cause, it did not immediately seek to create a state or a society based completely on Sharia. The role of Sharia only enhanced in the traditional and informal judiciary but not in the formal judiciary. Similarly, some Islamic values in public life such as mandatory hijab in schools and women-men separation in public places were imposed but these rules were not inspected strictly (Brenner, 2017: p. 189-193). According to Hamas leaders, their ultimate goal was a society based on Sharia and they employed a gradual approach for this aim (Brenner, 2017: p. 108-109). However, in fact, this strategy was a result of Hamas' pragmatism. According to Martin Kear (2019), Hamas did not resort to a total Islamization as it sought to distance itself from Salafi-Jihadist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the eyes of the West and avoid any loss of popularity that a forced Islamization would have caused among the Palestinians in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (p. 157). Finally, Hamas continued to attack Israel using Qassam Rockets. Between June and December 2007, hundreds of rockets were thrown from the Gaza Strip to Israel (Schanzer, 2008: p. 176) in order to force Israel to lift the blockade (Baconi, 2018: p. 147). Israel also carried out incursions into the Gaza Strip and declared Gaza a "hostile territory" in September (Baconi, 2018: p. 140).

On the other hand, in that period, the US took precautions against the Hamas government in the Gaza Strip. First, it contributed to the isolation of the Hamas government through the sanctions and its support to the blockade, hoping for the collapse of the regime (Milton-Edwards, 2011: p. 93). Second, the US generously supported the Fatah-led PNA in economic terms. The Quartet even appointed former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair to oversee the economic development of the PNA. Third, the US supported Israel and signed a new economic aid agreement with it in August to bolster its military capabilities (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 219). Besides, in

July, President Bush gave a speech where he called for an international meeting that would restart the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks based on the two-state solution proposed by the Road Map. In his speech, he harshly criticized Hamas and sent a direct message to it:

And we will continue to deliver a firm message to Hamas: You must stop Gaza from being a safe haven for attacks against Israel. You must accept the legitimate Palestinian government, permit humanitarian aid in Gaza, and dismantle militias. And you must reject violence, and recognize Israel's right to exist, and commit to all previous agreements between the parties. As I said in the Rose Garden five years ago, a Palestinian state will never be created by terror. (United Nations, July 2007).

The US invited forty-nine states to the conference that would be held in Annapolis, Maryland. Unsurprisingly, Hamas was excluded from the process. On November 27, the conference took place with a strong participation (Migdalovitz, 2007: p. 2-3). At the end of the meeting, Bush announced that the PNA and Israel would start meeting regularly in December and reach a final status agreement before the end of 2008 (The White House, July 2007).

Hamas organized a meeting in Gaza to protest the conference where Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said, "Let the whole world hear us: We will not relinquish one centimeter of Palestine, and we will not recognize Israel." (Schanzer, 2008: p. 157). However, in December, Ahmed Yousef, Hamas' Political Adviser, sent an open letter to Condoleezza Rice. In this letter, Yousef criticized the American attitude towards Hamas in general and Hamas' exclusion from the Annapolis Conference in particular underlining that Hamas was a democratically elected government. He also complained about the US' pro-Israeli position citing the issues of sanctions, blockade, military operations and the occupation. Most importantly, Yousef expressed Hamas' willingness to negotiate with the US stating that Hamas was not "anti-American" and direct Hamas-US negotiations would increase prospects of peace (Yousef, 2008: p. 204-206). However, there was no change in the policies of the US towards Hamas. In the meantime, Saudi Arabia and Egypt brought Hamas and Fatah together for reconciliation talks. In mid-December, Mashal announced its willingness to engage in

negotiations to form a unity government with Fatah. Thus, the parties began to hold meetings (Schanzer, 2008: p. 158).

In January 2008, Bush visited Israel and the West Bank where he gave speeches supporting the Annapolis process, a sovereign Palestinian state based on the Road Map and stressing the PNA's liability to confront terror without naming Hamas (Bush, 2008: p. 218-219; The White House, January 2008). Hamas stated that Bush was unwelcome and organized mass protest against his visit accusing him of provoking a Palestinian civil war (Schanzer, 2008: p. 161). On the other hand, despite intense effort by Rice, the peace talks failed in a few months due to the disagreements of Israel and the PNA on settlements, Jerusalem and borders. The escalating violence between Hamas and Israel was another factor that impeded the talks (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 226-229). In early 2008, to avoid a possible large-scale Israeli military operation, Hamas offered ceasefire to Israel through Egypt but the latter did not respond positively. Then, Hamas intensified its rocket attacks to force Israel to accept a ceasefire (Schanzer, 2008: p. 159-160). The US House of Representatives passed a resolution condemning the rocket attacks of "Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist organizations" (Congress.gov, January 2008). In February, Hamas perpetrated a suicide bombing attack against Israel years later, killing one Israeli woman. In response, Israel carried out a five-day operation into the Gaza Strip and killed more than one-hundred Palestinians (Baconi, 2018: p. 148). In the UNSC, the US did not condemn the excessive use of force by Israel but condemned the Palestinian rocket attacks and called for an end to the attacks by both sides (Penketh, March 2008).

5.1.2. Sana'a Declaration and Carter's Meetings with Hamas Leaders

On March 23, the continuing talks between Fatah and Hamas resulted in the emergence of the first reconciliation document between the parties, the Sana'a Declaration. The deal was signed in Yemen in the presence of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, Musa Abu Marzuq from Hamas and Azzam al-Ahmad from Fatah. In Sana'a, Hamas and Fatah declared that they agreed the Yemeni initiative as a framework to continue dialogue between the parties to return the Palestinian territories to what it was before

the division and affirmed the “unity of the Palestinian people, territory and authority” (Sudam, March 2008). On the other hand, the vice president of the US, Dick Cheney, met Abbas on the same day when the Sana’a Declaration was signed. In their joint press statement with Abbas, Cheney did not directly mention the Sana’a Declaration but expressed his discontent by saying: “The future belongs to the advocates of peace and reconciliation, if only they seize the opportunities in front of them and maintain the resolve to join in defeating the forces of terror and extremism.” (The White House, March 2008). Then, the disagreement between Hamas and Fatah surfaced just in hours following the declaration. The PNA stated that there was no need for further talks on the framework and the talks should be about the implementation of the declaration, which meant Hamas’ immediate withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. Abbas also made a statement in the same direction underlining that Hamas must accept to end its control of the Gaza Strip before any dialogues (Sudam, March 2008). The day following the deal, Cheney also stated that he did not believe that Abbas would agree to reconcile with Hamas until it gave up its control of the Gaza Strip and said:

My conclusion from talking with the Palestinian leadership is that they have established preconditions which would have to be fulfilled before they would ever agree to a reconciliation, including a complete reversal of the Hamas takeover of Gaza. (France 24, March 2008).

Indeed, the condition of relinquishing its power in the Gaza Strip was unacceptable for Hamas, which interpreted the declaration as merely a pledge for further dialogue. Thus, the first reconciliation attempt between Hamas and Fatah failed in a few days (Schanzer, 2008: p. 159), mostly as a result of the pressures of the US on the PNA in this direction. In the following months, another round of talks for reconciliation started in Egypt but Hamas quit the talks as it was reluctant to relinquish its power in the Gaza Strip (Baconi, 2018: p. 152-153).

In that period, the US sought to provide a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel with the mediation of Egypt hoping to revive the stalled peace negotiations (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 137). Meanwhile, believing that he could convince Hamas to lay down arms and contribute to the continuation of the peace talks between Israel and the PNA, former US President Jimmy Carter made a trip to the Middle East and met top-level Hamas

leaders (Schanzer, 2008: p. 180; Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 193), even though he was urged by the US officials not to do so as the US designated Hamas as a terrorist organization (Labott, April 2008). After the meetings, Carter criticized Hamas' exclusion from the peace talks saying,

A counterproductive Washington policy in recent years has been to boycott and punish political factions or governments that refuse to accept United States mandates. This policy makes difficult the possibility that such leaders might moderate their policies. (The Carter Center, April 2008).

He also said that Hamas was ready for a ceasefire and would accept any agreement negotiated by Abbas and Olmert if it was approved either in a Palestinian referendum or by an elected government (The Carter Center, April 2008). President Bush strongly criticized Carter's meetings with Hamas leaders in his speech he gave in Knesset when he visited Israel in May:

Some seem to believe that we should negotiate with the terrorists and radicals, as if some ingenious argument will persuade them they have been wrong all along. We have heard this foolish delusion before. As Nazi tanks crossed into Poland in 1939, an American senator declared: "Lord, if I could only have talked to Hitler, all this might have been avoided." We have an obligation to call this what it is - the false comfort of appeasement, which has been repeatedly discredited by history. (National Archives and Records Administration, 2008: 560).

5.1.3. Operation Cast Lead

In June, Hamas and Israel agreed on a six-month ceasefire through Egyptian mediation. According to the agreement, Israel would stop its incursions into the Gaza Strip and ease the blockade, while Hamas would end the rocket attacks by all factions in Gaza (Baconi, 2018: p. 150-151; Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 193). In the first five months, both parties kept their promises to a large extent, though sporadic rocket attacks came from the Gaza Strip and Israel made very little ameliorations on the blockade (Kardelj, 2010: p. 80). However, Israel broke the ceasefire in November by destroying one of Hamas' tunnels and killing six Hamas members with the stated aim of eliminating a threat. Hamas responded Israel's assault with rocket attacks, which

caused no serious casualties. Thus, the violence escalated again (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 194-195). In December, Hamas declared the end of the ceasefire citing Israel's violations but it was willing to extend it if Israel lift the blockade (Baconi, 2018: p. 154-155). However, Israel showed no interest. On December 25, Olmert addressed the Palestinians in the Gaza strip saying they must reject their Hamas rulers and warned them that he would not hesitate to use force to stop Hamas and Islamic Jihad from firing rockets into Israel (Reuters, December 2008). Hamas did not take Israel's threat seriously and viewed it as just a tactic of psychological warfare. Therefore, it did not prepare for a major conflict (Natil, 2015: p. 131). Two days later, Israel launched a massive operation into the Gaza Strip named Operation Cast Lead. The principal aim of the operation was toppling the Hamas government (Shlaim, 2014) and destroying its military, social and political infrastructure (Kear, 2019: p. 184). Daniel Zoughbie (2014) asserts that an important reason for the operation was Olmert's desire not to fall behind the opposition leaders Netanyahu and Livni before the Israeli elections, both of whom spoke of toppling Hamas (p. 140). On the other hand, Harms & Ferry (2017) underlining the timing of the operation claim that Israel sought to capitalize the final days of Bush in office as the newly elected Barack Obama from the Democratic Party would take office in a few weeks (p. 195-196).

The operation that lasted twenty-two days resulted in a complete disaster for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Throughout the operation, Israel targeted Hamas and the civilian population through land operations, airstrikes and bombings; while Hamas relied on rockets attacks and land warfare (Shlaim, 2014; Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 196). Israel had thirteen dead, while the Gazans had 1,417 dead, 313 of whom were children, and more than 5,500 wounded. It was estimated that eighty-three percent of the casualties were civilians. Apart from the casualties, the operation had serious economic and humanitarian consequences. The economic loss of Gaza was nearly \$2 billion in assets. Four thousand homes, more than six hundred factories, small industries, workshops, business enterprises and twenty-four mosques were demolished. Eight hospitals, twenty-six primary health care clinics were damaged (Shlaim, 2014). However, Israel failed to overthrow the Hamas government, eradicate its infrastructure and stop the rocket attacks. For that reason, despite the catastrophe

that the Gaza Strip went through, Hamas declared its victory (Baconi, 2018: p. 159). Besides, the operation increased the political standing of Hamas and led to a growing sympathy for the Palestinians (Shlaim, 2014).

The US sided with Israel along the operation and criticized Hamas for the violence. In one of the press briefings made in the early days of the operation, Deputy Press Secretary of the White House, Gordon Johndroe, stated:

Hamas has once again shown its true colors as a terrorist organization that refuses to even recognize Israel's right to exist. In order for the violence to stop Hamas must stop firing rockets into Israel, and agree to respect a sustainable and durable ceasefire. That is the objective to which all parties need to be working, and that is what the United States is working towards. (The White House, December 2008).

Similarly, Condoleezza Rice said:

The United States is deeply concerned about the escalating violence in Gaza. We strongly condemn the repeated rocket and mortar attacks against Israel and hold Hamas responsible for breaking the ceasefire and for the renewal of violence there. The ceasefire must be restored immediately and fully respected. (BBC News, December 2008).

In the following days, both the Senate and the House of Representatives passed resolutions condemning Hamas and supporting Israel's operation calling it fight against terrorism (Congress.gov, January 2008, S.Res.10; Congress.gov, January 2008, H.Res.37). In the meantime, Rice prepared a UN resolution calling for a ceasefire. However, by Olmert's request, President Bush asked her to abstain from voting for the resolution in the UNSC. That was because the president, like Olmert, did not endorse Rice's attempt in the UNSC. Then, Rice abstained from voting for the resolution she herself prepared (Zoughbie, 2014: p. 140-141). However, Rice claimed that her abstention was not at Olmert's request but that the US wanted to "see the outcomes of the Egyptian mediation" for a ceasefire (The New York Times, January 2009).

5.2. Reconciliation Talks and Peace Efforts Until 2012

5.2.1. Early Months of President Obama

In January 2009, Barack Obama took office as the forty-fourth president of the US. As the image of the US in the world was damaged in Bush's term due to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, some practices of the policy of the global war on terror such as interrogation techniques including torture and the economic crisis of 2008; in the campaign period, Obama presented himself as a candidate who could fix the mistakes made by the Bush administration and emphasized words like "change" and "hope" (Lilli, 2016: p. 3-6). Thus, once elected, Obama began to follow a foreign policy based on soft power, unlike the Bush administration which prioritized hard power (Milton-Edwards, 2011: p. 99). This shift of the US was true for the Palestinian issue as well. Obama attached a great deal of importance to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict starting from the first days of his presidency. Determined to resolve the conflict through diplomacy, he appointed George Mitchell, the architect of the Mitchell Report, as Special Envoy to the Middle East. Besides, the important and experienced actor of the peace process, Dennis Ross, became an adviser to the Department of State, while the Secretary of State was Hillary Clinton (Migdal, 2014: p. 253-257). General James Jones and Dan Shapiro were other important names in Obama's Middle East team. The administration included the API of 2002 in its agenda and quickly started to work on the peace process based on a two-state solution (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 246-247). On Hamas, the position of the Obama administration was the same as the Bush Administration and the Quartet: no contacts until Hamas recognized Israel, renounced violence and accepted of the previous agreements between the PNA and Israel (Milton-Edwards, 2011: p. 96). Nevertheless, Senator John Kerry went to the war-torn Gaza in February and visited the UN headquarters in that region as well as making observations without seeing Hamas officials (Wedeman, February 2009). In March, the US offered an aid of \$900 million for the Gazans through the PNA to make sure the money did not "end up in the wrong hands" (CNN International, March 2009). An international aid campaign was also held in Sharm al-Sheikh. However, the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip was going very slow as the Hamas government was

not recognized internationally and the donations went to the PNA (Baconi, 2018: p. 162-163).

In the early months of his presidency, Obama made two important speeches showing his departure from Bush's policies regarding the Muslim world. First, in his speech he gave in Istanbul, he underlined that he wanted to advance the dialogue between the US and the Muslim world and said, "I'm deeply committed to rebuilding a relationship between the United States and the people of the Muslim world - one that's grounded in mutual interest and mutual respect." (The White House, April 2009). Second, in a speech he gave in Cairo in June, he appreciated Islamic values and the history of Islamic civilization, and said "America is not - and never will be - at war with Islam. We will, however, relentlessly confront violent extremists who pose a grave threat to our security." (The White House, June 2009). On Hamas, he reiterated that the organization should accept the conditions of the Quartet. He also mentioned the need for peace between the Palestinians and Israel referring to the Road Map and the API, as well as criticizing Israel's settlement construction (The White House, June 2009).

Hamas spokesmen made contradictory statements on Obama's speech in Cairo. While Fawzi Barhum cautiously welcomed Obama's words stating that Obama's words must be judged not on its form, but by Obama's future policies (RFE/RL, June 2009), Ayman Taha stated that speaking about a policy of pursuing a war against extremism and working towards two states for peoples on Palestinian lands was no different from the policy of President Bush (BBC News, June 2009).

On the other hand, in February, Hamas and Fatah had once again embarked on reconciliation talks under Egyptian auspices in order to form a unity government that would facilitate the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip and the removal of the blockade. The parties had made some progress on the issues of elections, security arrangements and the reformation of the PLO (El-Khodary & Kershner, February 2009). However, on the ongoing reconciliation talks, the Obama administration stated that the US would only deal with an interim government that accepted the Quartet's conditions, which led to a stall in both the talks and reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip (Baconi,

2018: p. 162-163). Problems surfaced as Hamas rejected Fatah's demand that it accepted the Quartet's conditions. There were problems in the power-sharing as well. While Fatah wanted a government of technocrats, Hamas insisted on having a majority in the unity government (Morrow & Al-Omrani, March 2009) with reference to its electoral victory in 2006. When Egypt offered a reconciliation document in October 2009, which was unilaterally signed by Fatah, Hamas decline to sign it refusing to comply with the three demands of the Quartet. Besides, Hamas wanted guarantees that if it won in any upcoming elections, the international community would recognize its government (Issacharoff, October 2009).

5.2.2. Increasing US-Israel Cooperation and Continuing Efforts for Reconciliation

Despite its early determination, the Obama administration failed to make a remarkable progress on the road to reach an agreement between Israel and the PNA. Let alone reaching a peace deal, the two parties did not even hold any bilateral talks in 2009 and much of 2010. This was mostly because the hard-liner Likud Party had come to power again in March 2009 under the leadership Benjamin Netanyahu and was not willing to comply with the serious and repeated demands coming from the Obama administration regarding halting the settlement construction. The efforts of the Obama administration brought nothing for almost two years due to Netanyahu's insistence on building settlements, which created a tension between Obama and Netanyahu (Shlaim, 2014; Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 197). However, the failure in the peace process and the tension did not prevent the Obama administration from being a fervent supporter of Israel on the issues regarding the Gaza Strip and Hamas in that period. For instance, an independent fact-finding mission assigned in April 2009 by the UN to investigate the war crimes in Operation Cast lead expounded its report in the fall of 2009. Named after Richard Goldstone, who was the head of the mission, the Goldstone Report found that both Hamas and Israel committed war crimes. Hamas and other Palestinian factors were found guilty for deliberately throwing rockets and mortars on civilians. On the other hand, Israel was also found guilty for deliberately killing civilians, using Palestinians as human shields when entering urban areas and destroying the

infrastructural buildings in the Gaza Strip with no military significance such as hospitals, water wells, farms and sewages. It was also revealed that there was no evidence that Hamas threw rockets from civilian homes or stored weapons in mosques contrary to Israeli claims (Shlaim, 2014; Baconi, 2018: p. 164-165).

The Obama administration objected the Goldstone Report fearing that it would undermine the peace process it was trying to carry out (Baconi, 2018: p. 165) and tried to undermine it by stating that the report was one-sided and flawed (Haaretz, October 2009). The US House of Representatives also passed a resolution deeming the report as “biased and unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy” (Congress.gov, October 2009). On the other hand, Hamas stated that it did not agree with certain aspects of the report but intended to act on the recommendations by carrying out investigations about any alleged crimes committed by the members of the armed groups in Gaza (Institute for Palestine Studies, October 2009). Besides, when Abbas decided not to endorse the report in order not to lose the American support, Hamas’ spokesman stated that it was first in history that an occupied people was trying to prove the innocence of the occupier (Baconi, 2018: p. 165-166).

In 2010, as Obama was criticized by the pro-Israeli community in the US for the tension with Israel, the Obama administration decided to increase high-level visits to Israel as well as military assistance and strategic cooperation, though the settlement problem persisted (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 255). The US also continued to support Israel on Gaza and Hamas-related issues. In March 2010, the US Treasury Department designated Hamas affiliated two important institutions Al-Aqsa TV and the Islamic National Bank as terrorist entities. Hamas denounced the decision and even organized a mass protest against it (Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, March 2010). In April, the House of Representatives passed a resolution that proposed withholding US contributions to the UNRWA if the Department of State did not certify that it did not have economic and professional ties with terrorists (Congress.gov, April 2010). When Israeli soldiers raided a flotilla of a Turkish NGO in international waters sailing for the Gaza Strip to deliver aid and killed nine people in May, Israel was condemned internationally. Hamas also mourned those who were killed in the raid and declared

them martyrs, describing Israel's attack as an act of piracy (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 257; Baconi, 2018: p. 167-168). However, the Obama administration viewed the incident as an Israeli self-defense (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 257). The House of Representatives also passed resolutions supporting Israel's right to defend itself, condemning the Turkish NGO, the IHH, and urging the Obama administration to consider whether the IHH should be placed on the list of foreign terrorist organizations (Congress.gov, June 2010; Congress.gov, July 2010). Nevertheless, after the incident, the US forced Israel to ease the blockade to some extent (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 257).

In September, the US finally succeeded in bringing the PNA and Israel together in order to carry out direct talks for peace as Abbas gave up on his condition that Israel must stop settlement construction before negotiations (Baconi, 2018: p. 168). At the beginning of the process, Obama said that the parties would held bilateral talks every two weeks for one year to resolve all the final status issues, end the occupation and creating an "independent, democratic and viable Palestinian state." (UNISPAL, September 2010). George Mitchell also delivered a briefing on the developments. In response to a question about Hamas' role in the process, he said Hamas would play no role and reiterated the three conditions Hamas must accept for participation (The White House, August 2010). Hamas' reaction to the beginning of the peace talks was to organize armed attacks on the settlers in the West Bank, killing four in total (Baconi, 2018: p. 168). Obama sent his condolences to the families of the victims and said:

And so the message should go out to Hamas and everybody else who is taking credit for these heinous crimes that this is not going to stop us from not only ensuring a secure Israel but also securing a longer-lasting peace in which people throughout the region can take a different course. (The White House, September 2010).

However, Obama's words did not materialize. In the talks following the attacks, in addition to the persistence of the settlement problem, Israel emphasized the need to security first. Thus, by the end of 2010, the peace talks reached a deadlock (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 259-260). After this failure, George Mitchell resigned the following year (Migdal, 2014: p. 277) and no high-level peace talks were held until 2013, except for some exploratory talks like in the spring of 2012 (Baconi, 2018: p. 187).

Meanwhile, reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah restarted. Although Hamas and Fatah had held meetings in the winter of 2010 as a result of the pressure from Saudi Arabia, no tangible progress were made for a unity government (Kurtzer et al., 2013: p. 257, MIFTAH, July 2017). In September, the parties started to hold meetings again in Damascus (MIFTAH, July 2017), despite the tension between Hamas and Fatah. In these talks the parties agreed on the establishment of an election committee and election tribunal, the reorganization of the PLO and its hierarchy (Jacob, July 2011), and release of the prisoners (Şalom, October 2010). However, the security issue was the main problem. Hamas demanded establishment of a supreme security council with the cooperation of the parties, while Fatah opted for the establishment of the council by presidential decree. Besides, Hamas demanded the reorganization of the security apparatuses in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Fatah rejected this demand stating that the security forces in the West Bank was already reorganized based on professional parameters (Jacob, July 2011). In addition, apart from the usual three conditions, the Egyptian mediators told Abbas that the US and Israel had red lines on security issues such as Abbas enjoying the ultimate security control and disarmament of Hamas. Therefore, as Hamas did not make concessions on the security issues, talks remained inconclusive (Baconi, 2018: p. 169).

5.2.3. Cairo Agreement

The wind of the Arab Spring had begun to make its presence felt in the Palestinian politics by the spring of 2011. On March 15, 2011, NGOs and the Palestinian youth, with the help of the social media, organized massive peaceful protests in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. However, the aim of the protestors was not to overthrow their leaders but to call on them to end the division and conflict between Hamas and Fatah (Natil, 2015: p. 140-141). These calls quickly bore fruit and, the same day, Ismail Haniyeh called on Fatah to “renew the national dialogue in order to meet the demands of the Palestinian people” (Jacob, July 2011). The next day, Abbas announced that he was ready to visit Gaza to end the division and form a government composed of independents for new elections (Kear, 2019: p. 154). According to Ibrahim Natil (2015), both parties were quick to respond to the unification demands as they feared

any further protests and campaigns, as well as taking care about the demands of their people (p. 141). Though Abbas did not go to Gaza immediately, an important meeting was held in Nablus in the following days between the senior figures of the parties. In this meeting, Hamas delegation proposed the release prisoners of both sides to create a positive atmosphere for the reconciliation process, while Fatah took a big step towards Hamas and agreed that, after a reconciliation agreement, Hamas would continue to have its own security and police forces in the Gaza Strip (Kear, 2019: p. 52-53).

Weeks later, the parties reached a reconciliation deal consisting of two documents: On April 27, in Cairo, all the thirteen Palestinian factions signed the “New Understandings Document”, and on May 4, in Cairo again, Mashal and Abbas signed the reconciliation document that Egypt had proposed before (Brenner, 2017: p. 56-57). Martin Kear (2019) argues that Hamas was now less opposed to a reconciliation with Fatah due to a number of factors such as the fall of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, the crisis in Syria and the uncertainty over the consequences of the Arab Spring (p. 53), therefore it signed the Egyptian document it had rejected before. With the combination of the Egyptian document and the New Understandings Document, the Cairo Agreement proposed the following key points: appointment of an election committee and an election tribunal; holding presidential, PNC and PLC elections within one year, joint appointment of a supreme security council and the appointment of an interim government. This government would prepare elections, complete the reconciliation process, reconstruct the Gaza Strip, end the blockade, unify the PNA’s institutions in the occupied territories and Jerusalem and reactivate the PLC (Brenner, 2017: p. 57). Besides, the government would be composed of independents and technocrats chosen by consensus, equipping it with a non-political character (Kear, 2019: p. 223). However, the Cairo Agreement provided a framework which was too broad and left some key points blurred such as who would exactly be the ministers and the prime minister. Likewise, the final resolution of important issues such as security was left to committees, which meant the postponement of the disagreements over these issues (Brenner, 2017: p. 57-58).

While Netanyahu defined the agreement as “a mortal blow to peace and a great victory for terrorism” (Haaretz, May 2011), the American reaction was not different from Netanyahu’s. The US senate passed a resolution that reaffirmed “opposition to the inclusion of Hamas in a unity government” unless it accepted the Quartet’s three conditions (Congress.gov, May 2011). Similarly, Obama criticized the agreement in his speeches. On May 19, he said:

...In particular, the recent announcement of an agreement between Fatah and Hamas raises profound and legitimate questions for Israel: How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist? And in the weeks and months to come, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question. (The White House, May 19, 2011).

Three days later, he repeated the three conditions for Hamas:

And I indicated on Thursday that the recent agreement between Fatah and Hamas poses an enormous obstacle to peace. No country can be expected to negotiate with a terrorist organization sworn to its destruction. And we will continue to demand that Hamas accept the basic responsibilities of peace, including recognizing Israel’s right to exist and rejecting violence and adhering to all existing agreements. (The White House, May 22, 2011).

Hamas’ spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri answered Obama stating that Hamas would not recognize Israel (United Nations, May 2011). Indeed, problems arose quickly on this issue. After the signing of the agreement, Abbas insisted that the government should follow his political program which included recognition of the Quartet’s conditions, which was unacceptable for Hamas. Hamas argued that any political program should be the product of negotiation. Moreover, Abbas also insisted that he himself would appoint the ministers while Hamas put forward that the interim government should be based on national consensus (Kear, 2019: p. 226). In June, serious disagreements took place over who the prime minister would be. Abbas wanted to retain Salam Fayyad in his position, who was already the prime minister of the PNA and had strong ties with the EU and the US. However, Hamas did not want to see him as prime minister as it regarded him as a stooge of the West and Israel (BBC News, June 2011). Another problem was that, although the Cairo Agreement mandated both sides to stop political

arrests and detentions, Hamas and Fatah continued to detain and interrogate the members of the other in their respective zones of control (Brenner, 2017: p. 63). As a result, such disagreements led the parties to defer the negotiations for the implementation of the agreement throughout the summer of 2011 (MIFTAH, July 2017). Power-sharing problems between the parties and the US imposition of the three conditions of the Quartet once again blocked any unification.

5.2.4. Doha Agreement

Through the fall and winter of 2011, Hamas and Fatah held talks in various places such as Gaza, Amman and Ramallah to eliminate their differences on a unity government. In December, in the ongoing Syrian War, Hamas positioned itself on the side of the opposition against the Ba'ath regime and relocated its headquarters from Damascus to Doha, Qatar (MIFTAH, July 2017; Baconi, 2018: p. 185-186). Doha was, at the same time, the location where the talks between Hamas and Fatah culminated in another reconciliation agreement for a unity government. In February 2012, Mashal and Abbas signed the Doha Agreement under Qatari auspices. According to the agreement, an interim government of technocrats would be established under the premiership of, this time, Abbas. Similar to the Cairo Agreement, the interim government would be in charge of holding general elections and reconstructing the Gaza Strip. The parties once again agreed on the reformation of the PLO, as well as stressing the continuation of the committees established for the issues such as elections and prisoners (ECF, November 2014). Through this agreement, as well as allowing Abbas's premiership, Hamas accepted that it would not hold key ministries in the interim government. That was mostly because Hamas, as a pragmatic organization, needed a reconciliation as it was in an economic bottleneck as Iran had stopped funding it due to its support to the dissidents in Syria. Tariq Baconi (2018) states that Hamas sought to "relinquish responsibility for the financial and administrative burdens of government within the Gaza Strip" (p. 188), while maintaining its de facto hold in the Gaza Strip (p. 189). Another concession that Hamas made was that it agreed that the political prisoners would be released after in the post-reconciliation period (Baconi, 2018: p. 188). Due

to such concessions, some Hamas members criticized the Doha agreement, especially the Gaza-based ones (Toameh, February 2012).

Netanyahu criticized the agreement stating that Hamas and peace did not go together and the PNA must choose either an alliance with Hamas or peace with Israel (Krieger, February 2012). On the other hand, the position of the US on a unity deal between Hamas and Fatah was the same. Victoria Nuland, the spokesperson of the US Department of State, stated that unification was an internal matter of the Palestinians and the US would ask the PNA for more information about the deal. Nevertheless, she reiterated the longstanding US position on the issue:

Let me just reiterate those for all of you again: Any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence. It must recognize the State of Israel. And it must accept the previous agreements and obligations between the parties, including the roadmap. So those are our expectations. So we are continuing to engage with President Abbas and his government. (US Department of State Archive, February 2012).

On Hamas, she said, “I will say that our own position on Hamas hasn’t changed. It remains a designated foreign terrorist organization.” (US Department of State Archive, February 2012).

In March, Abbas declared that Hamas and Fatah agreed on many issues such as a period of calm in both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, a peaceful popular resistance against Israel, the establishment of a Palestinian state in the pre-1967 borders. Besides, the parties agreed that the peace talks would continue if Israel halted settlement construction and accepted a Palestinian state within pre-1967 borders as basis for talks and modifications (Toameh, March 2012; BBC News, April 2012). A few days later, Israel launched the most violent operation since Operation Cast Lead into the Gaza Strip with the stated aim of preempting a major attack. In response, various Palestinian factions led by Islamic Jihad began to carry out retaliatory attacks into Israeli territories. To Khaled Mashal, through this operation, Israel tried to create another civil war among the Palestinians and undermine the unity agreement. Fearing further escalation of the violence, Hamas did not join the rocket campaign of the other factions

but acted as their protector and supporter as the political authority in the Gaza Strip. The operation lasted almost one week and twenty-seven Palestinians were killed, while the rocket fire did not cause any Israeli casualties (Baconi, 2018: p. 189-190; Brulliard, March 2012). On the American side, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned the rocket attacks by the Palestinians and reasserted Israel's right to defend itself. She added, "Israel must continue to act to eradicate Qassam firings and attack terror operatives." (The Jerusalem Post, March 2012). In response, Ismail Haniyeh called on Clinton to visit Gaza "and have a close look at the level of Israeli crimes", and added that Washington "should stop denouncing the Palestinian people's right to defend themselves" (United Nations, March 2012).

In March and April, negotiations for the implementation of the Doha Agreement stalled due to a number of issues such as the opposition of some Hamas seniors, Abbas' efforts to restart the peace process with Israel and Hamas' unwillingness to allow the election committee to work in the Gaza Strip (United Nations, March 2012; United Nations, April 2012). The US also maintained its opposition to the Doha Agreement in that period and reminded its concerns about it citing that the US designated Hamas a terrorist organization and it must accept the conditions of the Quartet (The White House, March 2012). However, the Palestinian people and independent actors put pressure on both sides to agree on and implement a final unity deal (MIFTAH, July 2017). As a result, Hamas and Fatah signed another deal in Cairo in May. According to this agreement, an interim government that would be founded in ten days by Abbas and Mashal would hold presidential and parliamentary elections within six months. Besides, the election committee would begin to update voter records in Gaza on 27 May (United Nations, May 2012). The parties also pledged to carry out non-violent resistance to the Israeli occupation in pursuit of an independent Palestinian state within pre-1967 borders (BBC News, April 2019). However, after a series of meetings, no government was founded as power-sharing problems arose again. Abbas' insistence on appointing Fayyad as the prime minister, Hamas' decision to stop the activities of the election committee in the Gaza Strip, which was caused by, according to Fayyad, Hamas' observations that it was losing support for any future elections, the PNA's unilateral decision to hold local elections in October and Hamas' refusal to recognize

Israel contrary to the demands of the PNA and the US brought the negotiations for the unity government to a deadlock (United Nations, May 2012; United Nations, June 2012; United Nations, July 2012).

5.3. Two Major Operations, A Peace Initiative and Unity Government

5.3.1. Operation Pillar of Defense

On November 14, 2012, the conflicts between Palestinian resistance groups and Israel, which had already escalated since March, resulted in the launching of another major Israeli operation into the Gaza Strip: Operation Pillar of Defense. Israel specified its objectives as destroying Hamas' rocket-launching capabilities, strengthening its deterrence, damaging Hamas and minimizing attacks on itself. However, there were other reasons for Israel launching the campaign such as Netanyahu's aim of increasing his reputation before the Israeli general elections in January 2013 and Israel's discontent with the reconciliation attempts between Hamas and Fatah. Apart from those, the electoral victory of Mohamed Morsi from the MB in Egypt urged Israel to send a message to Hamas that the government change in Egypt would not change anything about the Israeli policies towards it. During the operation, Israel relied heavily on airstrikes, and targeted military training camps and government buildings as well as residential areas where it thought Hamas stored weapons, while Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups used rockets and mortar fires against Israeli targets. On November 22, after the indirect talks between Hamas and Israel, a ceasefire was reached. Through this ceasefire, both Israel and Hamas agreed to stop military attacks on each other. Besides, Israel pledged to ease the blockade. In the end, both parties claimed victory: Israel stated that Hamas's rocket-launching capabilities had been destroyed, and Hamas was content that Israel would ease the blockade thanks to the ceasefire. The operation cost the lives of 174 Palestinians and six Israelis, while Israel also assassinated Ahmed Jabari, a senior leader of the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Baconi, 2018: p. 193-195; Kear, 2019: p. 188-191).

The position of the US on Operation Pillar of Defense was the same as that on Operation Cast Lead. In the early days of the operation, both the House and the Senate passed resolutions that described the operation as an Israeli self-defense against terrorism, condemned the rocket attacks by Hamas and the other Palestinian armed organizations, called on Hamas to accept the three conditions of the Quartet and declared its “vigorous support and unwavering commitment to the welfare, security, and survival of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state with secure borders” (Congress.gov, November 2012, S.Res.599; Congress.gov, November 2012, H.Res.813). Ben Rhodes, Deputy National Security Advisor of the Obama Administration, also made clear that the rocket firing from the Gaza Strip into Israel was unacceptable and Israel was in a position on self-defense. He stated that the onus was on Hamas to de-escalate and some states that had ties with Hamas such as Turkey and Egypt should urge Hamas to de-escalate (The White House, November 15, 2012). Finally, three days before the end of the operation, President Obama had phone calls with Morsi, where he underlined the necessity of Hamas ending rocket fire into Israel, and Netanyahu, where he received an update on the situation. In both calls, he expressed his sadness for the Israeli and Palestinian civilian lives lost during the operation (The White House, November 19, 2012).

Even though the relationship between Fatah and Hamas was relatively soured due to the deadlocked reconciliation process and Hamas’ boycott of the local elections in the autumn of 2012 as a reaction to Fatah’s unilateralism (Lynfield, October 2012), the months following the operation witnessed a rapprochement between the parties. In addition to the sense of Palestinian grievance, the UN’s decision to update the status of Palestine to “non-member observer state”, which allowed the state to take part in General Assembly debates, became another development that brought the parties closer. In December, for the first time since the division, Hamas organized a rally in the West Bank and Fatah organized a rally in Gaza (BBC News, April 2019; MIFTAH, July 2017). In these days, Khaled Mashal also visited Gaza after forty-five years and gave a speech there where he stated that Hamas would never recognize Israel (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019). He also gave a green light to another attempt for ending the political and territorial division stating that Palestine was too big to be

governed by only one faction (Baconi, 2018: p. 197). As a result, in January 2013, reconciliation talks restarted under Egyptian auspices. The parties agreed again on a government of technocrats under the premiership of Abbas to hold elections (United Nations, January 2013). However, the talks failed largely due to the disagreements over prioritizing elections over unification, as Fatah demanded, or securing unification before the elections, as Hamas demanded (Ibish, February 2013). John Kerry's new initiative to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was another factor that undermined the reconciliation talks as Hamas opposed to the peace initiative (Baconi, 2018: p. 198-199). Besides, in the following months, the military coup against Morsi in Egypt and Fatah's establishment of ties with new Sisi regime in contrast to Hamas' condemnation of the coup led to another stall in the reconciliation attempts (Amayreh, September 2013).

5.3.2. John Kerry's Peace Initiative

In March 2013, President Obama, who was reelected a few months ago, visited Israel and the West Bank accompanied by the new Secretary of State, John Kerry (Goldenberg, 2015: p. 5). In both speeches he gave in Ramallah and Jerusalem, Obama underlined the right of self-determination of the Palestinians and the necessity of creating a viable and independent State of Palestine (Jewish Virtual Library, March 2013; Haaretz, March 2013). After holding meetings with officials from the PNA and the Israeli government, Obama authorized Kerry to organize another round of peace talks between the parties. In the following four months, Kerry implemented a robust shuttle diplomacy visiting Israel and the West Bank five times and holding many meetings with the leaders in order to set a suitable environment for a restart of the final status talks (Goldenberg, 2015: p. 5). For the talks to restart, Israel promised to free groups of pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners in different times in the following months. In return, as Israel and the US were discontented with the PNA's efforts in the international institutions such as the UN, the PNA pledged to stop applying to such agencies (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 202). On July 19, 2013, Kerry announced that the PNA and Israel had agreed to continue direct talks for a period of nine months. Ambassador Martin Indyk was also assigned as Special Envoy for Israeli-Palestinian

Negotiations by the US administration. Then, the negotiations formally began in the following days with meetings held in Washington (Goldenberg, 2015: p. 5), based on the API with revisions (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 201). On the other hand, Hamas was critical of the latest peace initiative. In a release, Hamas stated that negotiations with the “Zionist entity” would not bring anything new and such peace talks would not be useful for the Palestinian cause, but would prolong the divisions among the Palestinians (KUNA, June 2013). To Hamas, the peace initiative was only “a means for the occupation to look good to the international community” (New Delhi Times, August 2013). Besides, Hamas thought that Abbas and his negotiation team had no legitimacy to represent the Palestinian people in the talks (New Delhi Times, August 2013).

In the following months, bilateral negotiations continued between Israel and PNA teams, while the US played the role of a facilitator. Once again, the construction of new settlements by Israel severely damaged the course of the negotiations. Besides, the Netanyahu government was harshly criticized by the Israeli public, especially by those from the right-wing, for freeing pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners. As a result, the negotiations bore no fruit by December. In December, the US began to work on a framework agreement that would set the key parameters for a final agreement, as it became clear that no comprehensive agreement would be reached by April 2014, the end of the period of nine months (Goldenberg, 2015: p. 5-7). However, no tangible progress was made as settlement problem persisted and Israel was reluctant to free the fourth group of prisoners (Rudoren & Kershner, April 2014). Upon this, the PNA applied to fifteen different UN agencies and international treaties for membership (The Times of Israel, April 2014). Thus, talks came to a deadlock and Kerry’s initiative failed in months. Kerry criticized Israel after the death of talks by stating that Israel risked becoming "an apartheid state" if a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would not be attained in a near future (BBC News, April 2014). Since the failure of Kerry’s initiative, no direct peace talks between the PNA and Israel have taken place.

5.3.3. Foundation of Palestinian Unity Government

By early 2014, Hamas was going through a serious political isolation and economic crisis. That was primarily because, in addition to the Israeli blockade, the Sisi regime in Egypt had declared Hamas a terrorist group, banned its activities in Egypt and aggravated the blockade by closing all access to the Gaza Strip and destroying all of Hamas' tunnels under the Rafah border (Baconi, 2018: p. 200-204; Kear, 2019: p. 227). The lack of Iranian funding was another factor that damaged Hamas' economy. Besides, the re-escalation of the violence between Palestinian resistance groups and Israel made life even harder in Gaza. As a result, to ease these hardships, Hamas once again needed a reconciliation with Fatah. On the other hand, as the PNA and Israel were not able to make a remarkable progress for a final status agreement or a draft framework in Kerry's peace initiative, Fatah was also becoming more and more willing for a reconciliation with Hamas (Baconi, 2018: p. 200-206).

On April 23 Hamas, Fatah and other PLO factors signed an agreement to form a government of technocrats that would hold elections in the occupied territories for the PLC, the PNC and the presidency, facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza and unite the institutions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The agreement proposed that this interim government would be formed in five weeks and hold elections in six months. Due to its political and economic weakness, Hamas once again had to make the concessions that it sacrificed both its seats in the government for technocrats and political hold in the Gaza Strip for the unity government and future elections (Baconi, 2018: p. 206-207; Kear, 2019: p. 228-229). Just after the signing of the agreement, Israel officially suspended the peace talks. Netanyahu characterized the agreement as "a great reverse for peace" (Beaumont, Black & Roberts, April 2014). The US also reacted negatively to the agreement. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki expressed the disappointment of the US with the agreement and stated that it "could seriously complicate" the efforts for peace (Reuters, April 2014), while Obama said that the agreement was "unhelpful" (Ahram Online, April 2014). On the other hand, Russia, the EU and the UN, the other three members of the Quartet, praised the deal (Baconi, 2018: p. 206).

After seven years of efforts, the Palestinian Unity government was officially founded on June 2, 2014. It consisted of seventeen ministers who were technocrats, and was headed by Rami Hamdallah, who was already the prime minister of the PNA government in the West Bank (BBC News, June 2014). None of the ministers were from Hamas and most of them were close to Abbas and Fatah, though they were nominally independent. Besides, like the prime minister, some of the other ministers were the incumbent ministers of the former PNA government (Press-Telegram, June 2014). After the unity government took office, the Hamas government in Gaza resigned. Ismail Haniyeh described the unity government as "a government of one people and one political system", while Abbas said, "A black page in history has been turned forever." (BBC News, June 2014). The EU, the UN and Russia welcomed the new government and expressed their willingness to work with it (The Jerusalem Post, June 2014). The reaction of the US was, this time, somewhat positive. Jen Psaki stated that the US was willing to do business with the new government as it was a government of technocrats and did not include any Hamas members. Nevertheless, she implied that the US would have a cautious approach saying, "We will continue to evaluate the composition and policies of the new government and calibrate our approach accordingly" (Reuters, June 2014), which was a reference to the principles of the Quartet (Reuters, June 2014). However, the reaction of Israel to the unity government was extremely negative. Netanyahu accused the US of collaborating with Hamas for its willingness to work with the unity government, even though the members of the unity government had no ties with Hamas (Beaumont, June 2014). Besides, Israel immediately began to apply new financial and security sanctions on the new government (Baconi, 2018: p. 208), as well as announcing its plan to construct more than three thousand new housing units in the settlements in the West Bank (Kear, 2019: p. 194).

5.3.4. Operation Protective Edge

On June 12, three Israeli teenagers from the West Bank settlers were kidnapped (Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 203). Netanyahu immediately held Hamas responsible for the kidnappings and the unity government for failing to prevent the incident, while

Hamas denied any responsibility (Kear, 2019: p. 195). Then, Israel launched a security operation into the West Bank to find the teenagers. During the operation, Israel arrested hundreds of Palestinians including some PLC members as well as killing five Palestinians, damaged Hamas' and the PNA's social and political infrastructure in the West Bank, imposed curfews, raided houses and destroyed sites. Even though the stated aim of the operation was to locate the teenagers, the Israeli intelligence had already received the information that the teenagers had most likely been killed just after being kidnapped and it was some low-level members of Hamas who were responsible for the incident rather than the leadership (Baconi, 2018: p. 212-213; Kear, 2019: p. 195). According to Harms & Ferry (2017), this makes the operation "nothing more than a punitive exercise" (p. 203). The Israeli operation led to an increase in rocket fire from the Gaza Strip into Israel by Hamas and other armed Palestinian factions. Upon this, Netanyahu emphasized the need to weaken Hamas's military capacity by using force in order to reinstate the calm, despite the fact that Hamas had largely complied with the ceasefire of 2012 until Israel's latest operation (Baconi, 2018: p. 213-214). On July 1, the dead bodies of the teenagers were found. Then, Netanyahu stated that Hamas was responsible and would pay for this (Kear, 2019: p. 195). According to Martin Kear (2019), Israel's calls for revenge for the kidnapping and killing of the teenagers were only a diplomatic and political pretext to launch a major political and military assault on Hamas with the aims of de-legitimizing the unity government and destroying Hamas's social, political and military infrastructure in the occupied territories (p. 196). Eventually, on July 8, Israel launched a very large operation into the Gaza Strip named Operation Protective Edge.

In Operation Protective Edge, Israel resorted to both airstrikes and ground invasion with the stated aim of destroying Hamas' infrastructure, especially the tunnels that Hamas dug into Israeli territories and rocket fire capabilities, for self-defense (Baconi, 2018: p. 214-215; Harms & Ferry, 2017: p. 204). In the airstrikes, Israel aimed at houses, mosques, hospitals, apartments and even graveyards using vehicles like F-16s, drones and helicopters (Baconi, 2018: p. 214-215). In response, Hamas and other groups in Gaza threw thousands rockets and mortars into Israel, in addition to waging a defensive war against the IDF (Baconi, 2018: p. 215-216; Kear, 2019: p. 198). Even

though calls for a ceasefire came frequently from the international community, a ceasefire did not come before late August, which was largely because Hamas rejected a truce in order to force Israel to lift the blockade through armed struggle (Baconi, 2018: p. 218-219). Hamas had also other demands such as construction of a seaport in Gaza and release of its members in the West Bank from prisons. The ceasefire announced on August 26 brought about easing of the blockade by Israel in addition to a mutual cessation of violence. Although its demands were not met, Hamas claimed victory and held a rally to celebrate the ceasefire. Israel also claimed victory as it hit Hamas hard and did not accept Hamas' demands (BBC News, August 2014).

Operation Protective Edge, which lasted approximately fifty days, destroyed the Gaza Strip: With estimated numbers, it cost the lives of 2251 Palestinians, 1,462 of whom were civilians and 551 of whom were children. Seventeen hospitals were damaged, twenty-six schools were destroyed and 122 were damaged, 18,000 houses were demolished and 108,000 people were left homeless, and the water and sewage network of the Gaza Strip was severely disrupted (Kear, 2019: p. 198). The total cost in the Gaza Strip was around \$7.8 billion. Israel's losses were sixty-six soldiers and five civilians (Baconi, 2018: p. 222). Besides, ten thousand people in southern Israel were displaced due to the rockets and mortars (Kear, 2019: p. 198). Throughout the operation, international organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Red Cross repeatedly condemned Israel for its strategy of collective punishment and disproportionate use of force, while the UN also accused Israel of committing war crimes and severely violating international law (Baconi, 2018: p. 215). Since the end of Operation Protective Edge, Israel has not organized any major operations into the Gaza Strip, while the frequency of Hamas attacks against Israel has also decreased. Nevertheless, clashes still take place between the parties from time to time.

On the other hand, the US did not deviate from its earlier position during the Israeli operations into the Gaza Strip, it sided with Israel in Operation Protective Edge. Both the Senate and the House passed resolutions supporting Israel's right to defend itself and condemning Hamas' rocket attacks on Israel. S.Res.526 also accused Hamas of

using human shields and condemned that (Congress.gov, July 2014, H.Res.657; Congress.gov, July 2014, S.Res.526). Like the Congress, the Obama administration supported Israel's operation passionately, but also often called for a truce and brought the civilian deaths on the agenda. In a press briefing, White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest emphasized that Israel was facing a threat by Hamas' tunnels and rocket attacks, and it was Israel's right to take action to dismantle Hamas' infrastructure (The White House, 21 July 2014). Moreover, in another press briefing, he stated that Hamas and other Palestinian factors were deliberately targeting civilians in the conflicts while Israel had "very high standards to ensure the safety and well-being of civilians", nevertheless, adding that Israel should do more to reach these standards (The White House, 28 July 2014). Similarly, in a phone call with Netanyahu, President Obama condemned Hamas' rocket and tunnel attacks on Israel and reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself, but also expressed his concern for the deaths from both sides and called for a ceasefire (The White House, 27 July 2014).

5.3.5. Demise of the Unity Government

Following the operation, in September, Hamas and Fatah signed a supplementary agreement to redefine the tasks of the unity government and facilitate its rule in the Gaza Strip. According to this agreement, the government would end the blockade, reconstruct the Gaza Strip and organize a conference of donors to this aim, refunction the PLC, hold elections and pay the salaries of the government employees in the Gaza Strip. Fatah and Hamas also declared their commitment to ending the occupation and establishing a sovereign Palestinian state within pre-1967 borders in the agreement (Toameh, September 2014). In October, the first cabinet meeting of the unity government convened in Gaza under the leadership of Rami Hamdallah (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019). However, these developments were taking place amidst power-sharing problems. Hamas, which had to accept the establishment of the unity government due to the political and economic crisis that it was once going through, acted pragmatically again and began to spoil the unity government as Israel eased the blockade and the balance of power between Fatah and Hamas changed in favor of Hamas for its resistance in the Operation Protective Edge (Baconi, 2018: p. 224; Kear,

2019: p. 230-231). For example, it prevented five governors appointed by Abbas for the districts of Gaza from taking office in order not to relinquish its political hold in the coastal enclave, upon which Abbas accused Hamas of establishing a shadow government in Gaza. Similarly, Hamas proposed that a national committee formed by all factions in the Gaza Strip should undertake reconstruction and aid delivery affairs, rather than the unity government (Kear, 2019: p. 231). Abbas' statements criticizing Hamas for the loss of lives during Operation Protective Edge and the arrest of many Hamas members in the West Bank by the PNA after a bombing attack on the cars and houses of some Fatah seniors were among the other development that fueled the tension (The Times of Israel, November 2014). Besides, Abbas was claiming that Israel and Hamas were secretly negotiating, which was denied by Hamas (Solomon, November 2014). In late November, Hamas stated that the unity government's mandate of six months had expired. Fatah rejected this claim and stated that there was never any agreement that the government would fall if the unity government had not completed its tasks, including holding elections, in six months (The Times of Israel, November 2014). The power-sharing problems were not resolved in the following months. Eventually, the unity government was dissolved in June 2015. Abbas stated that the reason for the dissolution was that the unity government was unable to operate in the Gaza Strip. However, it is likely that Hamas' statements that it was holding indirect talks with Israel to strengthen the ceasefire were also a reason for Abbas to dissolve the unity government (Al Jazeera, June 2015). In late 2015 and early 2016, Hamas and Fatah organized another round of talks for reconciliation in Doha. Although Hamas announced that the parties were close to a reconciliation agreement, Fatah's insistence on Hamas' relinquishment of its hold Gaza and Hamas' rejection prevented any genuine progress (MIFTAH, July 2017; The New Arab, February 2016).

5.4. Hamas and the US in Recent Years

5.4.1. President Trump

While the years of 2015 and 2016 were relatively quiet for the Palestinian politics, from 2017 onwards, important developments mostly related to the policies of the US

have taken place. In January 2017, Donald Trump from the Republican Party took office as the forty-fifth president of the US. During his campaign, he seemed not to seek a reconciliation with Muslims, unlike Obama. In that period, he was remarkable for his anti-Muslim statements such as “We have a problem in this country; it's called Muslims.” and “If you have people coming out of mosques with hatred and death in their eyes and on their minds, we're going to have to do something.” (Johnson & Hauslohner, May 2017). He even stated that he would “strongly consider” closing mosques and proposed banning Muslims from immigrating to the US (Johnson & Hauslohner, May 2017). On the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Trump had stated in the earlier phases of his campaign that he would have a neutral approach to the issue. However, as his rival, Hillary Clinton, was a fervent supporter of Israel, he changed his position later in favor of Israel in order not to be outdone and said, “I would love to be neutral if it's possible. It's probably not possible because there's so much hatred.” and “There's nobody more pro-Israel than I am.” (McCaskill, March 2016). Similarly, he criticized Obama's policies towards Israel and said, “When I become president, the days of treating Israel like a second-class citizen will end on day one.” (Landler & Haberman, March 2016). He also promised that his administration would recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital and move the US embassy to this city from Tel Aviv (Beaumont, November 2016). On the other hand, Trump seemed to be indifferent to Hamas and did not speak of it very often. He even once admitted that he did not know the difference between Hamas and Hezbollah (Holpuch, September 2015). After being elected, with regard to the Israeli Palestinian conflict, Trump stated that he would like to bring peace “to war that never ends” with a deal for “humanity's sake” (The Times of Israel, November 2016), while Hamas leader Mashal called on the new administration to “treat fairly with the Palestinians” and end the American policy of ignoring Israel's “perpetual crimes” (Anadolu Agency, November 2016).

5.4.2. 2017 Fatah-Hamas Agreement

In the months following Trump coming to power, negotiations took place between the PNA team and the US administration in order to set up a fertile ground for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, while Trump and Abbas also met twice for the same

purpose (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019). However, in October 2017, Hamas and Fatah unexpectedly signed a reconciliation agreement in Cairo under Egyptian auspices. The increasing economic sanctions of the PNA on Hamas aimed at forcing it to relinquish its control over the coastal enclave bore fruit and led Hamas to seek reconciliation with Fatah. According to the agreement, the PNA would assume control of all border crossings into the Gaza Strip by November 1. Then, the new unity government would take full responsibility for Gaza a month later (CNN International, October 2017; Al Jazeera, October 2017). Gaza's police force will include three thousand new PNA officers and Hamas officials in Gaza would be integrated into PNA ministries. Besides, the PNA would ease the sanctions on Hamas. However, the most controversial issues such as elections, reformation of the PLO and the status of Hamas' armed wing were not resolved and left to the next meeting in late November (Cook, October 2017).

After the agreement was signed, the Israeli government made a statement where it declared that it would refuse any diplomatic talks with any Palestinian unity government including Hamas and demanded that Hamas recognized Israel, renounced terrorism, disbanded its armed wing, returned the bodies of Israeli soldiers and Israeli civilians held by Hamas and handed over the Gaza Strip to the PNA including border crossings (Beaumont, October 2017). On the other hand, the US did not react negatively as the Trump administration believed that only a full PNA control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip could help it with "the ultimate deal" that would end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Asseburg, 2017: p. 4). Nevertheless, Jason Greenblatt, Special Representative for International Negotiations of the Trump administration, stated that the unity government would have to "explicitly commit to nonviolence" (Cook, October 2017). Even though Hamas handed over the authority of the Rafah border to the PNA in November and the parties agreed to hold general elections by the end of 2018 (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019), the reconciliation agreement collapsed in the following days as Hamas did not want to hand over the control of the Gaza Strip to the PNA and refused to disband the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades (Lieber, December 2017). The 2017 Fatah-Hamas Agreement is the last reconciliation

agreement signed by Hamas and Fatah, and no deal has been reached by the parties ever since, even though they have occasionally held talks for reconciliation.

5.4.3. Trump's Pro-Israeli Policies

Starting from late 2017, President Trump began to follow very pro-Israeli policies. In December, he kept his promise he made to Israel during his campaign and officially recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and announced that the US would also move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019). As well as damaging the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah (The Times of Israel, December 2017), this move led Hamas and other factions in Gaza to fire rockets into Israel. In response, Israel carried out military operations into the Gaza Strip against Hamas (BBC News, December 2017). Hamas also called on the Palestinian people to start a new intifada after Trump's decision (Williams & Al-Mughrabi, December 2017). Not an intifada but some violent protests took place in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Kershner, December 2017). In March, thousands of people from Gaza launched six weeks of Friday protests called the "Great March of Return" near the Gaza-Israel border. The protests, which were initiated by independent activists but later supported by Hamas, were demanding an end to the blockade and the recognition of the right of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes in Israel. Israel used a disproportionate violence against the protestors and caused serious casualties. In May, the Trump administration moved the US Embassy in Jerusalem. Upon this, protests made peak and Israel increased the dose of the violence. The US blamed Hamas for the violence and stated once again its support for Israel' right to defend itself. The border protests continued throughout 2018 and 2019. By March 2019, 190 Palestinians had been killed and 28,000 had been injured by the Israeli forces (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019; Holmes & Holder, March 2019; Hudson, May 2018).

In the meantime, apart from capital and embassy issues, the Trump administration continued to make decisions supporting Israel. In January 2018, the US designated Ismail Haniyeh, who had replaced Mashal as the head of the Political Bureau of Hamas

the previous year, as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist (US Department of State, n.d.). Hamas condemned the move and stated that the US animosity towards the Palestinians was unprecedented (Al Jazeera, February 2018). In March, the US stopped economic aid to the PNA as long as it continued to pay stipends to the Palestinians convicted of acts of terrorism or their families. In September, the Trump administration cut all aid to UNRWA and Israeli-Palestinian people-to-people programs administered through USAID (United States Institute of Peace, June 2019). In the same month, the US shut the PLO mission in Washington stating that the PLO did not take steps “to advance the start of direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel” (US Department of State, September 2018). In February 2019, the US stopped all aid to the Palestinians in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank under the Anti-Terrorism Clarification Act which allowed the Americans to sue those receiving foreign aid from the US over alleged complicity in acts of war (Knell, February 2019). Upon these challenges, Hamas and Fatah held talks in Moscow to eliminate their disputes on reconciliation. The parties failed to reach agreement, nevertheless, they agreed on rejecting Trump’s peace plan on the agenda (Toameh, February 2019). In November, the Trump administration formally declared that it did not consider the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories as illegal, while Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said, “Calling the establishment of civilian settlements inconsistent with international law has not advanced the cause of peace.” (Borger & Holmes, November 2019).

5.4.4. Trump Peace Plan

In January 2020, President Trump expounded his long-awaited peace proposal with a joint press conference with Netanyahu. It was prepared under the leadership of Jared Kushner, Trump’s son-in-law and advisor. The plan, which Trump called the “deal of the century”, proposed a two-state solution but favored Israel strongly in all major issues (BBC News, January 2020). According to the plan, there would be some form of Palestinian statehood but few details were revealed about the structure of this statehood. The Palestinian state would be non-militarized and there would be a strict Israeli security control in some areas including the sea. Moreover, the plan had stipulations for the Palestinians to be granted independence such as a complete

dismantling of Hamas. On the other hand, Jerusalem would be recognized as the undivided capital of Israel, while the capital of the Palestinian state would be located in the east and north of the city and the status-quo in the holy sites in Jerusalem would be preserved. On the settlements issue, the plan proposed that the vast majority of the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the Jordan Valley would be recognized as part of Israel. To compensate this loss of territory, the Palestinian state would receive some territory near Gaza, which is mostly desert. Besides, settlement construction would stop for four years. Finally, the plan rejected the right of return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes in Israel (Beaumont, January 2020; Holmes, Taha, Balousha & McGreal, January 2020).

The Palestinians immediately rejected Trump's plan. While Abbas characterized the plan as conspiracy that would not pass, Hamas was also harsh in its statements. Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhr described the document as worthless and said, "Palestine will prevail, and Trump and the deal will go to the dustbin of history." (Holmes, Taha, Balousha & McGreal, January 2020). Likewise, Ismail Haniyeh stated that the deal of the century had been born dead, it had no future and they would "foil the deal at all costs" (Shehada, February 2020). He also stated that the deal could lead the Palestinians to a "new phase in their struggle" against Israel (Deccan Herald, January 2020). Their rejectionist position regarding the plan has brought about a rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah. After the announcement of the deal; Hamas, Fatah and other Palestinian factions held an emergency meeting to discuss a unified response to the plan (Daraghmeh & Akram, January 2020). Netanyahu's immediate plans on annexing the Jordan Valley and the settlement blocs in the West Bank as proposed by the Trump Peace Plan (MEMO, July 2020) was another factor that made the parties closer. In the following months, Hamas and Fatah decided to continue meetings and take further steps to end the internal division (Xinhuanet, July 2020). In September, the parties held meetings in Istanbul and agreed on holding elections to end the division. However, a detailed road map has not been shared yet (BBC News Türkçe, October 2020).

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has developed two main arguments. The first argument of the thesis is that, between 1987 and 2020, Hamas followed a militant, Islamist and anti-Israeli agenda but it also proved many times to be a very flexible and pragmatic organization in both its aims and methods related to the Palestinian cause, while the US, acted as a peace broker between the parties claiming to be impartial, however, sided with Israel in the major issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The second argument of this thesis is that the ideological and procedural differences between Hamas and the US have contributed to the arrival of important developments in the Palestinian politics between 1987 and 2020. Even though Hamas is a pragmatic organization and flexible in its aims and methods, in general terms, it has pursued Islamist, militant and anti-Israeli policies; while the US proposed peace plans and democratization with a pro-Israeli tendency. This contrast has led, from time to time, to the emergence of inevitable conflicts between Hamas and the US.

The findings suggest that Hamas has an Islamist worldview and defends the Palestinian cause within an Islamic and militant framework. However, the pragmatic and flexible side of Hamas can be observed on many occasions within this period of thirty-three years. The first example is that even though Hamas emerged with the aim of eradicating Israel and found an Islamic Palestinian state in the region of historical Palestine, just years after its foundation, Hamas leaders began to speak of accepting a Palestinian state within pre-1967 borders and signing a long-term truce with Israel (Milton-Edwards & Farrell, 2010: p. 8; Long, 2010: p. 137-139). Eventually, in 2017, Hamas stated in its new charter that it accepted a sovereign Palestinian state within

pre-1967 borders with Jerusalem as the capital on the condition that the refugees would return to Palestine (Middle East Eye, May 2017). At this point, it is clear that the Israeli operations, the sanctions of the PNA and international actors such as the US and the EU has led Hamas to get flexible in its aims. On the other hand, the fall of the MB movement from power in Egypt in 2013 through a coup, the weakening of the organization by crackdowns of the new pro-Western and authoritarian Sisi regime and its closure of the Rafah border to Gaza also contributed to Hamas formally softening its stance with a new charter.

The second example is that, in its early years, Hamas reflected its armed resistance as the only way of liberating Palestine. Moreover, Hamas adopted a rejectionist position against the political processes of the PNA and US-sponsored peace plans, believing that armed resistance was the only way to liberation and considered those processes and plans as concessions given to the “Zionists” and the US. However, in the following years, Hamas participated in both local and legislative elections. This change of manner indicates that Hamas values power and aims to be an important actor in the Palestinian politics. To that aim, Hamas takes pragmatic positions and is ready to give concessions from its initial methods.

A third example is that, even though Hamas has always had an anti-American rhetoric in its publications and the statements of its leaders, it did not refrain from establishing ties with the US in the early years of the First Intifada to get stronger and replace the PLO as the leader of the Palestinian politics. Besides, after the US cut ties with Hamas, Hamas tried to reestablish contact with the US in the following years through various means such as Ahmed Yousef’s letter to Condoleezza Rice (Yousef, 2008: p. 204-206). This implies another Hamas pragmatism: As it seeks to become a recognized movement in the international arena, Hamas tries to establish good ties with major international actors such as the US, although it rhetorically rejects everything tied to the US.

A final example is of Hamas’ pragmatism is that it did not implement the Sharia law completely in the Gaza Strip after it captured the coastal enclave in 2007 and opted for

a partial Islamization fearing that such a move could alienate the West and the Palestinians (Kear, 2019: p. 157), even though it always emphasized that Islam was its main reference. That is to say that Hamas softened its very fundamental worldview in order not to lose any support, which is another act of pragmatism. All these examples indicate that Hamas is a pragmatic and flexible organization in both its aims and methods.

Regarding the US policies, this thesis suggests that the US policies toward the Palestinian politics between 1987 and 2020 are characterized by proposing peace initiatives and democracy promotion with a pro-Israeli attitude rather than impartiality. The lack of a constant and determined US pressure on Israel to stop settlement construction, withdraw from the territories it has occupied since 1967, acknowledge Palestinian sovereignty in the Muslim part of the Old City and the Haram al-Sharif, and accept the Palestinian refugees into its territories are the examples of the sided attitude of the US during the peace process. The thesis also asserts that these policies of the US are in a heavy contrast with those of Hamas.

The second argument of this thesis is that the ideological and procedural differences between Hamas and the US have had an influence on some crucial developments in the Palestinian politics between 1987 and 2020. Even though Hamas is a pragmatic organization and flexible in its aims and methods, in general terms, it has pursued Islamist, militant and anti-Israeli policies; while the US proposed peace plans and democratization with a pro-Israeli tendency. This contrast has led to the emergence of inevitable conflicts between Hamas and the US, and these conflicts have contributed to the different developments in different times in the Palestinian politics.

During the early years of Hamas, the conflict between the policies and visions of Hamas and the US was a vital force that helped the moderation of the PLO. In that period, Hamas began to shake the longstanding power monopoly of the PLO with its Islamist and militant agenda, and its popularity increased dramatically. This pushed the PLO to be more conciliatory towards Israel, the US and American peace initiatives between 1987 and 1993 (Rigby, 1991: p. 10; Aruri, 2003: p. 71-75). In order not to

lose its privileged place in the Palestinian politics, the PLO had to comply with the US-sponsored peace plans by renouncing violence, accepting the UN Resolutions 242 and 338, recognizing Israel, and then, signing the Oslo I Accord in 1993 even though this agreement is claimed not to be very advantageous for the Palestinians. That is to say, in those years, the conflicting visions of Hamas and the US served the purpose of moderating the PLO and paved the way for the peace process.

During the Oslo years, the US was the guarantor of the peace process, while Hamas was strongly opposing the process and rejecting any deal signed within Oslo framework. This stark contrast between their positions created another conflict between Hamas and the US. In order to undermine the process, Hamas increased the intensity of violence and perpetrated many deadly attacks against Israel in these years. Besides, as the US urged the PNA to apply a crackdown on Hamas, intra-Palestinian clashes also took place resulting in a level of bloodshed that was unprecedented. The violence that took place in that period appears to be linked to the conflicting visions of the militant and Islamist Hamas and the peace-broker US.

Hamas' electoral victory in 2006 was an outcome of both its rising popularity that partly stemmed from the US-supported Israeli violence and the democratization and political reform policies of the US in the PNA. The Hamas violence made its historical peak in the first few years of the Second Intifada, while the US strongly supported Israel's military operations against the PNA and Hamas where the infrastructure of the PNA was destroyed and Hamas leaders were assassinated. As a result, the destruction of the infrastructure of the PNA gave Hamas the opportunity to fill the political, social and economic vacuum (Natil, 2015: p. 38-39), while the assassination of the Hamas leaders also increased its prestige among the Palestinians. Thus, Hamas won the elections held under the US-led democratization program thanks to the US-supported Israeli violence. This means that the conflict between Islamist and radical Hamas and the peace broker and democracy promoter US led Hamas to rise politically. Nevertheless, it was another conflict caused by the difference between the ideologies of Hamas and the US which prompted the latter to undermine the Hamas government

in Gaza. At the end, the American policies against militant Hamas led to the division of power in the Palestinian politics in 2007.

Between 2007 and 2020, there were mainly two points of conflict between Hamas and the US. First, in every reconciliation effort between Fatah and Hamas, the US imposed the three conditions of the Quartet to recognize any unity government that had members from both Fatah and Hamas: Hamas must recognize Israel, accept the previous agreements between the PNA and Israel, and renounce violence. However; Islamist, militant and anti-Israeli Hamas always rejected all these three demands. Therefore, together with the power-sharing problems between Fatah and Hamas, this conflict between Hamas and the US has been the other significant reason for the failure of the reconciliation attempts between the parties. The other point of conflict occurred during major Israeli operations into the Gaza Strip. In Operation Cast Lead of 2008-2009, Operation Pillar of Defense of 2012 and Operation Protective Edge of 2014, all of which were launched with the stated aim of stopping the rocket firing by Hamas, Israel applied a very disproportionate violence and hundreds of Palestinians lost their lives, while Gaza was also destroyed. The US' constant support to Israel's operations intensified the conflict between Hamas and the US-supported Israel, similar to the case during the Second Intifada. The result of this conflict was the destruction of Gaza and high numbers of casualties on the Palestinian side. If the US had done things necessary to stop Israel from conducting the operations or convinced it to be proportional, the consequences of these operations would not have been so grave for the Palestinians. However, due to the ideological conflict with Hamas, it did not do so.

Consequently, the thesis asserts that Hamas has been an Islamist, militant and anti-Israeli organization. However, it is also a pragmatic and flexible movement in its objectives and methods. The US, on the other hand, has always claimed to be an impartial peace broker in the Palestinian politics. However, it has had a strong pro-Israeli attitude in all the major issues. Hamas' involvement in the Palestinian elections, the shift in its objective from eradicating Israel to end the occupation and its choice not to resort to a full and widespread Islamization of the society and the state are the evidences of Hamas' flexibility and pragmatism; while the fact that the US almost

never pressured Israel to make concessions during the peace process blaming Hamas and PNA on many issues, and followed an increasingly pro-Israeli policy over the years are also the evidence of the US' biased Palestinian policy. This contrast between the visions and policies of Hamas and the US has encountered many times in the last three decades and prompted serious developments for the Palestinian politics each time, such as the start of the Oslo process, the violence in the mid-1990s, Hamas' electoral victory in 2006, the Fatah-Hamas split, the failure of the reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas, and the destruction of the Gaza Strip by Israeli operations.

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APPENDICES

A. TURKISH SUMMARY / TÜRKÇE ÖZET

HAMAS VE AMERİKA BİRLEŞİK DEVLETLERİ: 1987'DEN 2020'YE FİLİSTİN'DE ÇATIŞAN VİZYON VE POLİTİKALAR

Bu tez, Hamas ve Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin, Birinci İntifada'nın başladığı ve Hamas'ın kurulduğu 1987 yılından günümüze kadar olan dönemde Filistin siyasetine dair sahip oldukları vizyonu, uyguladıkları politikaları ve bu iki aktörün vizyon ve politikaları arasındaki farkların Filistin siyasetinde ortaya çıkardığı sonuçları incelemektedir.

Bu tez altı bölümden oluşmaktadır. Tezin giriş niteliğinde olan birinci bölümü, ilk olarak Filistin sorununun tarihsel ve bölgesel bağlamda kısa bir özetini sunmaktadır. Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nun Birinci Dünya Savaşı'ndaki yenilgisini müteakiben, o zamana dek yaklaşık dört yüz yıl boyunca Osmanlı hakimiyetinde bulunan tarihi Filistin bölgesinde bir manda yönetimi kurulmuş ve İngiltere bu manda aracılığıyla bölgeyi Milletler Cemiyeti adına yönetmeye başlamıştır. Bu sırada, Filistin'de bağımsız bir Yahudi devleti kurmayı amaçlayan küresel Siyonizm hareketinin çalışmaları sonucu, Filistin'e zaten daha önce başlamış olan Yahudi göçleri devam etmiş, bu da manda yönetimi altındaki Filistin'de Müslüman Araplar ve Yahudi göçmenler arasında çatışmaların çıkmasına sebebiyet vermiştir. İkinci Dünya Savaşı sırasında gerçekleşen Yahudi Soykırımı, Yahudiler için Filistin'de bir devlet kurulması sürecini hızlandırmış, 1948'de manda yönetiminin sona ermesiyle, manda yönetimi altındaki toprakların %56'sını kapsayan bölgede İsrail Devleti kurulmuştur.

Filistin'de binlerce yıldır Arapların yaşadığını, bu sebeple yeni gelen Yahudi göçmenlerin bölgede böyle bir devlet kurmaya hakkının olmadığını öne süren Irak, Suriye, Ürdün ve Lübnan gibi Arap devletleri, İsrail'in bağımsızlık ilanının ertesi günü bu devlete savaş açmıştır. Fakat bu savaşı İsrail kazanmış ve bu sayede topraklarını daha da genişletmiştir. Ayrıca, savaşın sonunda çok sayıda Filistinli Arap evlerini terk etmek zorunda kalmış ve çevredeki Arap ülkelerinde mülteci konumuna düşmüştür. 1956, 1967 ve 1973 yıllarında üç Arap-İsrail Savaşı daha gerçekleşmiş ve İsrail bu savaşların hepsinde Arap koalisyonunu mağlup etmiştir. 1967'de gerçekleşen ve bu savaşların üçüncüsü olan Altı Gün Savaşı'nda İsrail Batı Şeria ve Gazze Şeridi'ni ele geçirmiştir, o tarihten bu yana da bu toprakları işgal altında tutmaya devam etmektedir. Öte yandan, 1950'li yılların sonunda İsrail'i ortadan kaldırmak ve bölgede bir Arap devleti kurmak amacıyla sosyalizm ve Arap milliyetçiliği tandanslı El Fetih isimli silahlı direniş örgütü ortaya çıkmış, 1964'te de Filistin Kurtuluş Örgütü kurulmuştur. El Fetih liderliğindeki FKÖ, 1980'li yılların sonuna kadar Arap devletlerinin desteğiyle İsrail'e karşı silahlı mücadele yürütmüştür. 1987'de Birinci İntifada'nın başlamasıyla; Hamas, FKÖ'ye muhalif İslamcı ve radikal bir hareket olarak ortaya çıkarken, ABD ise bir dış güç olarak Filistin siyasetinde varlığını daha güçlü bir şekilde hissettirmeye başlamıştır. Tez, bu noktadan sonrasını ele almakta ve Filistin siyasetini Hamas ve ABD politikalarına odaklanarak irdelemektedir.

Tezin ilk bölümü, bu kısa özetten sonra; amacın, yöntemin, argümanların ve tezin yapısının belirtilmesi ile devam etmektedir. Tez, Hamas ve ABD'nin, 1987 ve 2020 yılları arasında Filistin siyasetine dair nasıl bir vizyona sahip olduklarını, hangi politikaları uyguladıklarını ve bu vizyon ve politikaların çatışmasının Filistin siyasetinde doğurduğu sonuçları ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, 1987'den 2020'ye kadar devam eden kronolojik bir anlatım tarzı benimsenmiştir. Tezin hazırlanmasında hem birincil hem ikincil kaynaklar kullanılmıştır: kitaplar, makaleler, resmi hükümet kayıtları ve haber siteleri en çok başvurulan kaynaklar arasındadır.

Tezin iki ana argümanı bulunmaktadır. İlk argüman, İslamcı ve radikal bir örgüt olan ve ilk kurulduğu yıllarda İsrail'i silah gücüyle ortadan kaldırarak tüm Filistin'de bir

İslam devleti kurmayı amaçlayan Hamas'ın amaç ve yöntem bakımından aslında oldukça pragmatik ve esnek bir örgüt olduğu, ABD'nin ise İsrail ve Filistinliler arasında tarafsız bir arabulucu olma iddiasıyla barış planları hazırlayan ve Filistin siyasetinde demokratikleşmeyi teşvik eden bir aktör olmasına karşın, bu süreç içerisinde tüm önemli dönemeçlerde İsrail'in yanında olduğudur. Tezin ikinci argümanı ise, İslamcı ve radikal Hamas ile barış inisiyatifleri hazırlayan ve demokrasi yanlısı ABD'nin çatışan vizyon ve politikalarının, 1987'den beri Filistin siyasetinde yaşanan birçok önemli olayın ortaya çıkışında önemli bir rol oynadığıdır.

Tezin ikinci bölümü, 1987-2020 arasındaki kronolojik anlatının dışında olup, temel özellikleriyle Hamas'ı tanıtmayı amaçlamaktadır. Hamas, Aralık 1987'de, Birinci İntifada'nın patlak vermesiyle, Müslüman Kardeşler örgütünün Filistin ofisinin bir kolu olarak kurulmuştur. 1940'lı yıllardan beri var olan Müslüman Kardeşler Filistin ofisi, 1987'ye kadar, FKÖ'nün aksine daha barışçıl, dini tebliğ ve sosyal yardım ağırlıklı çalışmalar yapmış olsa da, Likud yönetiminin zaten işgal altında yaşamakta olan Filistinlilerin hayatını daha da zorlaştırmaya başlaması, diğer bir İslamcı örgüt olan İslami Cihad'ın silahlı direnişi sayesinde popüleritesini artırması ve yeni yetişmiş olan genç ve arzulu İslamcı neslin yükselmesiyle 1980'li yıllarda yavaş yavaş silahlı direniş düşüncesine kaymış, 1987'de Birinci İntifada'nın ilk günlerinde ise Gazze'de Hamas'ı kurarak dönüşümünü tamamlamıştır. Hamas, İslamcı ve militan bir örgüt olarak ortaya çıkmış, amacını da kuruluş manifestosunda İsrail'i silahlı mücadele yoluyla ortadan kaldırarak Filistin'de bir İslam devleti kurmak olarak açıklamıştır. Bu yönüyle Hamas, aynı anda hem Filistin milliyetçisi hem de İslamcı bir örgüt görünümündedir. Bununla birlikte, örgüt bu hedefi ilerleyen yıllarda küçültmüş ve İsrail işgalini ortadan kaldırmayı öncelikli hedefi olarak belirlemiştir.

Hamas ilk kurulduğunda nispeten daha basit bir örgütsel yapıya sahip olmasına rağmen, 1989'da Hamas liderlerinin tutuklanmasıyla bir yeniden yapılanma sürecine girmiştir. Günümüzde Hamas'ın Gazze içerisinde ve işgal altındaki toprakların dışında olmak üzere iki farklı lider kadrosu bulunmaktadır. Gazze'de bugüne kadar Şeyh Ahmed Yasin, Abdülaziz El-Rantisi gibi isimler liderlik yapmıştır. Gazze dışında ise Siyasi Büro ve Danışma Meclisi olmak üzere iki farklı organ bulunmaktadır. Siyasi

Büro Hamas'ın yürütme organı olup, başkanlığını bugüne kadar Musa Ebu Merzuk, Halid Meşal ve İsmail Haniye gibi isimler yapmıştır. Danışma Meclisi ise Hamas'ın yönetim kadrosunun aldığı kararların dini ve ahlaki olarak denetlendiği organdır. İzzeddin el-Kassam Tugayları ise Hamas'ın askeri kanadıdır. Gizliliğe önem veren İzzeddin el-Kassam Tugayları'nın iç yapısı hakkında fazla bilgi bulunmamaktadır. Aynı zamanda bu askeri kanat, Hamas'ın genel liderliğinden operasyonel ve stratejik konularda belirli bir derece özerkliğe de sahiptir. 1990'lı yılların başlarında kurulan İzzeddin el-Kassam Tugayları, bugüne kadar İsrail'e karşı intihar saldırıları ve roket atışı gibi yöntemlerle birçok saldırı düzenlemiştir.

Hamas, kurulduğu günden itibaren yıllarca silahlı mücadelenin Filistin'in kurtuluşu için tek yol olduğunu birçok kez ifade etmiş ve cihad vurgusu yapmıştır. Ne var ki, Hamas yıllar içinde resmi siyasi süreçlere de dahil olmuş, 2006 yılında düzenlenen genel seçimlere Değişim ve Reform adıyla katılmıştır. Hamas bu seçimi kazansa da, El Fetih, İsrail ve ABD'nin muhalefeti nedeniyle iktidarda çok fazla kalamamış ve iktidarı Gazze'yle sınırla kalmıştır. Bununla birlikte, Hamas'ın siyasi parti olarak çalışmalar yapması Hamas'ın askeri kanadını ortadan kaldırmamış, örgüt 2006'dan sonra da İsrail'le çatışmaya devam etmiştir. Aynı şekilde, uzun yıllardır yapılagelen sosyal yardım faaliyetleri de aynen devam etmiştir.

Hamas'ın uluslararası arenada ilişkilerinin iyi ve kötü olduğu devletler bulunmaktadır. ABD, İsrail, Kanada, Japonya gibi devletler ve Avrupa Birliği bugün Hamas'ı bir terör örgütü olarak tanımaktadır. Rusya ve Çin gibi diğer büyük güçler ise Hamas'ı terör örgütü olarak görmemektedir. Türkiye, İran ve Katar gibi devletler ise açıkça Hamas'ı desteklemektedirler ve Hamas ile aralarında ekonomik ve siyasi bağlar bulunmaktadır. Öte yandan, Hamas Suriye İç Savaşı'nda rejim karşıtı grupları desteklediği için Suriye tarafından artık desteklenmemektedir. Başta Suudi Arabistan olmak üzere, Katar haricinde diğer Körfez ülkeleriyle de son yıllarda Hamas'ın ilişkileri bozulmuştur. Hamas ise her ne kadar kendini ideolojik olarak Batı karşıtı bir pozisyonda konumlandırırsa da, cepheyi genişletmemek adına düşman olarak yalnızca İsrail'i gördüğünü sık sık ifade etmekte ve İsrail dışındaki tüm ülkelerle iyi ilişkiler geliştirmeye hazır olduğunu belirtmektedir.

Üçüncü bölüm, 1987'den bu yana Hamas ve ABD politikalarının ele alınmaya başlandığı bölümdür. Tezin bu bölümünde, 1987-1993 yılları arasını kapsayan Birinci İntifada ve 1993-2000 yılları arasındaki Oslo süreci incelenmektedir. Aralık 1987'de, işgalin ağırlaşmasının getirdiği ekonomik ve sosyal sıkıntıların bir sonucu olarak Filistin halkının başlattığı Birinci İntifada'nın ilk aylarında Hamas gösterilere katılmış, fakat bunu yaparken FKÖ'nün Filistin siyasetindeki tekeline karşı mücadele etmiş ve İntifada'ya İslami bir boyut kazandırarak ayrı bir güç odağı haline gelmiştir. Bunun sonucu olarak da zaten prestij kaybetmekte olan FKÖ'nün yıllardır süregelen "Filistin halkının liderliği" konumu sarsılmaya başlamıştır. Bu dönemde yeni kurulmuş, kırılğan bir oluşum olan Hamas'ın çok fazla dikkat çekmemek için İntifada'nın ilk zamanlarda şiddetin dozunu düşük tutması da İsrail'den ciddi bir baskı görmemesini sağlamıştır.

Öte yandan, bu tarihe kadar İsrail'in yakın bir müttefiki olmasına ve FKÖ'yü terör örgütü olarak tanınmasına rağmen Filistin siyasetine direkt olarak müdahale etmemiş olan ABD, FKÖ'nün siyasi yönden zayıfladığını ve Soğuk Savaş dengelerinin Sovyetler aleyhine değişmekte olduğunu görerek Arap-İsrail sorununu kendisinin ve müttefiki İsrail'in çıkarları doğrultusunda çözecek bir barış süreci başlatmanın tam zamanı olduğunu düşünmüştür. Shultz Planı ve Shamir Planı bu dönemde ABD'nin öncülüğü ve teşvikleriyle ortaya çıkmış olan barış planlarıdır. 1991 Madrid Konferansı da yine ABD tarafından organize edilmiştir. Bu sırada Hamas, bu barış planlarını ABD'ye ve İsrail'e verilmiş tavizler olarak nitelendirerek eleştirmiş, bu nedenle şiddetin dozunu önemli ölçüde artırmış ve Filistinliler arasında prestijini yükseltmiştir. FKÖ ise, gerek Filistin siyasetinin liderliğini Hamas'a kaybetmek istemediğinden, gerekse içinde bulunduğu siyasi krizden dolayı İsrail'i tanımış, Birleşmiş Milletlerin 242 ve 338 no'lu kararlarını kabul etmiş ve FKÖ'nün silah bıraktığını açıklayarak ABD'nin öncülük ettiği barış inisiyatiflerine böylece dahil olmuştur. Madrid Konferansı'ndan sonraki dolaylı görüşmelerden sonuç alınamayınca İsrail ve FKÖ Oslo'da gizlice direkt görüşmelere başlanmış, bunun sonucunda da 1993 yılında, Filistinliler için çok önemli bir avantajının bulunmadığı belirtilen Birinci Oslo Antlaşması imzalanmıştır. Böylece Oslo süreci başlamış, ABD de sürecin resmi garantörü olmuştur. Yani Hamas'ın İslamcı ve militan politikaları ile ABD'nin barış

inisiyatifleri, birbirine zıt politikalar olsa da, bu dönemde FKÖ'nün ılımlı bir örgüt hale gelmesinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır.

Oslo Antlaşması ile Filistin Ulusal Yönetimi'nin kurulması ve Gazze ile Eriha şehirlerinin yönetiminin FUY'ye verilmesi, daha sonra beş yıllık bir ara dönem başlatılarak bu süre boyunca bu bölgelerde FUY'nin eğitim, sağlık ve iç güvenlik gibi alanlardan sorumlu olması, bu ara dönemin sonunda da İsrail ve FYÖ arasında sınırlar, mülteciler, İsrail'in yerleşim yerleri ve Kudüs gibi büyük sorunları çözecek bir nihai antlaşma yapılması kararlaştırılmıştır. Hamas antlaşmayı protesto etmiş, antlaşmanın ABD'ye "Siyonistlere" verilmiş kapitülasyon olduğunu ifade ederek FKÖ lideri Arafat'ı Filistin topraklarını satmakla suçlamıştır. Bu sebeple, Oslo sürecini baltalamak için 1990'lı yıllarda o zamana dek eşi benzeri görülmemiş bir şiddet dalgası başlatarak hem işgal altındaki topraklarda hem de İsrail içerisinde İsrail'e karşı çok sayıda intihar saldırısına imza atmıştır. ABD ve İsrail'in de FUY'ye Hamas'ın saldırılarını önlemesi ve Hamas'ın altyapısını ortadan kaldırması için baskı yapması dolayısıyla, FUY sürecin devamı için Hamas üyelerine operasyonlar düzenlemek zorunda kalmış, bu da Hamas ve FUY güçleri arasında da çatışmaların yaşanmasına sebep olmuştur. İsrail'in Hamas'ın saldırılarını gerekçe göstererek Oslo Antlaşması'nın gereklerini yerine getirmemesi ABD'yi de alarma geçirmiş, böylece ABD Hamas'a karşı ekonomik yaptırımlar uygulamıştır. Bununla birlikte, İsrail'e üzerine düşenleri yapması için ciddi bir baskı uygulamamıştır. Hamas'ın eylemleri, 1995'te imzalanan ve İsrail'in Batı Şeria'daki bazı başka bölgelerden de çekilerek bu bölgeleri FUY'ye devretmesini öngören İkinci Oslo Antlaşması'ndan sonra da devam etmiştir. İsrail yine bu saldırıları sebep göstererek geri çekilmeleri ağırdan almış, ABD ise Hamas'ı hedef almaya devam etmiş ve İsrail'e sürecin devam etmesi için önemli bir baskı yapmamıştır. Hamas'ın eylemleri 1990'lı yılların sonuna dek ancak durdurulabilmiş, fakat İsrail ve FUY arasındaki nihai barış görüşmelerinden bir sonuç çıkmamıştır. Bu dönemde Filistin'deki şiddet, Hamas'ın İslamcı ve militan yapısıyla ABD'nin İsrail yanlısı barış planları yapma siyasetinin çatışmasının direkt bir sonucudur. Öte yandan, hedef ve yöntemlerinde esnek bir örgüt olan Hamas, bu dönemde, 2000'li yıllarda da devam edecek olan İsrail'i yok etmektense işgali sona

erdirek 1967 öncesi sınırlar içerisinde bağımsız bir Filistin devletini kabul etme eğilimine girmiştir.

Tezin dördüncü bölümü, 2000-2005 yılları arasında devam etmiş olan İkinci İntifada dönemini, İkinci İntifada'yı takip eden dönemde gerçekleştirilen Filistin seçimlerini ve seçim sonrası gerçekleşen El Fetih-Hamas ayrılığını, Hamas ve ABD politikalarına yoğunlaşarak incelemektedir. 2000 yılında, Oslo sürecinin başarısızlıkla sonuçlanmış olmasına ve İsrail işgalininin ağırlaşarak devam etmesine bir tepki olarak, Filistin halkı tekrar ayaklanmış ve İkinci İntifada'yı başlatmıştır. İkinci İntifada, başladığı andan itibaren birçok Filistinli silahlı grubun katılımı dolayısıyla birincisinden daha kanlı ve şiddetli geçmiştir. Hamas, İntifada'yı dış destekli Oslo sürecini bozan ilahi bir müdahale olarak yorumlayarak, bu dönemde bütün gücüyle İsrail'e karşı saldırılar düzenlemiştir. Bush yönetimindeki ABD ise ilk zamanlarda olayların nispeten dışında kalmayı tercih etmiş, fakat 11 Eylül saldırılarından sonra "Terörizmle Savaş" doktrinini hayata geçirerek teröre ve teröristleri desteklediğini iddia ettiği devletlere karşı küresel bir mücadele başlatmıştır. Bu politika, Filistin siyasetinde, FUY ve Hamas'a karşı İsrail'in düzenlediği geniş kapsamlı operasyonlara ABD'nin tam destek vermesi şeklinde kendini göstermiştir. İsrail'e verdiği desteğin yanı sıra, ABD kendisi de Hamas'a karşı çeşitli yaptırımlar uygulamıştır. ABD destekli İsrail operasyonlarında Hamas'ın birçok önde gelen figürünün öldürülmesi ve Hamas'ın buna rağmen İsrail'e karşı silahlı mücadeleyi devam ettirmesi Filistinliler arasında Hamas'ın popülaritesinin ciddi ölçüde artmasını sağlamıştır. İsrail'in FUY'ye karşı düzenlediği operasyonlarda FUY'nin altyapısına büyük hasar vermesi, işgal altındaki topraklardaki sosyal hizmetlerde büyük bir açığın meydana gelmesine neden olmuş, bu açığı Hamas'ın doldurması ise Hamas'ın prestijini artıran bir diğer unsur olmuştur. Bu itibar artışı, bu dönemde Hamas'ın itibarının Filistinliler arasında önemli ölçüde arttığını gören Hamas liderlerini, El Fetih'e siyasi arenada meydan okumayı düşünmeye itmiştir.

Öte yandan, ABD bu dönemde de barış planları hazırlamaya devam etmiş, fakat İsrail şiddet olaylarını gerekçe göstererek operasyonlarını sürdürmüş ve yeni yerleşim yerleri inşa etmeye devam etmiştir. ABD ise barış görüşmelerinin sekteye

uğramasından İsrail'i değil FUY'yi sorumlu tutmuş, Arafat'ın terörle yeterince mücadele etmediğini öne sürerek Filistin siyasetinde bir değişim sürecinin başlaması gerektiğini ifade etmiştir. Böylece, FUY'de demokratikleşmeye yönelik çeşitli reformlar gerçekleştirilmiş, yerel ve genel seçimlerin de yakın zamanda yapılması kararlaştırılmıştır. Kurulduğu günden itibaren silahlı mücadeleyi Filistin'in kurtuluşu için tek çıkar yol olarak gösteren Hamas ise, artan popülaritesinin etkisiyle büyük bir pragmatizm örneği sergilemiş ve seçimlere katılacağını açıklamıştır. Hamas ilk olarak, 2004 ve 2005 yıllarında aşamalı olarak gerçekleştirilen yerel seçimlerde başarı göstermiş, Ocak 2006'de yapılan genel seçimlerde ise El Fetih'i yenerek tek başına hükümet kurmaya hak kazanmıştır. Yani, ABD'nin hem İsrail'in operasyonlarını desteklemesi hem de FUY'nin demokratikleşmesine yönelik politikaları, Hamas'ın önce itibarının artması, sonra da seçimleri kazanması sonucunu doğurmuştur. Başka bir deyişle, ABD'nin İsrail ve demokrasi yanlısı politikalarıyla İslamcı ve radikal Hamas vizyonunun çatışması, bu dönemde Hamas'ı iktidara getirmiştir. Ne var ki Hamas, İsrail, ABD ve FUY'nin baskı ve yaptırımları sonucu iktidarda çok uzun süre tutunamamış, El Fetih ve Hamas güçleri arasında bu dönemde çatışmalar yaşanmıştır. Ertesi yıl El Fetih ile bir birlik hükümeti kurulması da sorunları ortadan kaldırmamıştır. İsrail, ABD, Mısır ve FUY'nin kendisine karşı bir darbe planladığını öğrenen Hamas, Haziran 2007'de Gazze'yi ele geçirmiş ve El Fetih'in buradaki varlığına son vermiştir. El Fetih ise Batı Şeria'da El Fetih üyelerinden oluşan yeni bir hükümet kurmuştur. Hamas'ın iktidara gelmesi gibi, El Fetih ve Hamas arasındaki bu ayrılık da ABD ve Hamas'ın vizyon ve politikaları arasındaki ideolojik çatışmanın bir sonucudur.

Tezin beşinci bölümünde, 2007'den 2020'ye kadar olan Hamas ve ABD politikaları; El Fetih ile Hamas arasındaki uzlaşma girişimleri ve İsrail'in Gazze Şeridi'ne yaptığı üç büyük operasyon merkeze alınarak, bununla birlikte ABD'nin barış sürecini canlandırma girişimlerine de değinilerek incelenmektedir. Bu dönemde El Fetih ve Hamas, Filistin siyasetindeki bölünmüşlüğü ortadan kaldırmak adına birçok kez görüşmeler yapmış, hatta 2014'te kısa ömürlü bir birlik hükümeti kurulmuş, fakat kalıcı bir birleşme sağlanamamıştır. Bunun iki temel sebebinden birincisi, tarafların iktidarın nasıl paylaşılacağı konusunda ortak bir zemin bulmayı başaramamalarıdır.

İkinci sebep ise, ABD'nin içinde Hamas'ın olduđu bir FUY hükümetini tanımayı reddetmesidir. Hamas'ın 2006'daki seçim zaferinden beri, ABD içinde Hamas üyelerinin bulunduđu bir hükümeti tanımak için, Hamas'tan Orta Dođu Dörtlüsü'nün üç şartını kabul etmesini talep etmektedir. Bu şartlar, Hamas'ın İsrail'i tanınması, silahlı mücadeyi sona erdirmesi ve FUY ile İsrail arasında geçmişte imzalanan antlaşmaları tanınmasıdır. 2007 ve 2020 yılları arasında El Fetih ve Hamas arasındaki her uzlaşma denemesinde tanınma için Hamas'a bu şartları dayatan ve El Fetih'i de bu konuda uyaran ABD, görüşmelerin başarısızlıkla sonuçlanmasında büyük pay sahibidir. Yani, Hamas ve ABD arasındaki ideolojik çatışma, bu dönemde El Fetih-Hamas ayrılığının devam etmesinde oldukça önemli bir rol oynamıştır.

Öte yandan İsrail, 2007-2020 arası dönemde üç kez Gazze Şeridi'ne Hamas'ın roket atışlarını gerekçe göstererek büyük çaplı operasyonlar düzenlemiştir. Bu operasyonların Gazze için çok yıkıcı etkileri olmuş, her bir operasyon Gazze'de büyük can ve mal kaybına neden olmuştur. ABD tüm operasyonları İsrail'in kendini teröre karşı savunması olarak niteleyerek her birine tam destek vermiş ve Hamas'ı şiddet olaylarının sorumlusu olarak göstererek roket atışlarını kınamıştır. İsrail'e operasyonların meşruiyeti ya da ölçülülüğü konusunda ciddi bir baskı yaptığı takdirde İsrail'i ikna edebilecek güce sahip olan ABD'nin, İsrail'in operasyonlarını engellemek için hiçbir şey yapmaması, tam aksine, destek vermesi, Gazze Şeridi'ndeki şiddet ve yıkımın en büyük sebeplerinden biridir. Bu destek de operasyonların Hamas'a karşı gerçekleştirilmiş olmasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, Hamas ve ABD vizyonu, ideolojisi ve politikaları arasındaki çatışmanın bu dönemdeki bir diğer sonucu da, İsrail'in düzenlediği operasyonlar ve Gazze'nin bu operasyonlardaki can ve mal kaybıdır.

Bu dönemde ABD barış sürecini canlandırmaya çalışmış, fakat İsrail'in yerleşim yerleri inşa etme konusundaki ısrarı nedeniyle görüşmelerde somut bir ilerleme kaydedilememiştir. Buna rağmen, zaten İsrail'in yakın bir müttefiki olan ve uzun yıllardır FUY ve İsrail arasındaki barış görüşmelerinde tavizleri hep Filistinlilerden beklemiş olan ABD, bu dönemde İsrail ile işbirliğini daha da artırmış ve Filistin sorununda özellikle Trump döneminde daha da İsrail yanlısı bir politika izlemeye

başlamıştır. Hamas'ın pragmatizmi ve esnekliği ise Gazze'yi yönettiği yıllarda da devam etmiştir. Örneğin, kurulduğu ilk günden itibaren çıkış noktası İslam olan ve hedefini Filistin'de bir İslam devleti kurmak olan Hamas, Gazze'de iktidarı ele geçirdikten sonra, uluslararası kamuoyundan ve Filistinlilerden tepki almamak adına, devlette veya toplumsal yaşamda hızlı ve geniş çaplı bir İslamlaşma yoluna gitmemiştir. Benzer şekilde, 2017 yılında yayınladığı yeni manifestosunda, ilk kez 1990'lı yıllarda gündeme gelen düşüncüyü resmileştirerek 1967 öncesi sınırlar içerisinde Kudüs'ün başkent olduğu bir Filistin devletini mültecilerin İsrail'deki evlerine geri dönebilmesi şartıyla kabul ettiğini belirtmiştir.

Tezin altıncı ve son bölümü, elde edilen bilgiler ışığında tezin argümanlarının toparlanarak tekrar ortaya konulduğu sonuç bölümüdür. Hamas İslamcı, militan ve İsrail karşıtı bir örgüt olsa da aynı zamanda amaç ve yöntemlerinde çok pragmatik ve esnek bir hareket iken, Filistin siyasetinde her zaman tarafsız bir arabulucu olduğunu iddia etmiş olan ABD de aslında tüm önemli konularda İsrail yanlısı bir tutum sergilemiştir. Hamas'ın Filistin seçimlerine dahil olması, önceleri İsrail'i ortadan kaldırmak olarak belirttiği amacını daha sonra işgali bitirmek olarak değiştirmesi ve İslamcı bir örgüt olmasına rağmen popülarite kaybetmemek için şeriat hükümlerini Gazze'de tam olarak uygulamayı Hamas'ın esnek ve pragmatik yapısının; barış sürecinde İsrail'e taviz vermesi için neredeyse hiç baskı uygulamayı birçok konuda Hamas ve FUY'yi suçlaması ve yıllar içinde gittikçe artan bir şekilde İsrail yanlısı bir politika seyretmesi de ABD'nin tarafsızlıktan uzak Filistin politikasının delilleridir. Öte yandan, Hamas ve ABD'nin Filistin siyasetine dair çatışan bu vizyon ve politikaları; Oslo sürecinin başlaması, 1990'ların ortasında yaşanan şiddet olayları, Hamas'ın 2006'daki seçim zaferi, El Fetih-Hamas ayrılığı, Gazze'nin İsrail operasyonlarıyla yıkıma uğratılması ve El Fetih ile Hamas arasındaki uzlaşma girişimlerinin şu ana dek başarısızlıkla sonuçlanması gibi hadiselerin ortaya çıkışında önemli bir pay sahibidir.

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