



Crushing Hamas

by [Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi](#)

In the past week, two different episodes occurred in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip that showed an evolution in Palestinian society. The first episode occurred in Gaza on June 25 in the proximity of the Kerem Abu Salem/Shalom area. There, a group of young, angry and frustrated Palestinians, members of the Popular Resistance Committees, PRC, dug a tunnel to reach an Israeli military base and engage in a battle in which they lost two, killed two Israeli soldiers and captured 20-year-old Corporal Gilad Shalit as a prisoner of war.

The second episode occurred in the Eastern Cemetery in Nablus on July 1. There, a group of young, angry and frustrated Palestinians, this time affiliated with Fateh, withstood a 20-hour Israeli military operation without rest, facing down tear gas, bullets, missiles and psychological warfare. Walid Shahruri, 16, fought on while wounded and did not answer even his mother's appeal for him to surrender. After the deaths of his colleagues, Nablus, with its more than 200,000 citizens, held a day of mourning in honor of their heroism.

These episodes could prove to be a new direction in the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation: they were not coordinated, nor ordered from higher up; they were not related and they were carried out by young people, not for the agenda of some leadership, but in the name of national aspiration and for their own fulfillment and pride in order to defy the culture of the occupation.

Young Palestinians constitute more than 50 percent of the population. The youths that fought in the two incidents cited above did so knowing they would not undo the Israeli occupation. They wanted to send a message by humiliating the Israeli military and thereby setting an example for others to follow in what might become a "third intifada", in the hope that this time it will not be hijacked by "big brothers", whether inside or outside.

The Israeli army's nose was bloodied and the inflated ego of this "undefeated army" was deflated by inexperienced youths who were born and raised under its boots.

That army is now bent on revenge and neither Amir Peretz, the Israeli minister of defense, nor PM Ehud Olmert can tame the beast. Hence the scenes we are witnessing in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In the Palestinian house, meanwhile, the political earthquake resulting from the victory of Hamas in January's parliamentary elections, showed the people's desire for change and reform. The success of Hamas also contributed to the exposure of a divided Fateh movement and a corrupt regime. It thus helped the emergence of a new generation in the secular Fateh movement who are not beholden to the old guard.

In addition, the rise of Hamas brought Islamists closer to the grey area of governing and compelled them to "normalize" with secularists to develop a joint agenda.

After the January elections, Hamas and Fateh carried on as opponents at different levels, both inside and outside the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This adversarial relationship reflected their differences in positions, interests and goals. In addition, Hamas had no experience in governing and Fateh could not accommodate itself as an opposition.

Israel, the EU and the US, meanwhile, forced three conditions upon Hamas for it to be internationally accepted as the Palestinian government: to recognize Israel, accept all previous agreements, and to renounce violence. The subsequent sanctions against the Palestinian Authority led to a severe closure, a freeze on the salaries of 160,000 Palestinian civil servants and an economic disaster in the making.

Hamas leaders succeeded in bringing in some money from Arab and Islamic states and Prime Minister Ismail Hanyeh established his Friday sermons in Gaza that directly reached the young masses, a move reminiscent of Latin America's Sunday Church sermons by revolutionary leaders.

Gradually, through the national dialogue based on the 18-point Prisoners' Document, Hamas reached an agreement with Fateh representatives to meet all the conditions set by the West and to form a coalition government willing to negotiate with Israel, with the roadmap as the basis to find a two-state solution.

This proved, however, to be in total contradiction with Israeli government goals, namely Kadima's unilateral "convergence" plan and the crushing of Hamas as a "terrorist organization". The latter came from the fear that Hamas' future evolution would see it successfully implement a program based on political Islam and eventually copy the tactics of Hizballah in Lebanon. Israel is using the Corporal Gilad Shalit episode as a pretext to implement these strategic goals.

These strategic goals also explain the Israeli practices in Jerusalem and the rest of the OPT in terms of the separation wall, closures, arrests, deportation of PLC members and, recently, influencing the PA's decision to retire the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem because of his close ties with Islamic leaders in Israel and their role in preserving the Arab-Islamic sites in Jerusalem.

The Shalit episode has brought Egypt's role as a mediator to the fore. Egypt has its own security concerns vis-a-vis Gaza, and in particular the border at Rafah, and wants to soften the impact of Israeli military operations so as not to expand the crisis to the region, in particular Syria.

There are several consequences to the current events in Gaza. A positive scenario would see Israel releasing Palestinian prisoners like they released Sheikh Ahmed Yassin in exchange for two Mossad agents following the attempted assassination of Khalid Mishaal in Amman in September 1997. This exchange of prisoners would be under Egyptian mediation like the 1997 exchange was under the late King Hussein's mediation.

Following such an exchange, Israel would find itself facing a Palestinian coalition government and Arab mediators (Egypt and Jordan). This could usher in, in spite of the culture of fear and mistrust, a long process of negotiations along the roadmap agenda. Though a seemingly positive scenario, Palestinians will continue to suffer under the Israeli military "stick" and the resumption of European "carrots".

A negative scenario would be the implementation of Israel's strategic goal, crushing Hamas, therefore the iron boot of the Israeli army will trample its way through, by assassinating some Hamas leaders and consequently ending the mission of the PA and in particular that of Mahmoud Abbas. This would lead us to the beginning of a third intifada in the mould of the examples set by Kerem Shalom and Nablus's Eastern Cemetery

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[Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi](#) *is the chairman of Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), a think tank based in Jerusalem.*