

RADICAL ISLAM IN GAZA

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RADICAL ISLAM IN GAZA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The recent Israel-Hamas escalation returns a spotlight to Gaza and the Islamist movement's relationship with more militant organisations. Gaza arouses multiple concerns: does Hamas seek to impose religious law; has its purported Islamisation stimulated growth of Salafi-Jihadi groups; and will al-Qaeda offshoots find a foothold there? Hamas faces competition from more radical Islamist groups, though their numbers are few, organisation poor, achievements against Israel so far minor and chances of threatening Gaza's government slight. The significance of Gaza's Salafi-Jihadis is less military capability than constraints they impose on Hamas: they are an ideological challenge; they appeal to members of its military wing, a powerful constituency; through attacks within and from Gaza, they threaten security; by criticising Hamas for not fighting Israel or implementing Sharia, they exert pressure for more militancy and Islamisation. The policy of isolating Gaza and ignoring Hamas exacerbates this problem. As the international community seeks new ways to address political Islam in the Arab upheaval's wake, Gaza is not the worst place to start.

In the last few years, Hamas has faced new Islamist challenges in Gaza. They are groups of militants, known as Salafi-Jihadis, who adhere to a strict interpretation of Islamic law and see themselves not as liberators of Palestine but as part of a global movement of armed fighters defending Muslims against non-Muslim enemies, a category many of them believe also includes Shiites and Palestinian secularists. Although their current strength is low, these groups – which are responsible for a sizeable proportion of Gaza-based rocket attacks toward Israel – could well trigger an escalation that, as illustrated in the past week, could have serious consequences for Gaza, Israel and the region as a whole.

Over time, Hamas's relationship with such militants has shifted from cooperation to antagonism. One of Gaza's oldest Salafi-Jihadi groups, Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), participated with Hamas and another faction in the 2006 capture of Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit. In the years since, Hamas has cracked down on Jaysh al-Islam and similar groups, acting decisively when it met with anything resembling a direct defiance of its governmental authority. In August 2009, when the spiritual leader of Jund Ansar

Allah (Soldiers of God's Supporters), a newer Salafi-Jihadi group based in Rafah, denounced Hamas, declared an Islamic Emirate in Palestine, and demanded the imposition of Sharia (Islamic law), Hamas brutally confronted it, resulting in more than two dozen deaths, 100 injuries and the group's near total elimination.

Hamas's policy since then has been one of containment, directed not only at Salafi-Jihadi militants, who are arrested when caught violating the ceasefire it until recently had been upholding, but also at Hamas members who sympathise with these groups. Most Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza are young, low-ranking former members of the military wings of established factions, primarily Hamas and Islamic Jihad but also the Popular Resistance Committees and Fatah. Reasons for their defections vary, but the majority state that primary among their sources of dissatisfaction with Hamas were its participation in the 2006 legislative elections, acquiescence to ceasefires with Israel and failure after taking over Gaza to implement Sharia.

The influence of Salafi-Jihadis is not prominent, but nor is it negligible. They accuse Hamas of laxity in enforcing religious mores, a charge that resonates with many movement supporters and leads the government to greater determination in applying Islamic law. At the same time, the exigencies of governing, hope of increasing diplomatic ties and pressure from many Gazans, human rights activists and Westerners pull in an opposite direction. The result has been a zigzagging policy in which Islamising decisions are announced, at times retracted when citizens object, and on occasion nonetheless enforced. More worrying has been a series of bombings, shootings, burnings and lootings aimed at targets that appear un-Islamic and for which no suspect has been publicly tried. In many cases, it is still unclear who or what was behind them. Some suspect Salafi-Jihadi groups, others Hamas's more militant members, who were thought difficult to reprimand while the government faced criticism for imposing a ceasefire – now broken – that had neither convinced Israel to lift its closure of Gaza's borders nor ended the Islamist movement's diplomatic isolation.

The international community's policy of snubbing Hamas and isolating Gaza has been misguided from the outset, for reasons Crisis Group long has enumerated. Besides condemning Gazans to a life of scarcity, it has not weakened the Islamist movement, loosened its grip over Gaza, bolstered Fatah or advanced the peace process. To that, one must add the assist provided to Salafi-Jihadis, who benefit from both Gaza's lack of exposure to the outside world and the apparent futility of Hamas's strategy of seeking greater engagement with the international community, restraining – until recently – attacks against Israel and limiting Islamising policies advocated by more zealous leaders. There is no guarantee that engaging Hamas politically and normalising the situation in Gaza would lead the Islamist movement to greater pragmatism or diminish the appeal of more radical alternatives. But it is worth the try.

President Mubarak's ouster likely will be followed by a revision of Egypt's approach toward Gaza – notably a significant loosening of the border closure and improved relations with Hamas. This would appear to be the natural consequence of the eventual election of a more representative, accountable government that better reflects the views of a citizenry dismayed by the former regime's policies. Such a shift should be seen as an opportunity for others – Europeans and Americans in particular – to revisit their own assumptions. And to understand that the alternative to Hamas in Gaza is not only or necessarily Fatah. It also is the more radical Islamist groups they have every interest in combating.

**Gaza City/Ramallah/Jerusalem/Brussels,
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RADICAL ISLAM IN GAZA

I. INTRODUCTION¹

During the two years that followed Operation Cast Lead, Israel's 2008-2009 war in Gaza, the coastal enclave had remained relatively calm despite occasional flare-ups.² Yet, few believed Hamas could or would uphold the ceasefire indefinitely. The precise timing and scale of its 19 March 2011 attacks could not be predicted, but the pressures on it had long been clear. In recent months, its military wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, had been more frequently targeted in retaliation for rocket attacks by unaffiliated groups.³ Israel had succeeded in pressing

Hamas to further curb projectile fire but at the cost of provoking its militants, who found themselves helping police a ceasefire that neither convinced Israel to lift its closure⁴ nor ended Hamas's diplomatic isolation. Many frustrated Qassam members, together with dissidents from military wings of other established factions, defected to more militant Islamist (sometimes referred to as "al-Qaeda-like") groups; this has been the clearest sign of a challenge to Hamas's policy in recent years. Israeli officials and Gaza militants estimate these groups have been responsible for a sizable proportion of recent attacks.⁵

Though such groups have appeared in Gaza only in the last several years, claims of their existence have been made since December 2002.⁶ Early that month, one week after

¹ The dangerous recent flare-up between Israel and Hamas was covered in Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°30, *Gaza: The Next Israeli-Palestinian War?*, 24 March 2011.

² Until 19 March 2011, when Hamas fired several dozen mortars toward Israel, this was an assessment shared by Israel's most senior security officials. In February 2011, outgoing military intelligence chief Maj. General Amos Yadlin said, "I am leaving my position when the country is strong ... the borders have never been safer Hamas is maintaining quiet along the southern border". "Ashkenazi: Israel must be careful with its assessments of the Arab world", *Haaretz*, 14 February 2011. After the March 2011 escalation, an Israeli foreign ministry official stated: "Hamas is confused. On the one hand it thinks the current Israeli government is a 'mad dog' that will react more quickly than previous governments. On the other hand it thinks that after the Goldstone Report and the flotillas, Israel will be reluctant to engage in another round of violence. They are wrong if they think Israel will restrain itself if – to use a cliché – an Israeli kindergarten is hit". Crisis Group interview, Jerusalem, 22 March 2011.

³ During escalations, both Gaza militants and Israeli forces typically claim to be retaliating against an action initiated by the other. Militants who launch rockets in violation of Hamas's ceasefire frequently say they are responding to an Israeli incursion, a casualty resulting from an incursion, Israeli airstrikes or fire toward Palestinian militants in the West Bank. Crisis Group interview, Islamic Jihad militant, Gaza City, 14 November 2010. An Israeli official said, "our policy is to hit back whenever we are hit. We never initiate anything here – because, like Hamas, we don't want to see an escalation. Of course, if we can thwart an attack before it happens, we do it". Crisis Group interview, strategic affairs ministry official, Jerusalem, 4 January 2011. With regard to the March 2011 escalation, Crisis Group wrote: "on 16 March 2011, in response to a rocket that targeted the Sdot Negev Regional Council that morning, Israel killed

two fighters from Hamas's armed wing, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, at their training ground. A movement leader argued that these actions violated what Hamas had considered reasonable rules of the game: that when Palestinian projectiles hit open space – as did the ones launched on 16 March – Israel aims at open space in response. Two Qassam dead thus were deemed to warrant retaliation". *Gaza: The Next Israeli-Palestinian War?*, op. cit., p. 1.

⁴ The terms most often used to describe Israel's policy toward Gaza are disputed. For purposes of this report, Crisis Group will refer to the maritime blockade and restrictions on the entry or exit of goods as Israel's closure.

⁵ Israeli officials were unwilling to provide a precise figure. A senior official in the strategic affairs ministry said he thought radical Islamist groups were behind close to half of recent fire toward Israel. Crisis Group interview, Jerusalem, 15 November 2010. An Islamic Jihad militant recently arrested by Hamas for violating the ceasefire estimated that since January 2011 Islamic Jihad had launched 37 rockets toward Israel and radical Islamists had fired eleven. He said Hamas had arrested seven Islamic Jihad members for violating the ceasefire since January 2011 and fifteen between September and December 2010. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 3 March 2011. A Qassam commander claimed a handful of rockets are launched by young militants hired by local merchants whose profits would decline if Israel's closure were further relaxed. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, March 2011.

⁶ A member of one such group told an interviewer the first Salafi-Jihadi attack in Gaza by likeminded militants was conducted by Jund Allah (God's Soldiers) in 2001. "Exclusive: New Gaza Salafist faction numbers 11,000", *Ma'an*, 18 April 2010. Some might also consider an October 2003 bombing of a U.S. diplomatic convoy in Gaza a radical Islamist attack. Though

three suicide bombers struck an Israeli-owned hotel in Kenya,⁷ Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said Israel believed al-Qaeda had established a presence in Gaza.⁸ The allegation was vigorously denied by the Palestinian Authority (PA),⁹ as were similar ones in subsequent years.¹⁰ After Hamas won parliamentary elections in 2006,¹¹ however, Fatah and the PA switched from being the primary deniers of the accusation to becoming one of the leading voices making it. In March 2006, the month the new Hamas government was sworn in, President Mahmoud Abbas reversed a statement he'd made only three and a half months earlier, saying, "we have signs of the presence of al-Qaeda in Gaza and the West Bank".¹² Later, after Hamas took over Gaza,

the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), a militant faction comprised mostly of Fatah dissidents, initially was reported to have claimed responsibility, it repeatedly has denied participation. Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010; "Three killed in Gaza convoy blast", *The Guardian*, 15 October 2003.

⁷ At approximately the same time, two surface-to-air missiles narrowly missed an Israeli airliner, "U.S. forces fire missiles into Somalia at a Kenyan", *The New York Times*, 4 March 2008.

⁸ "Israel says al-Qaeda active in Gaza", BBC, 5 December 2002; "Al-Qaeda Web Site Calls Israel New Target", *The Washington Post*, 6 December 2002.

⁹ The PA called the allegations "cheap and untrue". "Al-Qaeda web site calls Israel new target", *The Washington Post*, 6 December 2002. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said, "it is a big, big, big lie to cover (Sharon's) attacks and his crimes against our people everywhere"; Rashid Abu Shabak, head of the Preventive Security Organisation in Gaza, added: "We are sure that Israel is behind this and that there are absolutely no groups such as al-Qaeda operating here"; "Israel 'faked al-Qaeda presence'", BBC, 8 December 2002.

¹⁰ Months before Israel withdrew from Gaza in August-September 2005, Salafi-Jihadis calling themselves Jund Allah (God's Soldiers) – the same name used by a wing of Fatah's Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades – attacked Israeli troops in Gaza for the first time. The PA denied any al-Qaeda presence in Gaza. "These reports are baseless", said chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat. "Disillusioned Palestinian terrorists join al-Qaida", *World Net Daily*, 2 November 2005. After Israel's withdrawal, some claimed that members of al-Qaeda had infiltrated Gaza. The allegation was made not only by Israeli military intelligence chief Aharon Ze'evi-Farkash, but also by Hamas senior leader Mahmoud Zahar, who said, "yes, yes it's true what they say. A couple of men of al-Qaeda have infiltrated Gaza". "Al-Qaeda has arrived here in the Strip", *Corriere della Serra*, 13 August 2005.

¹¹ Weeks after Hamas formed a government, a Fatah leader in Rafah, Ashraf Juma', said, "there is such despair in Gaza: some are ready to sacrifice anything, and this creates fertile soil for growing al-Qaeda.... They support al-Qaeda because they are angry at the American support for Israel, and they see al-Qaeda hurting the Americans. We have a proverb to describe this: 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend'". "Al-Qaeda goes recruiting in festering Gaza", *The Sunday Times*, 9 April 2006.

¹² "Abbas: Al-Qaeda infiltrating West Bank, Gaza", Associated Press, 2 March 2006. Abbas said the opposite just four months

earlier. "Abbas: Al-Qaeda not in Gaza, West Bank", Associated Press, 17 November 2005.

Similar accusations have been made by Egypt (prior to President Hosni Mubarak's ouster)¹⁴ and Israel¹⁵ in recent months. In January 2011, following weeks of escalating tensions on Gaza's border with Israel,¹⁶ Yuval Diskin,

earlier. "Abbas: Al-Qaeda not in Gaza, West Bank", Associated Press, 17 November 2005.

¹³ "Al-Qaeda has infiltrated Gaza with help of Hamas, says Abbas", *The Sunday Times*, 28 February 2008.

¹⁴ In January 2011, Egypt's interior minister said one al-Qaeda-like group in Gaza, Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), was responsible for the New Year's Day 2011 bombing that killed 23 Copts at an Alexandria church. (A Jaysh al-Islam spokesman in Gaza denied this but praised those responsible; Hamas reaffirmed its condemnation.) The interior minister held Jaysh al-Islam responsible for a bomb in Cairo's Hussayn Square in February 2009, a charge first made in August 2009, when Egypt announced arrest of the "Zaytun cell", whose members it said planned to assassinate Israel's ambassador and confessed to training in Jaysh al-Islam "camps" in Gaza. "Egypt church blast death toll rises to 23", Reuters, 4 January 2011; "Egypt's interior minister says authorities arrest 19 Arabs with suspected links to al-Qaeda", Associated Press, 25 January 2011. Some Egyptian analysts were sceptical. Amr el Shobaki, at the government-funded Al Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies in Cairo, said: "When we accuse Gaza, it's as usual for a political reason". "Egypt says Gaza militants were behind New Year's church bomb", *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 January 2011.

¹⁵ In November 2010, two members of Jaysh al-Islam in Gaza were assassinated in Israeli missile strikes. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) announced that both assassinations were intended to thwart a single attack in Sinai, which inconsistent IDF statements described as either a kidnapping of Israelis or an attack against Israeli and U.S. targets in cooperation with Hamas. "Joint IDF-ISA operation targets senior Salafist terror organisation operative in the Gaza Strip, 17 Nov 2010", Israel Defense Forces Blog, 17 November 2010; "Joint IDF-ISA operation targets senior leader of Gaza Strip Salafist terror organisation involved in attacks on American and Israeli targets, 3 Nov 2010", Israel Defense Forces Blog, 3 November 2010.

¹⁶ According to Israel Security Agency data, the number of projectiles launched by Gaza militants went from 33 in November 2010 to 53 in December. "Monthly Summary-December 2010", January 2011. The data disseminated by different Israeli government bodies vary considerably. In August 2010, for example, the number of projectiles launched was either seventeen mortars and fourteen rockets (Israel Security Agency); five mortars, four rockets (foreign ministry website); or seven mortars, six rockets (IDF). A non-Israeli source, the Gaza NGO Safety Office (GANSO), gave numbers closest to those of the Israel Security Agency: 23 mortars, eighteen rockets in August 2010. Its numbers may be higher because they include fire at invading Israeli troops, not only attacks "toward Israel". See "Rocket attacks toward Israel", Israel Defense Forces Blog, 7 October 2010; "Palestinian ceasefire violations since the end of

chief of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), announced that some attacks from Gaza were conducted by radical Islamist groups, members of which he alleged were “in touch with al-Qaeda’s regional command”.¹⁷

Officials in Gaza have not taken such charges lightly. Some see in them a potential pretext for another war.¹⁸ Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh has denied there is an al-Qaeda presence, calling such allegations part of a “media campaign” launched in advance of an “upcoming Israeli escalation against the Palestinian people in general and the Gaza Strip in particular”.¹⁹ A central component of this campaign, in Hamas’s view, is the steady stream of insinuations that the movement is breeding radicalism by Islamising Gaza and is incubating, rather than containing, what are labelled as al-Qaeda-like groups. Such allegations are made in frequent references by Israeli politicians to “Hamastan”;²⁰ in reports disseminated by the Israel Security Agency on Gaza’s Islamisation;²¹ and in the aspersions cast on Gaza’s rulers by President Abbas, who has spoken repeatedly of the territory as “an emirate of darkness”.²²

Hamas officials compare accusations by the PA, Israel and Egypt to those of the U.S. in the months preceding the Iraq war: “The alleged anti-aircraft missiles are our chemical Scuds; the radical Islamists our supposed ties to al-Qaeda”.²³ Their worries have been exacerbated by Egypt-

tian warnings of an Israeli invasion,²⁴ talk in Israel’s press of a countdown to a second Gaza war,²⁵ and threats from high-ranking Israeli officials.²⁶

Yet, despite the sharpened rhetoric, even Hamas leaders question whether Israel would want to launch a large attack at this time.²⁷ The dangerous March 2011 escalation aside, security has improved: fewer rockets were launched from Gaza in 2010 than in any year since the first Qassam missile was fired toward Israel in February 2002,²⁸ and

in Gaza have anti-aircraft missiles”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 18 October 2010.

²⁴ Hamas officials told leaders of Gaza’s other factions that Egypt and other countries, some Arab, had warned that Israel is likely to launch another war in Gaza if the firing of rockets, especially Grads, did not cease. “Arab leaders warn militants over Israel bombardment”, Agence France-Presse, 12 January 2011. Haniyeh received these warnings in a telephone conversation with then Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman. Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior leader, Gaza City, 13 January 2011.

²⁵ “Israel’s looming war in Gaza: Can Obama stop it before it starts?”, *Haaretz*, 12 January 2011.

²⁶ Maj.-General (res.) Yom-Tov Samia, deputy in the reserves to the planner and commander of Operation Cast Lead, recently stated: “We are facing another round in Gaza” and recommended “annihilat[ing]” Hamas by delivering “a more serious blow” than last time. In a statement interpreted by Israeli commentators to refer to an occupation of Gaza’s southern border, beneath which most weapons are smuggled, he added that in another war Israel would have to seize territory to reduce Hamas’s “oxygen supply”. During the uprising in Egypt, he wrote an op-ed recommending that Israel “be ready to take control of the Philadelphi strip along the Egypt-Gaza border”. “Egypt is not Gaza, the Muslim Brotherhood is not Hamas”, *Haaretz*, 7 February 2011; “Officials: IDF may take over Philadelphi”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 January 2011. More recently, on the day Hamas launched dozens of mortars toward Israel, opposition leader Tzipi Livni stated: “The right way to deal with [Hamas] is with force, just like Israel did during and after Operation Cast Lead”. “Livni: Force is only way to deal with Hamas”, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 19 March 2011. Education Minister Gideon Sa’ar said that Israel would eventually have to launch a larger campaign than Operation Cast Lead. “IDF will have to carry out large-scale operation in Gaza”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 25 March 2011. Prime Minister Netanyahu, however, sought to tone down the rhetoric: “Israel will act firmly, responsibly and wisely to preserve the quiet and security that prevailed here over the past two years”. “Netanyahu: Israel will react firmly to recent Palestinian violence”, *Haaretz*, 23 March 2011.

²⁷ “Israel is not ready for another big war against Gaza. The last war occurred in very special circumstances. There was a change in the American administration, and Israel received a green light from Egypt and the PA”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza Minister of Health Bassem Naim, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

²⁸ On the first rocket launched toward Israel (rather than toward Israeli settlements in Gaza), see “Palestinians launch rockets at Israel”, Israel foreign ministry, 10 February 2002. For a comparison of numbers of rockets, 2002-2010, see “Rocket attacks toward Israel”, Israel Defense Forces Blog, 7 October 2010.

Operation Cast Lead”, Israel foreign ministry, 18 January 2011; bi-weekly safety reports, 1-15 and 16-31 August 2010, GANSO.

¹⁷ “Shin Bet chief: Al-Qaeda affiliated groups behind Gaza violence”, Associated Press, 19 January 2011.

¹⁸ A Hamas spokesperson said Diskin’s comment “borders on incitement”, *Ma’an*, 19 January 2011.

¹⁹ “Haniyeh: Israel planning Gaza escalation”, *Ma’an*, 12 December 2010.

²⁰ “Bibi launches Likud leadership campaign”, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 27 November 2005. Because “stan” is not an Arabic but a Persian suffix (“place of”), “Hamastan” conjures not only the fundamentalism of Afghanistan but also Hamas’s often criticised ties to Iran.

²¹ “Islamisation Processes in the Gaza Strip since Hamas Take-over”, Israel Security Agency; “The Jaljalat Phenomenon in the Gaza Strip”, Israel Security Agency; “Hamas Ongoing Islamic Agenda”, Israel Security Agency, 2010.

²² “Analysis: Fatah raises pressure on Hamas”, United Press International, 20 June 2007; “UN to debate Goldstone report after Abbas U-turn”, *The Independent*, 14 October 2009.

²³ Crisis Group interview, Hamas government spokesman Taher Nunu, Gaza City, 14 November 2010. Several other Hamas officials made the comparison, Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, October, November 2010. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated: “Today we are experiencing difficulty flying near the Gaza Strip since they have in their possession anti-aircraft missiles Imagine that there are no security arrangements, and there will be missiles that can take down an aircraft that is en route to Ben Gurion airport”, “Netanyahu: Terrorists

radical Islamist groups, though defiant, for the most part have been kept in check by Hamas.²⁹ Moreover, Israel in all likelihood would rather not pay the price of reoccupying the territory; nor, especially as it faces new pressure at the UN, would it want more civilian casualties and the prospect of renewed international condemnation. Hamas is believed to have accumulated more sophisticated weapons than it had before Operation Cast Lead,³⁰ and Israeli officials doubt Fatah's ability to control Gaza even after a successful Israeli attack.³¹ Regional events, too, have had an impact: amid great uncertainty in Lebanon, uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and street protests in other Arab countries, Israel likely would think twice before triggering further instability, and the U.S. would view such action with heightened concern.³²

None of this is to rule out a major confrontation. Rocket launches may have been down, but there had been a series of spikes in recent months, including significant escalations in December 2010 and, even more so, March 2011.³³ Although until March Hamas repeatedly had demanded and received consent from Gaza's militant factions to stop firing toward Israelis on the other side of the border, these agreements, despite the government's intensified patrolling and sterner punishment of violators, continued to be bro-

ken – whether because Hamas could not prevent breaches or in some instances chose not to try.³⁴

A single action, even a single militant could trigger another war. On the morning of 21 December 2010, the radical Islamist group Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam), saying it was retaliating for Israel's recent assassinations of two of its members, claimed responsibility for launching a rocket that landed in Kibbutz Zikim, metres away from an Israeli kindergarten.³⁵ Had the wind blown differently that day, Hamas might have faced a major escalation.³⁶ This is not the only reason Hamas has taken the threat of radical Islamists seriously, but it is among the most pressing. Gaza's health minister, Bassem Naim, said, "everything we've gained could be lost by the actions of a single idiot. These people do more harm than any others to Hamas's cause".³⁷

And yet, in spite of these groups' potential to wreak havoc, their current capabilities often are overstated. Their numbers are few, their organisation poor, their achievements against Israel so far insignificant and their chances of threatening Gaza's government slight. When acting without the help of more established Palestinian factions, they

(These figures, last updated in October 2010, were supplemented with those published in "2010 Annual summary – data and trends in terrorism", Israel Security Agency, January 2011.)

²⁹ In November 2009, Israeli military intelligence chief Amos Yadlin said Hamas was actively discouraging rocket fire, even sometimes shooting rocket launchers in the knees. "Yadlin: 'Hamas has many 60-km range missiles'", *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 November 2009.

³⁰ Less than a year after Operation Cast Lead, Yadlin said Hamas's "rocket capabilities" were better than before the war. *Ibid.*

³¹ A senior Israeli security official said, "Hamas suffered a severe blow during the war, but they were not defeated, mainly because they are the only ones willing to rule Gaza. Abu Mazen [President Abbas] doesn't really want it, though he has to pay lip service, of course". Crisis Group interview, strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 15 November 2010.

³² An Israeli defence official said regional turmoil somewhat constrains his country's freedom of manoeuvre but cautioned that Israel still will not hesitate to retaliate against attacks: "The current international context is less convenient to Israel than it was during Operation Cast Lead. At that time, we had eight heads of state visiting the prime minister *during* the operation However, though the current context is less convenient than it was [during Cast Lead], at the end of the day nothing will stop Israel from reacting if it is fired upon". He added: "The fact that other Middle Eastern countries are currently using violence as well will not make much of a difference. Israel is held to a different standard Two dead Palestinians draw more attention than 10,000 dead Libyans". Crisis Group interview, Jerusalem, 21 March 2011.

³³ "2010 Annual summary", *op. cit.*; "Palestinian ceasefire violations since the end of Operation Cast Lead", *op. cit.*

³⁴ Only established militant factions had been party to these agreements (even, a senior Hamas official said, "a few renegades from the [Fatah-affiliated] Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades"), but all militants, including Salafi-Jihadis, knew they were bound by them. Hamas conveyed its seriousness to other factions by bringing to these meetings senior leaders, including Khalil Hayya, Ismail Ashqar and Mahmoud Zahar. According to senior Hamas leaders, the main rocket launchers are Islamic Jihad members. All factions agreed that ceasefire violators would be jailed for at least six months and get no leniency for factional identity. Violators who were not members of established factions were treated as collaborators serving, perhaps unwittingly, a foreign agenda. Crisis Group interview, senior Hamas leader, Gaza City, 12 January 2011. A Qassam leader said many caught on the border are severely beaten. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 14 January 2011. But the ceasefire still is periodically violated. "Brigades claim fire on Israeli civilians", *Ma'an*, 19 January 2011. After the March 2011 escalation, Hamas initiated a meeting with several militant factions, including Islamic Jihad, at which all parties agreed to halt attacks if Israel would do the same. "Gaza factions offer truce, if Israel reciprocates", *Ma'an*, 26 March 2011. Hamas officials said the agreement had been reached in Damascus. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, 26 March 2011.

³⁵ The Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades also claimed responsibility. "2 militant groups claim single projectile launch", *Ma'an*, 21 December 2010; "Israeli teen hurt as Qassam strikes meters from Ashkelon kindergarten", *Haaretz*, 21 December 2010.

³⁶ Earlier that morning, Israeli aircraft hit seven targets in Gaza. "In response to intensive rocket fire, IAF targets Hamas terror infrastructure in the Gaza Strip in joint activity with ISA, 21 December 2010", Israel Defense Forces Blog, 21 December 2010.

³⁷ Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

can claim perhaps only a single attack that resulted in the death of an Israeli soldier.³⁸ Some profess to want to conduct an al-Qaeda-style “spectacular attack”, yet the closest any of them have come was to mount several explosive-laden horses – reportedly under the belief that emulating the Prophet Muhammad dictates the use of seventh-century transport³⁹ – and charge through an empty field on Gaza’s eastern border, where several of them and their horses were quickly killed.⁴⁰ Responsibility for the failed attack was claimed not by a minor jihadi cell but by what was then Gaza’s largest and most organised radical Islamist group, Jund Ansar Allah (Soldiers of God’s Supporters), which Hamas has since crushed.⁴¹

The significance of these groups comes not from their military capabilities but from the constraints they impose on Hamas: they are an ideological challenge to the movement, not simply from without but also, and more dangerously, from within; they appeal to members of Hamas’s military wing, a powerful constituency; through attacks inside Gaza, they threaten the security Hamas has established; and, by criticising Hamas for failing to fight Israel and to implement Islamic law, they exert pressure toward greater militancy and Islamisation.

³⁸ On 27 January 2009, one week after Operation Cast Lead, a bomb was detonated beneath an Israeli jeep, killing one soldier, an attack a Salafi-Jihadi group called Tawhid wa al-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad) said it had conducted and recorded on video. See “Israeli soldier killed, Gaza truce breached”, Reuters, 27 January 2009. In concert with Hamas and the PRC, two Jaysh al-Islam members helped kidnap Gilad Shalit, killing two soldiers in the process.

³⁹ The use of horses was ridiculed by Mahmoud Zahar: “Our Prophet did not use a ship or an aircraft or a car or a telephone. If you say that because he did not use these things, it is forbidden to do so today, that is not true Salafism. For example, these people believe that *ghazwa* [battle] prescribes riding a horse. So they gathered people together, and on horses they went to face Israeli tanks. And what happened?! If our Prophet had tanks, he would have used them”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 19 October 2010. The IDF said trucks were also used. “Main terrorist attacks carried out at Gaza Strip crossings”, Israel foreign ministry.

⁴⁰ The attack took place near the Nahal Oz fuel terminal on 8 June 2009 and was repelled by machine gun, tank and helicopter fire. “Terror attack on Gaza security fence thwarted”, Israel foreign ministry, 8 June 2009; “News of Terrorism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict June 2-9, 2009”, Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre, June 2009.

⁴¹ The group, Jund Ansar Allah (Soldiers of God’s Supporters), essentially ceased to exist after a standoff with Hamas at Rafah’s Ibn Taymiyya Mosque on 14 August 2009. Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member, Rafah, November 2010.

II. SALAFI-JIHADI GROUPS IN GAZA

A. SALAFISM

Salafis are Sunni Muslims who adhere to a literalist reading of scripture and attempt to follow the example of the *salaf al-salih* (pious ancestors) – the first three generations of Muslims. Growing out of a nineteenth-century Islamic movement of modernist reform, Salafism today is defined primarily by its puritan conservatism, non-violence, aversion to politics and emphasis on missionary work (*daawa*).⁴² The vast majority of Salafis in Gaza are apolitical, focusing on conventional *daawa* activities – scholarship, education and social outreach – that serve as a means of “calling” others to Islam.⁴³ The traditional brand of Salafism arrived in Gaza in the early 1970s but was almost unheard of until a decade later,⁴⁴ when many Palestinian students returned from study in Saudi Arabia,⁴⁵ which had begun to invest in countering the pan-Islamic aspirations of revolutionary Iran.⁴⁶ Since the rise of Hamas and the growth of political Islam in the Palestinian territo-

⁴² Some non-violent Salafi groups, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, are not missionary. On the history of Salafism, see Crisis Group Middle East/North Africa Report N°37, *Understanding Islamism*, 2 March 2005, pp. 8-14.

⁴³ One of Gaza’s leading traditional Salafis, Sheikh Yasin al-Astal, founder and chairman of The Scientific Council for the Salafi Mission in Palestine, has repeatedly called on militants to cease rocket attacks against Israel. “Astal calls to halt rocket fire”, *Firas Press*, 20 December 2010.

⁴⁴ Most Salafis and experts on Salafism say the movement began in Gaza in the early 1980s, when a number of Palestinian students returned from Saudi Arabia. “Al-Ayyam opens file on Salafi groups in the Gaza Strip”, *al Ayyam*, 14 May 2007. Sheikh Yasin al-Astal said he started *daawa* activities in 1983. Crisis Group interview, Khan Younis, May 2010.

⁴⁵ Traditional Salafis in Gaza continue to receive financial support from Saudi Arabia; some, like the Ibn Baz Islamic Society, are named after Saudi sheikhs. One of the largest Salafi institutes in Gaza, The Scientific Council for the Salafi Mission in Palestine, receives most of its funding from Saudi Arabia, according to Sheikh Ali al-Ghefary, head of Jamaat al-Tabligh wa al-Daawa in Gaza City. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 11 July 2010. Sheikh Yasin al-Astal says Sheikh Salim Sharab was instrumental in bringing traditional Salafism (the Gaza incarnation of which he is widely credited as having founded) from Saudi Arabia. “Al-Ayyam opens file”, op. cit. Salafi groups in the West Bank also receive funding from the Gulf. A Salafi in Nablus explained that the PA allowed him to receive funds from abroad and pursue *daawa* activities – just as it permitted Salafis to preach in West Bank mosques – as a way of manifesting sympathy to Islam even as its security apparatus represses Hamas. Crisis Group interview, Nablus, 3 March 2011.

⁴⁶ The Iranian revolution inspired the creation of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, whose founder, Fathi Shaqaqi, wrote *Al-Khomeini: al-Hall al-Islami wal-Badil* [Khomeini: The Islamic Solution and Alternative], Al-Mukhtar al-Islami (1979).

ries, Salafists have enjoyed the support of Fatah, which appointed them to PA institutions in an effort to compete with Hamas,⁴⁷ and have voiced no opposition to the presidency of Mahmoud Abbas, whom they consider the *wali al-amr* (ruler).⁴⁸ Salafi-Jihadis, by contrast, are the small fraction of Salafis who espouse violence, taking up what they perceive to be the armed defence of the Muslim community against non-Muslim enemies. Some but not all of them also name and denounce Muslim “deviants” as unbelievers (*kufar*), a practice known as *takfir*. Adherents are known as *takfiris*, a label Hamas members often apply to all of Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis, despite objections from many of them.

All Salafis, including Salafi-Jihadis, tend to reject the characterisation of Salafism as a movement; in their view, they simply practice true Islam (which, they believe, Sufis and Shiites do not). In the words of a Salafi-Jihadi in Rafah, “the Salafis are nothing more than those who follow the *sunna*” – the sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁹ This rather inclusive definition notwithstanding,⁵⁰

most Muslims today identify Salafism with a literalism that has long been criticised by members of the Muslim Brotherhood, of which Hamas is the Palestinian branch.⁵¹

Israeli security officials categorise Salafi-Jihadis as representatives of a “global jihad” movement to distinguish them from Islamists who belong to such militant Palestinian groups as Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Resistance Committees and al-Ahrar (The Free). All of the latter consider themselves national liberation movements focused on Palestine, while Salafi-Jihadis see themselves as members of a transnational movement, believe the enemies of true Islam, including Iran and Shiites,⁵² to be legitimate targets and are uninterested – because they reject the concept of national boundaries – in a Palestinian state.

A former senior adviser to the head of the Israel Security Agency put the distinction between Salafi-Jihadis and their primary competitor for recruitment,⁵³ the Muslim Brotherhood (including its offshoot Hamas), thus:

Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood strike a balance between universalism (Islam) and localism (nationalism/Palestine). Their focus is *daawa* [calling people to Islam]. They spring from the centre of society, which they wish to occupy. In order to achieve this, they must

⁴⁷ Khaled Hroub, “Salafi Formations in Palestine and the Limits of a De-Palestinised Milieu”, *Holy Land Studies*, vol. 7, November 2008, pp. 174, 178. Traditional Salafis allegedly were recruited by former President Yasser Arafat, who employed some of them in his office and as members of the presidential guard. Crisis Group interviews, former PA security officials, Gaza City, March 2011.

⁴⁸ “The people elected Hamas to be the parliament, not the presidency. Hamas was elected to be part of the *wilayat al-amr* [governmental authority], not to be the *wali* [ruler]”, Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Yasin al-Astal, Khan Younis, May 2010. “Traditional Salafis say Abbas is the *wali al-amr* and we are *khawarij* [seceders] – those who left religion in Ali ibn Abi Talib’s time. This is the real reason they received salaries from the PA and were employed in its security forces”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Gaza City, October 2010. Despite supporting Abbas, traditional Salafis have had fairly amicable relations with Hamas. “In our work, we face obstacles from the [Hamas] government at times and at others we see co-operation. The cooperation has included the Ministry of Waqf opening its mosques for us to hold lectures and seminars and also offering to sponsor one of our centres. The obstacles are always the result of factional considerations, which we try to overcome”. Crisis Group interview, Sheikh Emad al-Dayya, administrative board member, Ibn Baz Islamic Society, Gaza City, 26 July 2010.

⁴⁹ Crisis Group interview, “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010. Sheikh Yasin al-Astal agreed: “Nobody should call himself a Salafi, because in Islam, we are only Muslims”. Crisis Group interview, Khan Younis, May 2010.

⁵⁰ Many Hamas members, defining Salafism as the practice of true Islam, identify themselves as Salafis. Dismissing Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis as young and uneducated, Mahmoud Zahar said, “we are the real Salafis! The Muslim Brotherhood are the Salafis. These people are not the Salafis. They do not represent the truth – they are Muslims, but they do not represent true Islam”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 19 October 2010. “We are

Salafis in the sense that we are following the steps of the Prophet”. Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010. A local Hamas leader and Islamic University religious scholar said, “the Muslim Brotherhood has the *aqida* [doctrine] of the traditional Salafis. In reality, there is no difference between us. We both imitate Muhammad. Of course the traditional Salafis and the Muslim Brotherhood are in competition with each other in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, October 2010.

⁵¹ Members of the Muslim Brotherhood have said Islam’s true nature is *tajdid* (renewal), not *taqlid* (imitation). Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford, 1993), p. 238. Sayyid Qutb, a leading theorist of the Muslim Brotherhood, warned against confusing a call to return to Islamic principles with a call to a literal return to the seventh century. *Ma’rakat al-Islam wa’l-ra’smaliyya* [The Battle Between Islam and Capitalism], 1952, p. 84, as cited in *ibid*, p.234.

⁵² Hamas’s relations with Iran have been a principal subject of rhetorical attack by Salafi-Jihadis. For more on differences in attitudes toward the Shiites held by the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda, see Bernard Haykel, “Jihadis and the Shi’a”, in Assaf Moghadam and Brian Fishman (eds.), “Self-Inflicted Wounds: Debates and Divisions within al-Qa’ida and its Periphery”, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 16 December 2010. Salafi-Jihadis criticised Hamas for betraying the Chechen cause by meeting with Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. Crisis Group interview, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010.

⁵³ For more on the intense rivalry between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafi-Jihadis, see Marc Lynch, “Jihadis and the *Ikhwan*”, in “Self-Inflicted Wounds”, *op. cit.*

necessarily be moderate. Al-Qaeda is the opposite. It wishes to distance itself from society – to create a counter-society – in order to attack it.⁵⁴

B. EMERGENCE AND GROWTH

Though the first prominent assault by Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza occurred before the Israeli withdrawal in August and September 2005, it was not until the period of anarchy caused by fighting between Fatah and Hamas in 2006 and 2007 that such groups proliferated and their attacks became widespread.⁵⁵ These, however, were directed mainly⁵⁶ at symbols of Western or un-Islamic influence within Gaza,⁵⁷ such as internet cafes, music shops, video stores, hair salons and pharmacies.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Crisis Group interview, Matti Steinberg, Jerusalem, 18 November 2010.

⁵⁵ In May 2007, a Gaza policeman said attacks in Gaza by Salafi-Jihadis began in November 2006; in May 2007, two traditional Salafis, Sheikh Ibrahim al-Astal and Sheikh Yasin al-Astal, stated that Salafi-Jihadism in Gaza had emerged in the last year. “Al-Ayyam opens file”, op. cit.

⁵⁶ 40 attacks against businesses and institutions perceived as un-Islamic were reported in the first months of 2007 alone. “Bombs hit Christian bookshop, Internet cafe in Gaza”, Reuters, 15 April 2007.

⁵⁷ Attacks in recent years typically target empty buildings at night, causing almost no injuries. Salafi-Jihadis who admit to having perpetrated some of these (they accuse the Qassam Brigades of most) say that this was deliberate and that warnings were given to the proprietors. Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010; “Abu-Hamzah Al-Maqdisi to Al-Sharq Al-Awsat: We Are Not Takfiris, and We Are Proceeding with the Establishment of an Islamic Emirate”, *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 20 August 2009; “Disagreement between Hamas and hard-line groups in Gaza increases, and the movement [Hamas] denies its connection to Al-Qa’idah”, *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 26 March 2010. Salafi-Jihadis say, “Hamas attacks us only to maintain the secret ceasefire with the enemy. Their pretext is that we are behind internal blasts, but we have names proving that members of Qassam were blowing up the cafes. Salafis account for no more than 2 per cent of such bombings”. Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah leader “Abu al-Bara’ al-Masri”, Gaza, 5 April 2010. Some, like Mahmoud Talib, do not denounce internal attacks. “Salafi Jihadi movement leader and former leading member of Al-Qassam Brigades: We will take revenge on Hamas; Islamic Emirate will be achieved”, *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 6 September 2009.

⁵⁸ In many cases, no group took credit. Gazans are reluctant to assume every attack is by Salafi-Jihadis: factional and personal rivalries are sometimes suspected; similar attacks – burning cinemas showing pornography, destroying cafes thought to sell alcohol – occurred in the decades before Salafi-Jihadism arrived. “In Gaza, outbursts of fury, not blood”, *The New York Times*, 20 November 1994. Beverley Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement* (Polity, 2010), pp. 44, 49.

Since Hamas took over and restored security in Gaza, Salafi-Jihadis have had much less freedom of manoeuvre. The faceless groups that sprung up and claimed responsibility for attacks during the period of post-election turmoil – Jund Allah (God’s Soldiers),⁵⁹ Suyuf al-Haq (Swords of Righteousness),⁶⁰ Jaysh al-Quds al-Islami – Tandhim al-Qa’ida fi Ard al-Ribat (Jerusalem Islamic Army – al-Qaeda Organisation in Palestine),⁶¹ Fatah al-Islam fi Ard al-Ribat (The Triumph of Islam in Palestine),⁶² Jund Muhammad (Soldiers of Muhammad) and Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem)⁶³ – have mostly disappeared. Some members have been killed and imprisoned; others are underground or have new Salafi-Jihadi affiliations; still others, having renounced old beliefs, joined or rejoined established factions.⁶⁴

Of the groups that have persisted or since arisen, two have stood out in size and significance: Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam) and Jund Ansar Allah (Soldiers of God’s Supporters). The former participated in the 2006 abduction of Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit and the kidnapping over the following year of several foreign journalists; the latter attacked Israeli troops while riding explosive-laden horses in June 2009 and confronted Hamas at the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque in Rafah two months later. Both groups have unsuccessfully challenged Hamas, and both have been led by militants once allied with it.

⁵⁹ “Al-Ayyam opens file”, op. cit.

⁶⁰ “Salafi group threatens Internet cafes in Gaza Strip”, *al-Ayyam*, 2 December 2006.

⁶¹ “Statement by unknown source announces the setting up of al-Qaeda group in Palestinian territories”, *al-Ayyam*, 9 May 2006. “Ard al-ribat” is a name for Palestine, literally “the land of standing vigilant watch on the frontier”. On the growing prominence of the term, see “Ribat, al-Qaeda, and the Challenge for US Foreign Policy”, *Middle East Journal*, vol. 63, no. 1, Winter 2009.

⁶² “PA claims Fatah al-Islam militants at work in Gaza, blames Hamas”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 December 2007; “Fatah Al-Islam movement claims resurgence in Palestine in unauthenticated message, issues video of launching two rockets in Sderot, Israel”, SITE Intelligence Group, 3 December 2007.

⁶³ “The Salafi groups in Gaza are close to al-Qaeda, and have split from factions including Hamas”, *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 16 August 2009.

⁶⁴ Crisis Group interviews, “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010; Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, 16 October 2010.

C. HAMAS'S SOURING RELATIONS WITH SALAFI-JIHADI GROUPS

1. A partnership strained: The case of Jaysh al-Islam

Jaysh al-Islam came to prominence during the chaotic interval following Hamas's 2006 electoral victory. Hamas found the group useful at first. But as it revealed its sympathies with al-Qaeda, it became a liability, and Hamas, after taking over Gaza, swiftly took action against it. Jaysh al-Islam was formed by members of the Popular Resistance Committees (PRC), one of Gaza's larger militant factions, around the end of 2005.⁶⁵ It is led by Mumtaz Dughmush, a former member of the PA's Preventive Security Organisation who for years allegedly had been contracted for militant operations by both Hamas and Fatah.⁶⁶ He comes from one of Gaza's larger and more powerful clans, which controlled the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City until Hamas took it by force in September 2008.⁶⁷ A Hamas official claimed Dughmush was deranged, illiterate and obsessed with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the deceased leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq.⁶⁸

Dughmush was reputed to be unafraid of confronting the PA in the years before Hamas took over Gaza. According to a leader of the PRC, of which he was once a member, he had close ties to senior Qassam Brigades leaders, for whom he sometimes did "dirty work" for which they preferred not to be blamed. These operations embroiled him in "personal fights" he did not want the PRC dragged into,

which is one reason he left the organisation. Independence was another.⁶⁹

In April 2006, Hamas appointed the PRC's founder, Jamal Abu Samhadana, as chief of oversight of the interior ministry and head of the Executive Force, a policing unit established in Gaza during the tug-of-war over security forces that followed the January 2006 legislative elections.⁷⁰ Around this time, according to PRC members, Samhadana and members of the Qassam Brigades began digging a tunnel for a large kidnapping operation inside Israel, but he was assassinated in an Israeli airstrike, on 8 June 2006, before the operation could take place.⁷¹ Samhadana's tunnel was used just under three weeks later, when members of Hamas, the PRC and Dughmush's splinter group, Jaysh al-Islam, kidnapped Shalit. Two Israeli soldiers died in the operation, as did two Palestinian militants, one of them a member of Jaysh al-Islam, which announced its existence the following day.⁷²

At the time of the abduction, Jaysh al-Islam had not revealed any signs that it intended to conduct the sort of attacks against Westerners that would cast Hamas's past collaboration with the group in an unfavourable light. But seven weeks after Shalit's capture, it seized two journalists working with Fox News (U.S.),⁷³ called for the "liberation of Muslims detained in American prisons"⁷⁴ and forced the hostages to convert to Islam before letting them go. Hamas said it had received assurances that similar acts would not recur.⁷⁵ The following year, after its March 2007 capture of Alan Johnston, a British reporter for the BBC, Jaysh al-Islam demanded the release from UK custody of an al-

⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. A recently published report wrongly states Jaysh al-Islam was established in 2008, two years after it announced participation in the June 2006 Shalit kidnapping. Reuven Paz, "Jihadis and Hamas", in "Self-Inflicted Wounds", op. cit. Some of those later calling themselves Jaysh al-Islam had been expelled from the PRC "after the 2005 assassination of ... [PA] military intelligence chief Musa Arafat". For background, see Crisis Group Middle East Report N°68, *After Gaza*, 2 August 2007, p. 11.

⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Hamas officials, Rafah, Gaza City, October 2010; Khalid Abu Hilal, ex-Fatah leader, current head of al-Ahrar, Gaza City, 30 October 2010; PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. "Fatah policemen 'defect to al-Qaida'", *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 November 2007.

⁶⁷ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°71, *Inside Gaza: The Challenge of Clans and Families*, 20 December 2007.

⁶⁸ "Fatah policemen 'defect to al-Qaeda'", *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 November 2007. "Mumtaz and Qassam had a conflict, which pushed him more toward Salafism", Crisis Group interview, Khalid Abu Hilal, head of al-Ahrar, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

⁶⁹ "Mumtaz is the type of guy who doesn't wait for orders". Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. The split was amiable, and relations between the PRC and Dughmush's new group remained close.

⁷⁰ See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°54, *Palestinians, Israel and the Quartet: Pulling back from the Brink*, 13 June 2006.

⁷¹ His death was compared by a mourner to that of Abu Musab Zarqawi, the leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq, who was assassinated the day before. "Palestinian militant faction leader killed", Associated Press, 8 June 2006.

⁷² According to the leader of al-Ahrar, a militant Islamist faction close to Hamas, Jaysh al-Islam's role was minor: "Hamas wanted the Shalit operation to be a national undertaking, not purely Hamas. They had just formed a government; it was a political calculation". Crisis Group interview, Khalid Abu Hilal, Gaza City, 30 October 2010. A PRC leader had a similar assessment, though one that gave more weight to the PRC. Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

⁷³ They were held for almost two weeks. "Timeline: Steve Centanni and Olaf Wiig's Ordeal", FoxNews.com, 28 August 2006.

⁷⁴ The demand – unfulfilled – was signed by "The Holy Jihad Brigades". "Seized Gaza journalists in video", BBC, 23 August 2006.

⁷⁵ "Kidnapped Fox journalists released", CNN, 27 August 2006.

Qaeda-affiliated Palestinian-Jordanian cleric, Abu Qatada al-Filastini (Omar Mahmoud Othman), whose recorded sermons were found in a Hamburg apartment rented by one of the 11 September 2001 hijackers, Muhammad Atta.⁷⁶

Justifying his movement's previous cooperation with Jaysh al-Islam, Hamas cleric and Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) member Marwan Abu Ras explained: "At that time when we cooperated with them, and we kidnapped Shalit, it wasn't clear that they carried any affiliation with al-Qaeda. This came out after ... and then we cut off any relations with them".⁷⁷ Yet many were sceptical⁷⁸ that the demand for Abu Qatada's release constituted proof of a real tie to al-Qaeda: "The Dughmush family just wanted money", former PA Interior Minister Nasr Youssef said. "In Palestinian society, it is very shameful to kidnap somebody for money; therefore they claimed an exchange with this al-Qaeda prisoner in the UK".⁷⁹

Jaysh al-Islam's fortunes changed once Hamas took over Gaza, during Johnston's third month of captivity. One of the new government's first acts was to issue an ultimatum to Johnston's captors.⁸⁰ When the ultimatum was ignored,

Hamas arrested a Jaysh al-Islam leader and alleged veteran of the war in Afghanistan, Khattab al-Maqdisi⁸¹ (Ahmed Mazlum), reportedly the orchestrator of the kidnapping and the brains behind Dughmush.⁸² Jaysh al-Islam retaliated by kidnapping several Islamic University students.⁸³ The following day, the Executive Force arrested fifteen of Dughmush's kinsmen and laid siege to his home in Gaza City,⁸⁴ securing Johnston's release.

Relations between the two groups deteriorated further over succeeding months, reaching a breaking point the following year.⁸⁵ In the wake of three bombings that occurred on 25 July 2008,⁸⁶ police entered the Dughmush quarter of

⁷⁶ "Profile: Abu Qatada", BBC, 26 February 2007. Jaysh al-Islam said that in place of Abu Qatada, one of two prisoners in Jordanian detention could be released: Sajida al-Rishawi, an Iraqi woman sentenced to death in the suicide bombing of a Jordanian hotel, and Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi ('Isam Tahir al-Barqawi), a Jordanian cleric of Palestinian origin widely read by Salafi-Jihadis and once a mentor to al-Qaeda in Iraq founder Zarqawi. "Kidnapped BBC man's fate hangs on clan feud", *The Guardian*, 1 July 2007.

⁷⁷ Are Hovdenak, "Al-Qaeda – a challenge for Hamas?", Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 12 January 2009, p. 28.

⁷⁸ Abu Qatada's release appears not to have been the impetus for Johnston's abduction, which stemmed in part from a blood feud between the Hamas-affiliated Dayri and predominantly Fatah-affiliated Dughmush clans; the former had killed Dughmush members while in Hamas's Executive Force. Kidnappings of foreigners typically were accompanied by demands on Gaza's government; the Dughmush clan sought a trial of those present during the killing of their kinsmen. Crisis Group Report, *Inside Gaza*, op. cit.

⁷⁹ Youssef went on to say: "But in reality they asked for – and got – money". This frequently repeated claim was denied by mediators, Hamas officials and Dughmush kinsmen (see below). Are Hovdenak, op. cit., p. 29.

⁸⁰ In response, Jaysh al-Islam threatened to reveal past cooperation with Hamas, including assassinations of PA officials. "Abbas: No dialogue with 'murderous terrorists' in Hamas", *Haaretz*, 20 June 2007. Hamas Interior Minister Said Siam countered that Dughmush and three colleagues were responsible for the September 2006 murder of ex-PA General Intelligence official Brigadier General Jad Tayeh. "Participant in mediation efforts to Al-Quds al-Arabi: Kidnappers will keep their weapons. Johnston's release deal: Fatwa, personal concessions, and weapons instead of money to use in resisting occupation", *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 5 July 2007.

⁸¹ *Bayt al-Maqdis* (House of Holiness) is a name for Jerusalem; "al-Maqdisi" is thus a *nisba* (name based on place of origin) used as a nom de guerre by many Gaza Salafi-Jihadis.

⁸² Crisis Group interviews, friend of Ahmed Mazlum, Gaza City, 26 December 2010; Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010; Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

⁸³ "9 Students of Islamic University Kidnapped by 'Army of Islam' in Gaza", Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 3 July 2007. A reporter falsely stated that Zahar's son was among the kidnapped. Crisis Group interview, Zahar, Gaza City, January 2011; "Al-Qaeda veteran led Johnston kidnap gang", *The Sunday Times*, 8 July 2007.

⁸⁴ "Hamas: Military pressure, not fatwa, ultimately put an end to Johnston's abduction", *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 5 July 2007.

⁸⁵ In February 2008, Jaysh al-Islam militants detonated a landmine at the YMCA library, destroying roughly 8,000 books. (It was not its first such attack in Gaza. An international official estimated it burned some 80 internet cafes in the year after its first public statement, in June 2006). It is suspected of at least one of two attacks on the American International School in Gaza around the time of President George W. Bush's January 2008 visit to Israel. See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°73, *Ruling Palestine I: Gaza under Hamas*, 19 March 2008, p. 25. The American School was also attacked in April 2007, when masked militants bombed and set fire to it. One guard reported that the men said they belonged to al-Qaeda in Palestine; another said they identified themselves as members of the Army of Islam. "Bombing at U.S.-backed school in Gaza", *The New York Times*, 21 April 2007. In June 2008, a former Qassam member who had joined Jaysh al-Islam was claimed as a martyr by both organisations. A video was released in which he denounced Hamas's leadership and governance. Are Hovdenak, op. cit., p. 30. Several weeks later, Quartet envoy Tony Blair cancelled a Gaza visit after Israel warned him of an attack Israel Security Agency officials say Jaysh al-Islam planned. Yoram Cohen and Matthew Levitt, with Becca Wasser, "Deterred but Determined: Salafi-Jihadi Groups in the Palestinian Arena", The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, January 2010, p. 20.

⁸⁶ On 25 July 2008, a mysterious coincidence of three explosions occurred in Gaza: at an empty café before dawn, the home of Hamas cleric and legislator Marwan Abu Ras and a beachside picnic tent containing five Qassam commanders, all of whom, including the nephew of Hamas senior leader Khalil Hayya, were killed. Hamas officials say the attack on the com-

southern Gaza City and fought several hours with members of Jaysh al-Islam and the Dughmush clan.⁸⁷ Seven weeks later, Hamas re-entered the Dughmush quarter and ended the local autonomy the clan previously had enjoyed.⁸⁸ Eleven of Dughmush's kinsmen, nine of them members of Jaysh al-Islam,⁸⁹ were killed in the fighting.⁹⁰ Jaysh al-Islam issued a long statement accusing Hamas of waging "war on Salafist groups", accepting Shiite tenets, treacherously reneging on its agreement to forgive the Johnston kidnapping, stealing the weapons of mujahidin (holy warriors) and the money of peaceful Muslims and

"executing persons who wear Salafist attire and long hair", just as Fatah used to do to men with beards.⁹¹

The group has conducted few attacks since.⁹² International aid officials in Gaza say it was behind a small February 2010 explosion beside a convoy of vehicles belonging to the International Committee for the Red Cross, but it never claimed responsibility for the attack; after Dughmush stated that he had not ordered it and promised similar acts would not recur, the Jaysh al-Islam militants allegedly responsible were arrested.⁹³ Today, Qassam members state that Dughmush does not offer protection to wanted Salafi-Jihadis and has given up radical Islamist followers sought by Hamas.⁹⁴

Whatever its affinity with al-Qaeda, Jaysh al-Islam has stated that it is not a part of it,⁹⁵ an assessment shared by Israel,⁹⁶ Hamas⁹⁷ and other Salafi-Jihadis.⁹⁸ "It is the media that has made these Dughmush people look more im-

manders was unconnected to the other explosions. Marwan Abu Ras said his home was attacked by a disaffected ex-Jaysh al-Islam member trying to provoke a conflict between Hamas and Dughmush's group; a Salafi-Jihadi, not a Jaysh al-Islam member, later took credit: "[at the time] there were operations to arrest our supporters. Abu-Ras claimed that we were doing a service to the Israeli Mossad. We wanted to address a message to him to stop these accusations". "'Jaljalat' is waiting to carry out a big operation in order to dedicate it to Bin-Ladin", *al-Ayyam*, 11 July 2009. Hamas held Fatah responsible for the commanders' deaths but suspected Jaysh al-Islam of the café bombing. Ibid; "Six dead, 20 injured as car of Hamas leader explodes near Gaza City", *Ma'an*, 25 July 2008; Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010. The primary suspect in the attack on the Qassam commanders, Zaki Sakani, was offered protection by the Hillis family, which is one of Gaza's most powerful and includes several prominent Fatah leaders. One week after the bombing, it engaged in heavy armed clashes with Hamas as it attempted to defend the quarter it controlled in Gaza City. As a result of the fighting, twelve Hillis clansmen died, and 188 Fatah members fled to Gaza's eastern border, where they were admitted by Israel; many Hillis kinsmen have been relocated to the West Bank city of Jericho. "Israel lets in 188 Fatah loyalists", *Haaretz*, 3 August 2008. Zaki Sakani was wounded during the fighting in the Hillis quarter and was later abducted from a hospital by Hamas. "Sakani family appeals to human right institutions [to] reveal destiny of their abducted son", Palestine Press Agency, 24 January 2009. He was among several Fatah prisoners in Gaza on hunger strike in early January. "Fatah prisoners on hunger strike in Gaza", *Ma'an*, 7 January 2011. For further background, see Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°24, *Round Two in Gaza*, 11 September 2008.⁸⁷ "Bomb attack leads to huge Hamas crackdown on Fatah", *The Sunday Times*, 28 July 2008.

⁸⁸ A spokesman said Hamas was pursuing Dughmush clansmen who had killed a police officer and that the campaign was not aimed at Jaysh al-Islam. "The hard-liners accuse Hamas of 'launching a war on Salafism'", *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19 September 2008.

⁸⁹ This is according to Jaysh al-Islam. *Ma'an*, 25 September 2008.

⁹⁰ "Monthly Report on Violations of Human Rights and Freedoms in the PNA-Controlled Territory", The Independent Commission for Human Rights – Palestine, September 2008.

⁹¹ "Army of Islam gives Hamas a three-day deadline", op. cit.

⁹² Jaysh al-Islam has periodically taken credit for launching rockets, as it did following Israeli strikes that killed two of its members in November 2010. Israel said the group was planning an attack in Sinai, and Egypt accused it of bombings in Cairo and Alexandria – charges Jaysh al-Islam has denied. "Egypt's interior minister says authorities arrest 19 Arabs with suspected links to al-Qaida", Associated Press, 25 January 2011; "Egypt blames Gaza militants for church bomb", Reuters, 23 January 2011.

⁹³ Crisis Group interviews, international aid workers, November 2010.

⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Qassam commanders, Gaza City, November 2010. The director of Gaza's Internal Security Service says that unlike other Salafi-Jihadi groups, Jaysh al-Islam is not considered a renegade organisation. Interior Minister Fathi Hammad said, "we have more channels of communication with Jaysh al-Islam. They listen to us more than the other Salafi-Jihadi groups". Crisis Group interview, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010. A Jund Ansar Allah member in Rafah said his group was under far less government pressure than others. According to a close follower of Gaza's Salafi-Jihadis, Jaysh al-Islam's perceived closeness to Hamas has caused other Salafi-Jihadis to suspect it of working for the government. Crisis Group interviews, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010; Jund Ansar Allah member "Abu Musab", Rafah, 2 November 2010; Arab diplomat, Ramallah, January 2011.

⁹⁵ Jaysh al-Islam leader Abu Hafs al-Maqdisi said his organisation "is not part of al-Qaeda". "The hard-liners accuse", op. cit.

⁹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Israel strategic affairs ministry official, Jerusalem, 15 November 2010.

⁹⁷ The director of Gaza's Internal Security Service questioned not only Jaysh al-Islam's connections to al-Qaeda but also its identification with Salafi-Jihadism: "Jaysh al-Islam takes on the appearance of Salafi groups merely to attract new members". Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Lafi, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member "Abu Musab", Rafah, 2 November 2010.

portant than they are”, said a Hamas legislator. “They try to use the al-Qaeda label to look more powerful”.⁹⁹

2. Hamas’s Red Lines: Confronting Jund Ansar Allah

For Hamas, actions taken by Jund Ansar Allah (Soldiers of God’s Supporters) were a wake-up call to the threat Salafi-Jihadi groups might pose to its rule. Limited ceasefire violations could be grudgingly tolerated, but a challenge to Hamas’s authority could not. The group was created in late 2008 and ceased almost entirely to exist less than one year later.¹⁰⁰ Its spiritual leader, Sheikh Abd-al Latif Musa, once was the general director of Dar al-kitab wa al-sunna, one of the oldest traditional Salafi organisations in Palestine, established in Gaza in the early 1980s.¹⁰¹ The group’s military leader was a Palestinian, Khalid Banat,¹⁰² who had spent many years abroad and claimed to have fought in Afghanistan and Iraq alongside bin Laden and Zarqawi.¹⁰³ Having lived in Syria, he went by the name Abu Abdullah Suri (Abu Abdullah the Syrian). Hamas officials said he had been sent by the movement’s Damascus leadership roughly five years earlier¹⁰⁴ to help train the Qassam Bri-

gades,¹⁰⁵ which he is said to have done for some two years before turning to Salafi-Jihadism.¹⁰⁶

Those who knew Banat say he came to Gaza with a significant amount of money, which, along with weapons, he handed out generously to his young followers, though some say with less humility than is common for a Salafi ascetic.¹⁰⁷ Hamas officials state that he used the connections developed while training the Qassam Brigades to recruit¹⁰⁸ some of its members to the new group he and Musa created.¹⁰⁹ By many accounts, Banat was essential to Jund Ansar Allah’s growth. He was a generation older than most Gaza Salafi-Jihadis, who admired him for having fought abroad and then trained the Qassam Brigades.¹¹⁰

Like other Salafi-Jihadi groups, Jund Ansar Allah appealed to some low-level Qassam members, who upon joining would acquire new and important-sounding titles. Among those Banat recruited from Qassam was Sheikh Abd al-Latif Musa’s son-in-law, Fahd Musa; according to Hamas and Qassam leaders, Fahd Musa was “impatient”¹¹¹ – code for “unwilling to abide by Hamas’s ceasefires” – and had been a part of Qassam for only two or three years. Upon leaving to join Jund Ansar Allah, he was appointed, at a young age, spokesman and deputy head of the group’s military wing.

⁹⁹ Are Hovdenak, op. cit., p. 30. A former head of counterterrorism in Israeli military intelligence, later special assistant to the director of the Israel Security Agency, agreed: “Jaysh al-Islam is just the Dughmush clan. They’re not real Salafis”. Crisis Group interview, Barak Ben-Zur, Modi’in, 17 November 2010.

¹⁰⁰ The group is sometimes incorrectly referred to as “Ansar Jund Allah”. See, for example, Reuven Paz, “Jihadis and Hamas”, in “Self-Inflicted Wounds”, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ “Al-Ayyam opens file”, op. cit.

¹⁰² This is the same individual referred to incorrectly as “Fuad Banat” in Cohen, Levitt, Wasser, op. cit.. Although many Western analysts and press reports say Jund Ansar Allah was led by Sheikh Abd-al Latif Musa, Hamas officials and the group’s own posters state that Banat was its “emir”, while Musa was the emir of “the Islamic Emirate” he declared in his final sermon on 14 August 2009. “Abu Abdullah Suri was the actual leader of Jund Ansar Allah. Sheikh Abd-al Latif Musa was the spiritual leader and *mufti* of the group”, Crisis Group interview, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010; Jund Ansar Allah posters on file with Crisis Group. Some early reports about Jund Ansar Allah called Abu Abdullah Suri its emir. “Jund Ansar Allah: New Salafi Organisation Appears in Southern Part of Gaza Strip”, *al Ayyam*, 23 December 2008.

¹⁰³ Crisis Group interviews, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010; Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, 16 October 2010.

¹⁰⁴ In late 2010, those who knew him said he had arrived four or five years ago. Crisis Group interviews, Jund Ansar Allah members and Hamas officials, Rafah, October-November 2010.

¹⁰⁵ A Hamas member and former Qassam commander says Banat offered his expertise in military tactics and weapons manufacturing. Crisis Group interview, Rafah, October 2010.

¹⁰⁶ Crisis Group interviews, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010; Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010. Abu Musab said the training provided by Banat had been beneficial during the June 2007 takeover of Gaza.

¹⁰⁷ Crisis Group interviews, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010; Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, 16 October 2010. Banat was said to have bought at least two expensive apartments in Gaza, which Hamas officials found suspicious. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010.

¹⁰⁸ “Some of those he trained became his apprentices”. Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

¹⁰⁹ An early report of its formation appeared in December 2008, when a member stated that the group had existed for “a few months”. “Jund Ansar Allah”, op. cit. A reporter placed the date more precisely at 28 November 2008. Fathi Sabbah, “Gaza, a ‘Suitable Greenhouse’ for the ‘Takfiri Groups’”, *al-Hayat*, 16 August 2009.

¹¹⁰ Banat died at 40 years old. “Some of the youth were fascinated by him because he was a distinguished military trainer. His emulation of al-Qaeda was attractive to the younger generation”. Crisis Group interviews, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010; Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010.

¹¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Hamas leader, Rafah, October 2010.

At first, Hamas did not perceive Jund Ansar Allah to be a threat. Its intentions were unknown, and with war with Israel looming, Hamas had larger concerns.¹¹² Some two weeks before the war began, Jund Ansar Allah claimed a martyr, a 22-year-old killed in Rafah by Israeli forces.¹¹³ Asked at the time to comment on the new group, a Hamas spokesman said the movement welcomed anyone resisting Israel, and “the arena is big enough for everyone”.¹¹⁴ Once the war began, however, Hamas members found reason to regard Banat warily. After asking for his support, they heard him say, “we will not help a tyrant fight a tyrant”.¹¹⁵

Jund Ansar Allah’s only significant attack, aside from launching projectiles from Gaza’s border, was the failed June 2009 attempt to confront Israeli soldiers while mounted on explosive-laden horses.¹¹⁶ Hamas, still reeling from the Gaza war, issued a stern warning to the group for its blatant violation of the de facto ceasefire. The warning, Hamas officials claim, was ignored, as “internet cafes, barber shops, and hair salons went up in smoke”.¹¹⁷ Jund Ansar Allah members vehemently deny the charges, saying that they have never been involved in internal attacks.¹¹⁸

A first confrontation came one month later. On 21 July 2009, an explosion injured dozens at the Khan Younis wedding of a nephew of Fatah leader and former Pre-

ventive Security chief Muhammad Dahlan.¹¹⁹ Two Jund Ansar Allah members, both in attire favoured by Salafi-Jihadis, were in the area when the bomb went off. They were not thought to be responsible but fled from police and were arrested shortly thereafter, leading investigators to discover weapons and explosives in their homes.¹²⁰ The next day, police came to interrogate four other Jund Ansar Allah members, who refused to surrender, causing a day-long standoff. Threatening to blow themselves up if security forces entered the building, they demanded Hamas return the weapons confiscated from their colleagues the previous day. A communiqué issued by the group warned that if any of its followers died, any Hamas members responsible would be killed.¹²¹

Respected Islamic scholars mediated and resolved the standoff, but Jund Ansar Allah soon began distributing leaflets critical of Hamas. Feeling the group’s intransigence had gone too far, Hamas decided to arrest Banat but withdrew when he refused to surrender.¹²² In the days that followed, Jund Ansar Allah distributed new leaflets that taunted Hamas as too weak to challenge them. Emboldened, they began calling for Sharia to be implemented, sending warnings to Rafah businesses they thought were not abiding by it,¹²³ and calling for the administration of *hudud* (punishments prescribed in the Quran and *sunna* that include whipping unmarried fornicators, stoning adulterers and amputating the hands of thieves).¹²⁴

On 11 August 2009, members of Jund Ansar Allah sent messages instructing Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis to attend Friday prayers at Rafah’s Ibn Taymiyya Mosque, where Sheikh Abd-al Latif Musa was to deliver a sermon entitled “Golden

¹¹² “After Hamas took over Gaza, it fought Fatah, then the Hillis, Dughmush, and Hassanein clans. In the process, they turned a blind eye to the Salafi-Jihadis”. Crisis Group interview, Fatah-affiliated NGO employee, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

¹¹³ “Jund Ansar Allah”, op. cit.

¹¹⁴ The spokesman was Fawzi Barhum. Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Khalid Banat and the other Salafi-Jihadis expected Israel to wipe out Hamas. After the war, Hamas declared a unilateral ceasefire in coordination with all the factions, including the Salafi-Jihadis. The Salafi-Jihadi groups violated the agreement by launching mortars and rockets and shooting at Israeli jeeps without notifying Hamas”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010. Islamic Jihad committed to the agreement but asked for its objections to be noted. Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. After the war, Banat sought to unify Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadi groups. Hamas security officials say he partially succeeded. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, December 2010.

¹¹⁶ Israeli officials say they had early warning of the attack because they saw militants planting explosives near the border. A Hamas official said a collaborator, caught over a year later, had warned Israel. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, October 2010.

¹¹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010.

¹¹⁸ Crisis Group interviews, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010; Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010; Jund Ansar Allah leader “Abu al-Bara’ al-Masri”, Gaza, 5 April 2010.

¹¹⁹ The perpetrator, according to a Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service in Rafah, was a scorned suitor of the bride. Crisis Group interview, Rafah, October 2010. After subsequent confrontations with Jund Ansar Allah, some government officials blamed it for the bombing: “[Jund Ansar Allah] has violated the law by bombing a wedding party of the Dahlan family, some Internet cafes, and civilian sites”. Interview with Government spokesman Taher Nunu on “Panorama”, Al-Arabiya TV, 15 August 2009.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Hamas leader, Rafah, October 2010.

¹²¹ “Jund Ansar Allah: If Our Men Besieged in Khan Younes Are Killed, We’ll Kill Hamas Operatives Responsible”, MEMRI Blog, 23 July 2009.

¹²² Security forces surrounded him in Rafah but withdrew to avoid bloodshed. An informant is believed to have warned him Hamas would deliver him to Egypt, where he was wanted for involvement in the same February 2009 Cairo bombing Egypt accuses Jaysh al-Islam of facilitating. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010.

¹²³ These included hair stylists, internet cafes and non-Palestinian NGOs that they considered missionary groups.

¹²⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010; Qassam commander, Rafah/Gaza City, October 2010.

Advice to Ismail Haniyeh”.¹²⁵ Hamas sent well-known scholars, traditional Salafis and members of other Islamic factions to dissuade Musa from confronting the government. He assured them they would hear nothing upsetting.¹²⁶

On the eve of Musa’s oration, the Internal Security Service received a tip that weapons were being gathered inside the mosque.¹²⁷ The following day, heavily armed militants, some with explosive belts, walked past Hamas’s security forces as they made their way to afternoon prayers.¹²⁸ Musa began his sermon by denouncing the traditional Salafis and members of the PRC who had tried to convince him not to confront the government. After criticising Hamas for behaving like a secular movement, failing to implement Sharia and obstructing the fight against Israel, he declared an Islamic Emirate in Palestine, warned that anyone who did not abide by Sharia would have it imposed upon him and threatened retaliation if security forces stormed the mosque.¹²⁹

All but Musa’s followers then dispersed. The interior ministry had sent orders to have the militants’ weapons handed over.¹³⁰ Musa’s followers demanded to negotiate with a

senior Qassam commander, Muhammad (Abu Jibril) Shamali, whom they had fought several days before. Shamali thought he could resolve the dispute and ignored advice not to go. As he approached the mosque, a sniper inside killed him. A Hamas official described the directive issued immediately after: “Burn the mosque on top of them”.¹³¹ Musa and Banat fled, taking shelter in the former’s home. Musa is said to have had a last-minute change of heart and called on Hamas for help, but Banat shot the officer who responded, then detonated an explosive belt, killing himself and Musa.¹³²

The battle with Musa’s and Banat’s followers lasted until the following morning; 28 people died – at least seven of them police or Qassam members – and more than 100 were injured.¹³³ The incident was said to have caused acute embarrassment for Hamas, as it came on the same day Prime Minister Haniyeh had given a speech denying an al-Qaeda presence in Gaza.¹³⁴ In the year and a half since, Jund Ansar Allah has claimed responsibility for several projectiles launched at Israel,¹³⁵ but Salafi-Jihadis, including some who still identify themselves as members of the group, say that with its leaders killed and its weapons seized it basically is finished.¹³⁶

D. SALAFI-JIHADI GROUPS IN GAZA TODAY

Reliable estimates of the number of Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza are difficult to obtain. The gap between these militants’ notoriety and actual achievements can be partly blamed on Hamas, which by forbidding reports about them has

¹²⁵ In the days preceding, an explosive charge was detonated near Hamas’s security headquarters in Rafah. Crisis Group interviews, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010; Qassam commander, Rafah, October 2010.

¹²⁶ “We came to Abd-al Latif Musa and told him to retreat. He said, ‘don’t worry, you won’t hear anything that will upset you; it’s not what you expect’”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010.

¹²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010. On the night before Musa’s sermon, Hamas arrested two Salafi-Jihadis travelling toward Rafah from Nuseirat. Both had weapons and wore explosive belts. After refusing to remove their belts, they were brought to Internal Security headquarters in Rafah. Internal Security Service officers shot at the ground beside the would-be bombers, lightly injuring one with a ricocheted bullet; in exchange for calling an ambulance, they took off their explosive belts. A Hamas religious figure respected by Salafis was sent to speak with them, staying until dawn: “It was a very frightening night for me. At first I promised them that if they removed their belts, they would be let go and that would be the end of it. Later I spoke to them very harshly and said this night won’t be like last time (when we came to arrest Abu Abdullah Suri [Khalid Banat] and let him go). Blood will be shed”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010.

¹²⁸ The Internal Security Service, Qassam Brigades and police surrounded the mosque hours before the sermon. “PCHR Condemns Bloody Clashes in Rafah; 28 Persons Killed and at Least 100 Others Wounded”, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 15 August 2009.

¹²⁹ “14 August Rafah Clashes: Analysis, Implications, & Recommendations”, Association of International Development Agencies, 2009.

¹³⁰ Hamas officials asked the families of some of Musa’s followers to convince their children to leave the mosque. Accord-

ing to a Hamas official, several succeeded; others were told by their children they were infidels. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010.

¹³¹ “Shamali had recently attended one of Musa’s lectures, where he was accused of being a spy and beaten by Musa’s followers. Abu Jibril told his people not to react”. Crisis Group interviews, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010; Qassam commander, Rafah, October 2010.

¹³² “Musa called Hamas for help. An officer came and Banat shot him through the temple Miraculously, he survived”, Crisis Group interviews, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010; Qassam commander, Rafah, October 2010.

¹³³ “Deaths resulting from gunfire”, Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, 2010.

¹³⁴ Crisis Group interview, local journalist, Gaza City, August 2009.

¹³⁵ “Jund Ansar Allah claims morning’s projectile launch”, *Ma’an*, 24 September 2009; “Al-Aqsa threatens retaliation for strike; Salafi group attacks patrol”, *Ma’an*, 26 September 2009.

¹³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010. “Jund Ansar Allah is almost over after the death of its leaders and the seizure of its weapons”. Crisis Group interview, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010.

contributed to their mystique. Hamas is wary of articles that paint it as harbouring al-Qaeda-inspired groups or as weak and lacking control of Gaza. It wants neither to be portrayed as a border guard preventing other Islamists from fighting Israel nor to have the press offer a recruiting platform to self-aggrandising al-Qaeda aspirants. As a result, visiting reporters who interview radical Islamists have been expelled,¹³⁷ and local journalists are sternly warned that writing on the subject is forbidden.¹³⁸ Those willing to defy the ban said interviewees were now extraordinarily difficult to contact;¹³⁹ one said he had managed to see only three in six months and could no longer get any to speak with him.¹⁴⁰ Consequently, information about Gaza's radicals is slight, and much of it is unreliable.

Given that neither the PA, Israel, nor Egypt has an incentive to lessen the hyperbole, it perhaps is little wonder that estimates of the number of Salafi-Jihadis vary by several orders of magnitude. While the head of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) reports that "there are about 500 militant activists" in Gaza who identify with al-Qaeda's ideology,¹⁴¹ assessments from other sources differ considerably: a publication of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point states that there are 4,000 to 5,000 members of Salafi-Jihadi groups in Gaza (based on a figure of unknown methodology by a Fatah-affiliated professor at Gaza's al-Azhar

University)¹⁴² and goes on to cite an even larger (and equally unsystematic) conjecture by an Israeli analyst.¹⁴³

Naturally, Salafi-Jihadi groups have been happy to see their size and significance inflated. A self-proclaimed leader of one such group told a Palestinian newspaper that there were 11,000 like-minded militants in Gaza.¹⁴⁴ Though the boast made it into the headline, the local reporter who conducted the interview (and who has done similar ones with other masked men claiming to be Salafi-Jihadi leaders) told Crisis Group he found the claim "absurd".¹⁴⁵ Some reporters profess to be torn between public appetites for stories about al-Qaeda-like groups and the impossibility of verifying the identities, let alone the declarations, of the interviewees, some of whom arrange to answer questions by telephone¹⁴⁶ or email.¹⁴⁷ Gaza residents are thus left to traffic in rumour, often circulated by Fatah supporters, who constitute a disproportionate share of Palestinian staff at international NGOs and act as primary conduits of local information provided to Western policymakers, yet are the least likely to be informed about matters the Hamas government deems sensitive.¹⁴⁸

¹³⁷ Crisis Group interviews, local and international reporters, Gaza City, October-November 2010.

¹³⁸ Local journalists told a recent story of a reporter from Palmedia being arrested with radical Islamists he was interviewing. Crisis Group interviews, Emad Eid, director, *Ma'an* office, Gaza City; Ibrahim Qannan, *Ma'an* reporter, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

¹³⁹ Crisis Group interviewed a few Salafi-Jihadi militants as well as many officials who have interacted with them.

¹⁴⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Gaza reporters, November, December 2010.

¹⁴¹ An estimate of "hundreds" was given by several current and former Israeli security officials. Crisis Group interviews, Jerusalem, Modi'in, Tel Aviv, Ashkelon, November 2010. In September 2009, the figure provided by David Hakham, Defence Minister Ehud Barak's adviser on Arab Affairs, was 400. "Israel: 'Egypt is making efforts to encounter smuggling through tunnels at Gaza border'", Palestine Press Agency, 14 September 2009. In a co-authored paper written while on leave, the deputy head of the Israel Security Agency estimated the number was in the "low hundreds". Cohen, Levitt, Wasser, op. cit. "Shin Bet chief: al-Qaeda affiliated groups behind Gaza violence", The Associated Press, 18 January 2011. A former Israeli counter-terrorism official writes that the membership of "groups such as the Army of Islam (based by and large on the Durmush clan), the Sword of Islam and the Army of Believers—al-Qaeda in Palestine" is "estimated [to number] several dozen operatives at the most". Yoram Schweitzer, "The Terrorism Threat against Israel from al-Qaeda and Global Jihad", *Military and Strategic Affairs*, vol. 2, no. 1, June 2010, p. 25.

¹⁴² The professor, Mkhaimar Abusada, worked as a "Fatah political official in Gaza before Hamas took power". See "Under the gun: How the people of Gaza feel about Hamas", *The National*, 17 September 2010. His estimate was in "Salafism: A New Threat to Hamas", *The New York Times*, 27 October 2009. Crisis Group interview, Mkhaimar Abusada, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

¹⁴³ Benedetta Berti, "Salafi-Jihadi Activism in Gaza: Mapping the Threat", *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 3 (5), May 2010. The Israeli analyst wrote that followers of these groups number "at least 50,000, and probably many more". Jonathan Spyer, "Al-Qaeda-Style Islamism Comes to Gaza", *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 August 2009. A researcher quotes Fatah intelligence officers who say Jaljalat's members number 2,500-3,000. Yezid Sayigh, "Hamas Rule in Gaza: Three Years On", Crown Centre for Middle East Studies, March 2010.

¹⁴⁴ The interviewee called himself Shaykh "Abu-Al-Harith", leader of Jund Ansar Allah. "Exclusive: New Gaza Salafist faction numbers 11,000", *Ma'an*, 18 April 2010.

¹⁴⁵ Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Qannan, Gaza City, 28 December 2010.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, "Dismissed government releases Jaysh al-Ummah leader Abu-Hafs al-Maqdisi", *Ma'an*, 2 November 2010; "Jaysh al-Ummah claims responsibility for firing rocket at Southern Negev", *Ma'an*, 8 October 2009.

¹⁴⁷ "Salafi Jihadi Movement Leader", op. cit.

¹⁴⁸ This problem encompasses far more than information about radical Islamists, and its pervasiveness is often overlooked by even international officials in Gaza who acknowledge its existence and express frustration at their isolation from Hamas; despite awareness of the unreliability of their information and sources, they expressed faith in some demonstrably false rumours. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, October-November 2010.

Salafi-Jihadis who spoke with Crisis Group estimated their number in Gaza to be in the hundreds,¹⁴⁹ while the figure most often offered by Hamas officials is dozens.¹⁵⁰ Ashraf Juma', a Fatah leader in Rafah, agreed with Hamas that the number was "trivial", but added: "To conduct an attack that will have enormous consequences for Gaza, you don't need thousands; you need only tens".¹⁵¹

1. Smaller groups

Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza say that since the defeat of Jund Ansar Allah in August 2009, only two or three significant groups remain.¹⁵² Aside from Jaysh al-Islam, now perceived to be thoroughly under Hamas's thumb, there is Jaysh al-Umma (Army of the Nation), Tawhid wa al-Jihad (Monotheism and Jihad)¹⁵³ and, some add, Ansar al-Sunna (Sup-

porters of the Prophet's Sayings and Practices).¹⁵⁴ By the accounts of both Salafi-Jihadi leaders and Hamas officials, the other groups are not influential and in some cases have fewer than ten members each.¹⁵⁵

Jaysh al-Umma and Jaysh al-Islam are the oldest of the remaining groups.¹⁵⁶ Most date Jaysh al-Umma's formation to sometime before June 2007,¹⁵⁷ when it claimed responsibility for firing several rockets toward Israel. Aside from launching these occasional attacks, its main activity appears to be making announcements about arrests of its members by Hamas.¹⁵⁸ It claimed two attacks during Operation Cast Lead, the first a firing of mortar shells toward a convoy of Israeli tanks, the second a shooting of an Israeli soldier near the Zaytun neighbourhood of Gaza City.¹⁵⁹ It is based primarily in the southern towns of Khan Younis and Rafah and the northern town of Beit Hanoun; one of its leaders said the group opposes internal violence and has never burned or bombed a café.¹⁶⁰ In February 2010, he said, "our military activity is small be-

¹⁴⁹ A Jund Ansar Allah member said that at its peak the group following Khalid Banat and Sheikh Abd-al Latif Musa numbered 200-300, including all of Jund Ansar Allah and many from other factions. He said there were fewer Salafi-Jihadis now. Crisis Group interview, "Abu Musab", Rafah, 2 November 2010. A Jaysh al-Umma leader said that his group had "no fewer than 200" members, that Jaysh al-Islam was the only Salafi-Jihadi group of comparable size, and that the others had "a handful of people, in some cases not more than ten", Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 31 May 2010. Israeli officials estimated active membership of Jaysh al-Islam, by most accounts the largest group today, at "only several dozen, perhaps as many as 200 to 300". Cohen, Levitt, Wasser, op. cit.

¹⁵⁰ Most but not all used the word "dozens". Others said "tens", as did, surprisingly, a Jund Ansar Allah leader. Crisis Group interviews, Mahmoud Zahar, Gaza City, 2 July 2010; Jund Ansar Allah leader "Abu al-Bara' al-Masri", Gaza, 5 April 2010. A Hamas official in Rafah said the fewer than 200 Salafi-Jihadis arrested after the Ibn Taymiyya clashes constituted a majority. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010. The interior ministry spokesman said there were "not more than 100". Crisis Group interview, Ihab Ghusseini, Gaza City, 5 April 2010.

¹⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Fatah PLC member Ashraf Juma', Rafah, 2 November 2010. A senior Hamas leader acknowledged the point: "History is filled with examples of small actors causing big changes. Archduke Ferdinand's assassination was probably not approved at the highest level [of Serbia]". Crisis Group interview, Health Minister Bassem Naim, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

¹⁵² In December 2010, Salafi-Jihadi leader "Abu al-Bara' al-Masri" said only five groups are currently active in Gaza: Jund Ansar Allah, Jaysh al-Islam, Tawhid wa al-Jihad, Jaysh al-Umma and Ansar al-Sunna. "Radical Islamists defy Gaza's Hamas rulers", Agence France-Presse, 16 December 2010. Earlier, a Salafi-Jihadi leader using the same name said Gaza's Salafi-Jihadi groups "are made up of tens of people". Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah leader, Gaza, 5 April 2010.

¹⁵³ The group's full name is Jamaat al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (Group of Monotheism and Jihad) but is often reported in English as Tawhid wa al-Jihad, which is what is used in this report.

¹⁵⁴ The group's full name is Jamaat Ansar al-Sunna (Group of Supporters of the Prophet's Sayings and Practices) but is typically reported in English as Ansar al-Sunna, which is what is used in this report.

¹⁵⁵ Crisis Group interviews, Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010; Jund Ansar Allah leader "Abu al-Bara' al-Masri", Gaza, 5 April 2010.

¹⁵⁶ Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah leader "Abu al-Bara' al-Masri", Gaza, 5 April 2010.

¹⁵⁷ In 2010, a Jaysh al-Umma leader said the group had existed for six years. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 31 May 2010.

¹⁵⁸ It held its first press conference in January 2008 (where it announced its intention to kill President Bush during his visit to the region) and its first public training session that September; the same month, Hamas detained its leader and 23 supporters. "The hard-liners accuse Hamas of 'launching a war on Salafism'", *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19 September 2008. In May 2009, seven members were arrested while planning an attack against Israeli soldiers near Gaza's eastern border. "Gaza armed group says Hamas arrested seven fighters", *Ma'an*, 26 May 2009. In November 2010, a spokesman demanded the release of its leader, "Abu Hafs al-Maqdisi", who he said had been in prison for six weeks. "Salafist group says leader arrested by Hamas", *Ma'an*, 2 November 2010. Israel says "Abu Hafs al-Maqdisi" was born Ismail Hamid. "The Jaljalat Phenomenon in the Gaza Strip", Israel Security Agency.

¹⁵⁹ "Palestinian fighters launch projectiles at Israeli towns, resist invasion", *Ma'an*, 5 January 2009; "Palestinian fighters clash with Israeli troops in northern Gaza; five soldiers dead – projectile fire continues", *Ma'an*, 10 January 2009.

¹⁶⁰ "It is Hamas which detonates the cafes and the restaurants and accuses us of doing so in order to ruin our work and scare people away from us". Crisis Group interview, Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010.

cause Hamas is chasing us down”; since then, the group’s primary leader has been arrested.¹⁶¹

Tawhid wa al-Jihad is based in Gaza’s central refugee camps (*al wusta*), primarily Nuseirat. Hamas officials say it is one of the smaller and less significant groups, as do most Salafi-Jihadis.¹⁶² But it is the only radical Islamist group in Gaza thought to have killed an Israeli soldier.¹⁶³ Its leader, Abu al-Walid al-Maqdisi (Hisham Sa’idni), is a Palestinian believed to have entered Gaza through tunnels connected to Egypt. He is said to be more vehemently against Hamas than other Salafi-Jihadis.¹⁶⁴ His first arrest by Hamas was followed by an escape, during Operation Cast Lead, when Gaza’s central prison, al-Saraya, was destroyed.¹⁶⁵ In late December 2010, it was rumoured that he had given up on fighting in Gaza and requested safe passage back to Egypt, but in early March 2011 Hamas arrested him again.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ “Abu Hafs al-Maqdisi has constant problems with Hamas. They put him in prison every time Jaysh al-Umma launches a rocket”. Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

¹⁶² A Jund Ansar Allah member claimed it was the most important group because its leader was praised by a highly influential Salafi-Jihadi scholar. The scholar (see below) is Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (‘Isam Tahir al-Barqawi), a Palestinian Jordanian and ex-mentor to al-Qaeda in Iraq founder al-Zarqawi. Crisis Group interview, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010. Another member disagreed: “This endorsement didn’t have a big effect”. Crisis Group interview, “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010.

¹⁶³ On 27 January 2009, a week after the Gaza war, a bomb beneath an Israeli jeep killed a soldier, an attack Tawhid wa al-Jihad said it conducted and recorded on video. “Israeli soldier killed, Gaza truce breached”, Reuters, 27 January 2009. The Israel Security Agency credits Salafi-Jihadis with the attack. “2009 Annual summary – data and trends in terrorism”, Israel Security Agency, January 2010, p. 11. Footage of what purports to be the attack can be seen from 3:00 to 3:10 in a video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=uLwQiYLVp4&feature=player_embedded. The video is highly critical of Hamas.

¹⁶⁴ “Bardawil [Hamas PLC member] reveals the identity of the citizen detained by the government of Gaza”, *Palestine Today*, 6 March 2011. Crisis Group interviews, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010; Jund Ansar Allah members “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010, “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010.

¹⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010.

¹⁶⁶ Crisis Group interviews, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Ibrahim Qannan, *Ma’an* reporter, Gaza City, 27 December 2010. The arrest, in the Shati refugee camp, occurred several weeks after a Salafi-Jihadi online forum published a religious ruling signed by Sa’idni permitting the killing of Jewish and Christian civilians because they “are fundamentally not innocent”. Middle East Media Research Institute, 13 February 2011; “Hamas arrests wanted global jihad militant in

The last of these minor groups, Ansar al-Sunna, is believed to be one of the smallest;¹⁶⁷ some Salafi-Jihadis did not count it among those worth mentioning.¹⁶⁸

2. The question of Jaljalat

The term Jaljalat (rolling thunder), the title of a militant song popular with radical Islamists, has caused considerable confusion. Hamas officials use it to refer to all Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza, and this today is the most common usage. Others, mainly Israeli and Western analysts, have implied that the word refers either to a distinct Salafi-Jihadi group¹⁶⁹ or to those Salafi-Jihadis who were recently¹⁷⁰ or are currently¹⁷¹ members of Hamas.

Gaza”, *Haaretz*, 3 March 2011. On 23 March 2011, a statement published in an online forum and signed by Masada al-Mujahidin (Lion’s Den of Holy Warriors) demanded Sa’idni’s release and warned that Hamas would be held responsible if any harm were to befall him. Ansar al-Sunna also condemned Sa’idni’s detention. “Masada al-Mujahidin Condemns Hamas’ Treatment of Prisoners”, SITE Intelligence Group, 23 March 2011.

¹⁶⁷ “Aside from Jaysh al-Islam, Jaysh al-Umma and what few are left of Jund Ansar Allah, the rest of the Salafi groups have no more than ten members”. Crisis Group interview, Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010. Perhaps another indication of its size was that local journalists and Salafi-Jihadis disagreed on where it was located.

¹⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010; “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010. Its only notable attack was a March 2010 rocket that killed a Thai agricultural worker in Netiv HaAsara, an Israeli cooperative farm along Gaza’s northern border. The attack, during the Gaza visit of the highest ranking official the EU had sent since Hamas took over in 2007, caused the first death by rocket-fire since the war. The Fatah-affiliated Al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades also took credit. “Gaza rocket attack into Israel kills a Thai worker”, *International Herald Tribune*, 19 March 2010.

¹⁶⁹ According to a recent report, Jaljalat is “one of the more capable groups” of Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza. See Cohen, Levitt, Wasser, op. cit.

¹⁷⁰ A purported Jund Ansar Allah leader told a reporter “70 percent [of Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza] are members of the Jaljalat, a group made up of former Al-Qassam Brigades and Hamas affiliates”. “Exclusive: New Gaza Salafist faction numbers 11,000”, *Ma’an*, 18 April 2010. The interviewer said his understanding was that Jaljalat was the name Hamas used for those who had left the movement to join Salafi-Jihadi groups. Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Qannan, *Ma’an* reporter, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

¹⁷¹ The notion that Jaljalat is largely a “wing” of the Qassam Brigades has been spread widely by Hamas rivals. In March 2010, when Salafi-Jihadis were rumoured to be behind attacks inside Gaza, a Fatah-affiliated website published a scanned copy of a purported letter from Qassam leader Ahmed Ja’abari to Hamas’s Damascus-based politburo chief, Khaled Meshaal. It listed roughly 30 attacks since November 2009 – some against Hamas military wing members – and complained that Interior

Some of this ambiguity may stem from the term's origins. A Hamas official who has closely monitored Gaza's Salafi-Jihadis said that the movement began using the term when Jund Ansar Allah's military leader, Khalid Banat, attempted to unify Gaza's radical Islamists after Operation Cast Lead;¹⁷² because many of his followers did not leave their original groups, Hamas used the term to refer to the new, unified one: "For a time, most of the low-ranking cadres of the Salafi-Jihadi groups were united as a single body.

Minister Hammad had threatened Qassam's unity and lost control of security. News spread rapidly through Fatah websites and online forums. Within days it had been written about in the Ramallah-based newspaper *al-Ayyam*; by month's end, a prominent analyst of Palestinian security affairs had cited it as evidence of violent divisions within Hamas caused by Jaljalat, described as a group largely of current Qassam members with Salafi-Jihadi sympathies who have conducted attacks against Hamas. "Hamas is Fateh with a beard", *al-Ayyam*, 7 March 2010; Yezid Sayigh, "Hamas Rule in Gaza: Three Years On", Crown Center for Middle East Studies, March 2010. That paper was then cited as evidence of Qassam disunity in a December 2010 Congressional Research Service report, Jim Zanotti, "Hamas: Background and Issues for Congress", p. 18. The letter is likely a fake – and, according to Hamas members, a bad one. It uses a Hamas lexicon inconsistently, alternating, for example, between calling Qassam members *mujahidin* (holy warriors) and *munadilin* (freedom fighters), the latter a term Qassam commanders say they would never use to refer to themselves. An alleged Qassam member listed as killed in an internal attack is a Fatah supporter in the Gulf who has not visited Gaza in several years. Qassam commanders laughed at the letter, as did an Arab diplomat in Ramallah, who said PA intelligence officials admitted they created it. Crisis Group interviews, Qassam members, Gaza City, 10-12 November 2010; Arab diplomat, Jerusalem, 17 November 2010. A member of the PA General Intelligence Service said he believed it was real. Crisis Group interview, Ramallah, 27 January 2011. Hamas officials say that the only Qassam members killed by colleagues were those executed for collaborating with Israel. The most prominent recent case (August 2010) was Sami Anan, a Qassam commander accused of giving away plans for defending south Gaza City that Israel allegedly used during the war. Crisis Group interviews, Qassam commanders, Gaza City, November 2010. "Monthly Report on Violations of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Palestinian-controlled Territory", op. cit., August 2010.

¹⁷² Banat's followers included militants from established factions and members of nearly every Salafi-Jihadi organisation, including, according to Hamas, a few from Jaysh al-Islam, which mostly resisted his attempt to unify the groups. Because he recruited Qassam members, some interpreted Hamas's initial use of the term Jaljalat to be a reference to Qassam militants who became Salafi-Jihadis. Hamas members have used the term imprecisely: several in Qassam said "Jaljalat was started" by persons kicked out of Hamas but later clarified that they meant many or most early Salafi-Jihadis – all of whom are considered Jaljalat – were former Hamas members. Crisis Group interviews, Qassam members, Gaza City, November 2010; Qassam commander, Rafah, November 2010.

This is what we called Jaljalat".¹⁷³ Since eradicating Jund Ansar Allah almost entirely, Hamas has come to use Jaljalat to refer to all Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza.¹⁷⁴

Salafi-Jihadis, however, do not use the term to describe themselves and have frequently denied the existence of a distinct group by that name. Mahmoud Talib, a former member of the Qassam Brigades who is sometimes referred to in press reports¹⁷⁵ as the leader of Jaljalat (he is now in a Gaza prison), has rejected the appellation: "There is nothing called Jaljalat".¹⁷⁶ Local reporters describe Talib, whose reputation was based largely on having twice broken out of a Gaza prison,¹⁷⁷ as a "minor leader" among the Salafi-Jihadis,¹⁷⁸ a description thought too generous by the director of the Internal Security Service: "Talib is 22-years-

¹⁷³ "Naturally this weakened the separate Salafi-Jihadi groups and was resisted by their leaders, none of whom wanted to go from being an emir of, say, Tawhid wa al-Jihad to becoming a mere member of Jaljalat". Crisis Group interview, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010. "Jaljalat is mainly former Qassam, Islamic Jihad, and Fatah. Jaljalat and Jund Ansar Allah are basically the same thing". Crisis Group interview, Islamic Jihad member who occasionally fires rockets with Salafi-Jihadis, Gaza City, 14 November 2010.

¹⁷⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010; Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010; Qassam commanders, Gaza City, November 2010. This is also true of Hamas's allies: "Jaljalat is not an organisation. It is the name assigned to all Salafi-Jihadi groups; it refers to any Salafi-Jihadi who is working against the government", Crisis Group interview, Khalid Abu Hilal, head of al-Ahrar, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

¹⁷⁵ See, for example, "Jihadist Groups in Gaza declare Hamas to Be Infidel. Their Loyalty Is to Bin Ladin and Their Bombings Reached the Home of Haniyah", *Al-Hayat*, 3 March 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Talib continued: "We were given this name by people at the beginning of our work after they had seen a pamphlet distributed by us that concerned martyr Hamdi Shubayr. The pamphlet was headlined 'Jaljalat', which is the title of a song urging jihad and *naḥfīr* [call to arms]. I affirm to you that our official name is not 'Jaljalat'. The brothers in the command have not yet given us a special name" "Jaljalat" is waiting to carry out a big operation in order to dedicate it to Bin-Ladin", *Al-Ayyam*, 11 July 2009. Some reporters who have interviewed Talib use Jaljalat as a synonym for Ansar al Sunna, of which he is thought to be a member. See "Salafi Jihadi Movement Leader", op. cit.; "Hamas confronts supporters of Salafi Jihadist ideology in Gaza", *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 14 August 2009.

¹⁷⁷ "Mahmoud Talib once fired at the police when they came to arrest him. On another occasion, he planted a bomb near members of the Internal Security Service who had interrogated him. He tried to take shelter with Mumtaz Dughmush, but he continued his activities and Mumtaz reported him". Crisis Group interview, Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010.

¹⁷⁸ Crisis Group interview, "Abu Musab", Rafah, 2 November 2010.

old, and he doesn't have any followers. He was created by journalists".¹⁷⁹

A Salafi-Jihadi in Rafah offered the following view:

There is no entity called Jaljalat. It is not an organisation. What you have to understand is that even the other names that you use – Tawhid wa al-Jihad, Ansar al-Sunna, and the like – are not really separate organisations. All the Salafis will use these different organisational names at different times and for different operations. But we are all the same, with the same goals and the same teachings. One day you and several others launch some mortars and declare that it was Ansar al-Sunna. Another day you and a few different people fire a rocket and say it was Jaysh al-Umma. These different names are adopted only because of the pressure we face from the government.¹⁸⁰

3. Foreign membership

Israeli and Egyptian officials occasionally express concern about the possibility of foreign fighters entering Gaza. The territory's border with Egypt is so laxly guarded that smugglers from the Egyptian side of Rafah frequently dine on the Gaza side before returning home.¹⁸¹ Western

researchers and reporters are free to enter the dozens of tents covering the tunnels that line the Gaza side of the border, and their cars are rarely checked when they leave.¹⁸² Citing Israeli officials, a January 2010 report estimated the number of foreign fighters in Gaza to be between 30 and 50.¹⁸³ Numbers provided in late 2010 by Israeli and Hamas officials, as well as Salafi-Jihadis, were significantly lower. A Salafi-Jihadi in Rafah said there were "only a few" foreign fighters in Gaza, an assessment echoed by a senior Israeli security official and the director of the Internal Security Service in Gaza, both of whom described the quantity as "a handful".¹⁸⁴

It is, of course, too early to assess the impact of recent events in Egypt. A Hamas government official said border security had not deteriorated during or after the uprising; despite attacks in Sinai on security officials, police stations, government buildings and a church, Hamas – intent not to be seen as undermining Egypt's government – reportedly controlled its southern border and even offered logistical assistance to Egyptian troops.¹⁸⁵ Israeli officials, however, say the border has become more porous since President Mubarak's ouster.¹⁸⁶ Although contacts between

interview, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

¹⁸² Crisis Group observations, Rafah, October-November 2010. Some 13,350 Africans illegally crossed Israel's presumably better protected Sinai border in 2010. "IDF chief: Southern border fence won't end illegal immigration", *Haaretz*, 22 December 2010. ¹⁸³ Cohen, Levitt, Wasser, op. cit. Two days after the Ibn Taymiyya clashes, a reporter claimed Israeli officials said the number was close to 500, "The Salafi groups in Gaza are close to al-Qaeda, and have split from factions including Hamas", *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 16 August 2009.

¹⁸⁴ Crisis Group interviews, senior official, Israel strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 4 January 2011; Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010. A PRC leader said of Salafi-Jihadi recruitment, "I think it is the internet more than it is the tunnels". Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. ¹⁸⁵ Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 27 February 2011; "Reporter: Egypt police kill 10 in Sinai jailbreak", *Ma'an*, 11 February 2011. According to an article in the weekly edition of Egypt's leading government-owned newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, on the Egyptian side of Gaza's southern border, "[s]ecurity forces working for Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniyeh's government ... regularly gave Egyptian soldiers meals ... and ... patrolled the border Haniyeh's government has declared the area near the border with Egypt to be a closed military zone. This has resulted in an almost complete halt in smuggling operations and a crisis in bringing fuel over the border to Gaza from Egypt". "Palestinian escape stories", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 10-16 February 2011.

¹⁸⁶ "The changes in Egypt were beneficial for Hamas in terms of the border regime at Rafah crossing and of easier tunnel use". Crisis Group interview, Israeli official, Jerusalem, 22 March 2011. "The Gaza-Egypt border has been more porous since Mubarak was ousted". Crisis Group interview, Israeli defence

¹⁷⁹ Crisis Group interview, Ibrahim Qannan, *Ma'an* reporter, Gaza City, 27 December 2010. Khalil Hayya, a senior Hamas leader, agreed: "The reality of Mahmoud Talib is much smaller than the stories you'll read about him. He is a young guy, a very simple person. Violent in nature. At the beginning, he was a good guy. When he took the law into his own hands – he threw an explosive at a wedding, injuring several people – he was suspended from Qassam. Since then he has been arrested". Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 23 October 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Crisis Group interview, "Abu Musab", Rafah, 2 November 2010. Other Salafi-Jihadis said there were important distinctions among the groups. The leader of Tawhid wa al-Jihad is reported to have called all government employees *kufar* (infidels); other radical Islamists, such as those in Ansar al Sunna, have said that this label applies to the government itself but not necessarily to its members, each of whose faith must be individually verified. This difference was cited as a reason Tawhid wa al-Jihad had not joined other groups. Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member "Abu Suhaib", Rafah, 21 February 2010. An Israeli security official added: "It is the fate of radicals to split all the time. I was reading somewhere recently about the last Trotskyites. They're not getting along either". Crisis Group interview, strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 4 January 2011.

¹⁸¹ "We have an open border now, so the foreigners come in and out freely". Crisis Group interview, local Hamas leader, Rafah, October 2010. That said, Hamas security officials say they turn back any Salafi-Jihadis caught entering Gaza: "For the last year and a half, anyone who came through the tunnels was sent back to Egypt. We're not in need of manpower here", Crisis Group

high-level officials in Gaza and Egypt had increased markedly in March 2011,¹⁸⁷ and Hamas officials expressed optimism that relations with Egypt post-Mubarak would be greatly improved,¹⁸⁸ there is no reason to believe that Cairo's security interests regarding what happens in Gaza would be significantly affected.

official, Jerusalem, 21 March 2011. A former Israeli defence official warned that if Egypt ends its cooperation with Israel in isolating Gaza, "Israel will enter Gaza to ensure that its isolation continues. For this Israel will have to take over southern Gaza – not only the narrow Philadelphi corridor [separating Gaza from Egypt]. Note that if the border becomes open and Egypt allows free movement to Hamas, Israel will oppose this. Such a scenario would represent not Egypt taking responsibility for Gaza but rather a victory for Hamas, which we will not accept". Crisis Group interview, Jerusalem, 23 March 2011.

¹⁸⁷In March 2011, Hamas officials stated that Prime Minister Haniyeh had spoken by phone with Egypt's prime minister and foreign minister, that Interior Minister Fathi Hammad had spoken with Egypt's interior minister, and that Hamas leaders had communicated with Egyptian Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, chairman of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, March 2011.

¹⁸⁸Crisis Group interviews, Hamas officials, Gaza City, March 2011. In February 2011, two weeks before he took office as Egypt's foreign minister, Nabil al-Araby wrote that it is "inappropriate" for Egypt's foreign policy to "stand in grave violation of the basic precepts of international law. An example is Egypt's stance toward the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, which is in breach of international humanitarian law prohibiting blockades of civilians even in wartime". Nabil al-Araby, "It's time to review our foreign policy", *Al-Shorouk*, 19 February 2011. Fatah Central Committee member Nabil Shaath offered the following view: "Hamas aspires and is counting on Egypt to be ruled by Islamists so they can help Hamas against us; Hamas says, 'Why rush?' to which I say it is a losing bet; I don't see Iran or Syria in the picture because the winds of change are hitting everyone in the region". "Will the president cancel his visit to Gaza?", *Ma'an*, 24 March 2011.

III. HAMAS'S POLICY OF CONTAINMENT

A. THE RADICAL ISLAMISTS WITHIN

Hamas officials are quick to point out the small size of Gaza's radical Islamist groups, but they take the threat of Salafi-Jihadi ideology seriously.¹⁸⁹ For now, Salafi-Jihadis are few, have executed no significant military operations and could "be crushed by Hamas in a matter of hours, not days".¹⁹⁰ But because perhaps a majority were once its own members, Hamas has begun to scrutinise its cadres and methods. A Hamas religious scholar who had spoken with more than 150 imprisoned, recently released Salafi-Jihadis estimated that 60 per cent once belonged to the movement.¹⁹¹ The proximate causes of their defection were its participation in elections, failure to implement Islamic law in Gaza and enforcement of a truce, then a unilateral ceasefire with Israel.

But a deeper cause apparently was that Hamas, surprised by its 2006 electoral victory, was unprepared to govern.¹⁹² Its ranks swelled without time to train followers fully or prepare them for its new phase. Fresh recruits suddenly were in demand, not only in Qassam and the security forces – over which Hamas and Fatah battled – but in all of public administration. After Hamas's June 2007 take-over, these needs became greater still, as Fatah sought to paralyse the Gaza government by instructing PA employees to strike.

"The success of the movement has had its price", a police spokesman said. "After the elections, everyone wanted to be Hamas, and many were brought in before we could give them a proper education".¹⁹³ A Qassam commander

¹⁸⁹"Salafi-Jihadis are more dangerous for us than any faction". Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Bat-niji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010. Others in Hamas disagreed: "Their numbers are few, their influence is limited". Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010.

¹⁹⁰Crisis Group interview, Raji Sourani, director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 28 December 2010.

¹⁹¹"Many of the others were former PA intelligence". Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010. Other informed members of Hamas and Qassam did not dispute this. Crisis Group interviews, Rafah, Gaza City, October-December 2010. Several Hamas officials regretted not educating members well enough to prevent them from adopting radical ideas. Crisis Group interviews, PLC member Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010; local leader, Rafah, October 2010.

¹⁹²Crisis Group interview, Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010.

¹⁹³"The government demands a great deal from the movement. Everyone is busy with daily affairs, and less attention is paid to

echoed the sentiment, saying that before Hamas became a government, the Brigades – whose members must first join the Muslim Brotherhood¹⁹⁴ – were relatively small and their recruitment much more selective. “Before it took four or five years to become a Muslim Brother, sometimes more. The minimum today is seven to eight months”.¹⁹⁵ Hamas security officials lamented having traded quality for size: “Now it is recognised that this was a huge mistake”.¹⁹⁶

Not only were members of Qassam less trained than in the past, they also had no experience to prepare them for the new policing jobs for which many were recruited. According to human rights researchers and Hamas officials, the intensity of conflict between Hamas and Fatah after the 2006 elections contributed to the declining standards – each side became less likely to turn away unsavoury allies and less willing to police its own members.¹⁹⁷ When the dust had settled, these newer recruits to Hamas’s security forces attempted to compensate for their perceived lack of ideological commitment by acting more harshly than their colleagues; in response, Hamas launched a campaign in November 2010 that sought, with limited success, to convince the public of the security forces’ commitment

education, to monitoring your own elements”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

¹⁹⁴ A Qassam commander said all members of Hamas’s armed wing are in the Brotherhood, but a Hamas leader (formerly Qassam) said a few join Qassam shortly before the Brotherhood. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, November 2010; Rafah, 16 October 2010.

¹⁹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010. A Hamas official (formerly Qassam) said that before the 2006 legislative elections, recruitment periods were closer to three years.

¹⁹⁶ “After winning the elections, the movement greatly expanded. We felt we couldn’t be as selective”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010.

¹⁹⁷ “After Hamas won the elections in 2006, and again after the takeover in 2007, they absorbed a lot of new people – especially in the Executive Force and later in the police – whose ideology wasn’t 100 per cent in line with theirs. They absorbed a diversity of youth, some of whom joined because they had disputes with other factions. These were people who weren’t native to the movement, whose background wasn’t in the Muslim Brotherhood. Some even had secular and Marxist backgrounds. The most disastrous thing for the movement is that people with bad backgrounds – narcotics and psychological abnormalities – are now in the security forces. The political split between Fatah and Hamas was the perfect environment for this rot to spread”. Crisis Group interview, Jaber Wishah, deputy director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010. Others dated declining standards to the urgent need for recruits during the second intifada. Crisis Group interview, Issam Younis, general director, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

to human rights.¹⁹⁸ In Hamas’s view, its rapid, post-election transformation caused many problems, of which the Salafi-Jihadi defectors are but one. It was a symptom – the clashes at Ibn Taymiyya – that put Hamas on alert, but the movement’s response has been to institute a series of internal reforms (see below) meant to treat underlying causes.

B. INVESTIGATING THE SALAFI-JIHADIS

After “the events in Rafah”, as the clashes at the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque are sometimes euphemistically called, Hamas arrested and interrogated nearly 200 Salafi-Jihadis.¹⁹⁹ Discomfited by the criticism it received for its ferocity during the clashes, Hamas decided that in future it would attempt “not to break the Salafi-Jihadis’ legs but to bring them back into the fold”.²⁰⁰ How Salafi-Jihadi detainees were dealt with is disputed: Gaza security officials claim prisoners were not treated poorly;²⁰¹ international aid workers contest this, pointing to cases of torture.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ The campaign did not receive much attention, though the interior ministry devoted considerable resources to it. Crisis Group attended the opening and closing ceremonies, in November and December 2010.

¹⁹⁹ It also shut down or took over several mosques they attended. A Salafi-Jihadi said, “the situation of the mosques is pitiful. Hamas and Islamic Jihad control most of the mosques and use them as a platform for their own factional agenda. In Nuseirat, the Salafis had a small place of prayer, but Hamas seized it after the Ibn Taymiyya clashes”. Crisis Group interview, “Abu Muaz”, Nuseirat, 27 February 2010.

²⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²⁰¹ “These Salafi groups are part of our social fabric. Using force with them is not in anyone’s interest”. Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010. “If we were very tough with them, we would turn into Yemen or Iraq”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior police commander Subhi al-Batish, Gaza City, 11 November 2010.

²⁰² Aid workers allege that Salafi-Jihadis have been tortured, even if less severely than other detainees. “Unlike other prisoners held by the Internal Security Service, Salafi-Jihadis are held for four or five days (as opposed to four or five months) before being transferred to the main prison. After this they’re held for another four or five days and let go. When they are tortured, it is not done as harshly as it is to other prisoners. They are beaten while they have sacks over their heads, whereas others have their finger nails pulled, the bottoms of their feet beaten, and are strung up, forced to stand, held in stress positions, and – a new development – injected with adrenaline as they appear to be collapsing during interrogation”. Crisis Group interview, international aid worker, Gaza City, November 2010. On 23 March 2011, a statement published in an online forum and signed by Masada al-Mujahidin (Lion’s Den of Holy Warriors) demanded the release of Salafi-Jihadi prisoners and condemned their

The health minister compared Salafi-Jihadism to an addiction, stating that Hamas's goal was not to arrest all the culprits but to prevent the spread of the disease.²⁰³ The government formed a committee of psychologists and religious scholars that advised it on suitable remedies.²⁰⁴ In Gaza's prisons, respected religious figures held dialogues and seminars; detainees who refused to attend²⁰⁵ were sent to solitary confinement.²⁰⁶ The results were compiled in a large study of Salafi-Jihadism's Gaza roots.²⁰⁷ It found that the majority of Salafi-Jihadis were young,²⁰⁸ low-ranking former members of the military wings of established factions, primarily Hamas and Islamic Jihad but also PRC and Fatah.²⁰⁹ A minority had once been traditional Salafis. Some had been expelled from previous Islamist organisations and were thought to be motivated by revenge or a desire to show the authenticity of their faith. "After being kicked out of Hamas", a Qassam commander said, "many fell under suspicion of having committed sins or of being irreligious. They found it difficult to find other factions that would accept them. So they joined the Salafi-Jihadis in an attempt to prove themselves".²¹⁰

treatment by Hamas. "Masada al-Mujahidin Condemns Hamas' Treatment of Prisoners", op. cit.

²⁰³ "You can arrest all the addicts. But this will not solve the problem. You have to convince people not to take drugs; you have to prevent the recruitment of more addicts". Crisis Group interview, Health Minister Bassem Naim, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

²⁰⁴ Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010.

²⁰⁵ Crisis Group interview, Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010.

²⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member "Abu Suhaib", Rafah, 21 February 2010.

²⁰⁷ "We formed a committee of psychologists and scholars and were advised by each one on how to treat these people". Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010. "There was a big study of everything related to the Salafi-Jihadi phenomenon and what caused it. We brought many scholars – some of them not even from Hamas – to speak with these groups in wide-ranging dialogues". Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

²⁰⁸ A Hamas religious scholar in Rafah sent to speak with imprisoned Salafi-Jihadis said that of the more than 100 with whom he spoke the oldest was 24. Crisis Group interview, October 2010. A writer in a Hamas newspaper said that their average age was sixteen to 22. Husam al-Dajani, "Salafi Jihadis in the Gaza Strip causes and solutions", *Filastin*, 2 September 2009.

²⁰⁹ Referring to those who had come from Fatah, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji said, "naturally, anyone out to get Hamas will use a religious cover to make his movement easier". Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010. "If someone is kicked out of Hamas, he immediately falls under suspicion. As a member of the most religious and largest group, you are dignified. The minute you are kicked

Hamas also blamed Salafi-Jihadism on psychological or other problems. A religious scholar it sent to speak with the detainees said many had troubled backgrounds and little education,²¹¹ though others denied this.²¹² Fahd Musa, the deceased²¹³ son-in-law of Sheikh Abd-al Latif Musa and deputy to Jund Ansar Allah leader Khalid Banat, was described as emblematic:

He was born in Canada Camp, home to Palestinian refugees transferred from Gaza to Sinai in the 1970s. Surrounded by drug users and arms traffickers, he didn't attend high school or learn to read and write. His mother had divorced, his father was a heavy drinker, his siblings were estranged and his daughter had died of cancer. This is what happened to produce Fahd Musa.²¹⁴

A PRC leader said early recruits to Salafi-Jihadi groups were greatly affected by the Iraq war, particularly videos of attacks by al-Qaeda in Iraq against U.S. forces.²¹⁵ Some youth began wearing the *shalwar kameez* (South Asian trousers and tunic) adopted by Arab mujahidin during the Afghan War, as well as the black skullcap and long hair favoured by Abu Musab Zarqawi, al-Qaeda in Iraq's deceased founder.²¹⁶ Many also adopted the vehement anti-Shiite sentiments of Iraq's radical Islamists, directing some of it toward Hamas for its cooperation with Iran.²¹⁷

out, suspicion falls around you: you must have been caught doing something bad. In some cases you can be accepted by other groups, but not often. Many who are kicked out then turn to the Salafis". Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²¹¹ Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010.

²¹² "These guys in detention were not idiots: they could articulate their beliefs. They were university students". Crisis Group interview, international official who spoke with a number of former detainees, Gaza City, November 2010.

²¹³ Fahd Musa died in the August 2009 clashes at the Ibn Taymiyya Mosque.

²¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010.

²¹⁵ "At the beginning they admired them from a distance – merely imitating their dress. Then they started to mimic their behaviour. The first ones who did this were Jaysh al-Islam. After that, anyone who was kicked out of one of the factions formed his own Salafi-Jihadi group". Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

²¹⁶ Salafi-Jihadi dress can be seen in Gaza City but it and Salafi-Jihadis are much more common in tribal, conservative Rafah. Since Hamas cracked down on Salafi-Jihadis in summer 2009, black skullcaps are less evident. Crisis Group observations, October-December 2010.

²¹⁷ Salafi-Jihadis are not the only Gazans suspicious that Iran's relationship with Hamas and Islamic Jihad might facilitate Shiism's spread in Palestine. Crisis Group staff were repeatedly told of rumours Iran had asked Hamas to allow mosques and

C. THE IDEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

Salafi-Jihadis in Gaza list a number of grievances with Hamas – its creation of man-made laws, its failure to implement Sharia and its relations with both Shiite Iran and the “heretical” Alawis²¹⁸ of Syria – but the majority state that primary among them is its participation in elections.²¹⁹ The most influential scholar followed by Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis,²²⁰ Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi,²²¹ has argued democracy is a form of heresy because it arrogates to men powers accorded only to God and so allows them to legalise what God has forbidden.²²² Islamists who participate

schools named after Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, Iran’s first Supreme Leader, to be built in Gaza, despite the territory’s almost total absence of Shiites; some Islamic Jihad members were said to have converted. Similar claims appeared in publications of Western think-tanks, one of which saw in a recent pamphlet – written by Ahmed Yousef, a former adviser to Prime Minister Haniyeh, and entitled “The Dialectic of State and Nation in the Thought of the Imams al-Banna and Khomeini” – evidence that “Hamas is seeking a religious justification for its dependence on the Islamic Republic, beyond the political requirements”. Ehud Yaari, “Sunni Hamas and Shiite Iran Form a Common Political Theology”, *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, 9 November 2010. Though Yaari asserted that “Yousef had the blessing of others in Hamas’s top echelon before he published his study”, several senior Hamas leaders claimed not to have heard of the document, and none could be found who had read it. They uniformly – and vehemently – dismissed the notion it represented Hamas policy. Minister of Health Bassem Naim said the Iran alliance was strategic, not theological: “When it comes to Shiites, if we focus on the differences, there can only be war. In 2006, we refused Iran’s request to open a Gaza health clinic named after Khomeini”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 13 November 2010.

²¹⁸ Salafi-Jihadis consider Shiites infidels and call them rejectionists; Jaysh al-Umma has referred to Hamas as “the supporters of the rejectionists”. “The hard-liners accuse Hamas of ‘launching a war on Salafism’”. Quoted in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, 19 September 2008. Alawis – who trace their roots to the ninth century and are named after Ali, the fourth caliph and Muhammad’s son-in-law – have long struggled for recognition as Muslims, including from mainstream Sunnis and Shiites.

²¹⁹ They differ on whether it was Hamas’s participation in the 2006 legislative elections or also in earlier municipal elections. Crisis Group interviews, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010; Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010. When asked what caused the emergence and spread of Salafi-Jihadi ideology in Gaza, a Salafi-Jihadi answered: “Hamas’s participation in the polytheist elections”. “Salafi Jihadi Movement Leader”, op. cit.

²²⁰ Crisis Group interviews, Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Musab”, Rafah, 2 November 2010; Hamas official, Rafah, October 2010; Jund Ansar Allah member “Abu Suhaib”, Rafah, 21 February 2010. “Jihadist Groups in Gaza”, op. cit.

²²¹ See fn. 76 above.

²²² Uriya Shavit, “Is *Shura* a Muslim Form of Democracy? Roots and Systemization of a Polemic”, *Middle Eastern Studies*, May 2010, p. 361.

in democracy commit this heresy, wrote another leading Salafi-Jihadi scholar, who reminded his readers that Hamas founder Sheikh Ahmed Yassin had stated he would respect the people’s will even if they elected the atheist Communist Party.²²³

Sayed Salem Abu Musameh, who briefly led Hamas while Sheikh Ahmed Yassin was incarcerated, described a typical encounter with a Salafi-Jihadi:

Yesterday a young guy in Rafah asked me: “How do you accept being a PLC [Palestinian Legislative Council] member and having a non-Islamic constitution?” I told him: “We are a reformist movement that believes in working from inside society and convincing its members of the justness of our thoughts. In the Quran, God himself had a dialogue with Satan. You are not God, and those you disagree with are not Satan, so you can have dialogue too”.²²⁴

In Gaza’s prisons, Hamas scholars sought to lessen Salafi-Jihadis’ opposition to a government not guided solely by Sharia by instructing them about “the differences between politics and religion, as well as between the law and the spirit of the law”. One of the religious figures sent to speak with the detainees recalled two typical conversations:

I explained that their Pakistani dress was originally Hindu. It is worn also by Pakistani women, only in different colours. They were shocked. I told them the Prophet Muhammad wore thirteen types of outfits: Arabic, Copt, Roman, Yemeni, Ethiopian, Bahraini, etc. The only thing in the *sunna* is to protect private parts of your body in a specific manner. Again they were shocked. I said to one of the main Salafi-Jihadi sheikhs, “let’s say we are in France and we run a red light. What will happen?” He said, “we will go to court and be fined”. “Would you appear in court and pay the fine?”, I asked. He said, “Yes”. “So why”, I asked, “follow *their* law?” He said, “because it is necessary”. Then I explained that the same thing applies to Hamas: We also use man-made laws out of necessity.²²⁵

Nearly all of the prisoners were pardoned within several months of the Ibn Taymiyya clashes, regardless of whether they had been persuaded of Hamas’s legitimacy.²²⁶ Hamas

²²³ The scholar was Sheikh ‘Abd-al Mun’am Mustafa Halima (Abu Basir). Ibid.

²²⁴ Crisis Group interview, Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010.

²²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010.

²²⁶ An article reported from Ramallah the claim that, after the Ibn Taymiyya clashes, the heads of the Internal Security Service and Qassam Brigades offered three Salafi-Jihadi leaders amnesty in exchange for disbanding their groups and revealing

wanted to demonstrate magnanimity (“We showed that we were true Islamists by forgiving them so completely”) and minimise the possibility of retaliation.²²⁷ Some Salafi-Jihadis were encouraged to rejoin their old factions,²²⁸ others were offered jobs.²²⁹ Those released from prison signed pledges²³⁰ not to violate the de facto ceasefire or disrupt Gaza’s internal security and were thereafter visited daily²³¹ by the Mabahith (General Investigation Service), Internal Security Service, or Amn al-Haraka (Hamas Movement Security).²³² Religious scholars paid home visits and continued the discussions begun in jail.

D. HAMAS’S INTERNAL REVIEW

Attempts to re-educate Salafi-Jihadis were accompanied by a parallel effort Hamas directed within. In the months after the Rafah events, it began a movement-wide internal review.²³³ Among its most significant elements was a roughly one-year halt on new membership in the Muslim Brotherhood. Swearing an oath of allegiance (*bay’a*) to

the Brotherhood is a prerequisite to a position of authority within Hamas, not all of whose members have been invited to do so. In the words of a leader: “Anyone can say he is Hamas. What is meaningful is to say you are *Ikhwan* [Brotherhood]”.²³⁴

Along with the halt on recruitment came increased monitoring of Brotherhood members, particularly within Qassam.²³⁵ According to Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, those suspected of possessing ideas at odds with Hamas’s had their membership “frozen”, ie, were forbidden from participating in movement activities. “Exhibiting the slightest symptoms – calling others a *kafir*; wearing suspicious clothes; saying music is forbidden; believing that having more than one wife is obligatory; insisting that all women must wear a *niqab* [face-covering veil] – would cause an investigation”.²³⁶

The focus was not simply on eradicating Salafi-Jihadi thinking; it was also on removing cadres considered insufficiently loyal or committed. Qassam commanders spoke of colleagues whose membership was frozen because they no longer regularly attended prayers – precisely the sort who, paradoxically, were said to be most at risk of joining Salafi-Jihadi groups.²³⁷ Those believed to have strayed from Hamas’s teachings were counselled by religious figures who sought to correct “deviant” thought.²³⁸ According to Hamas officials, these religious figures gave instruction about the necessity of maintaining Gaza’s internal security; the impossibility, prior to establishing an Islamic state, of implementing *hudud*; and the acceptability of practices thought forbidden by Salafi-Jihadis, such as having organ transplants, cosmetic surgery, beards shorter than a fist, banks and Islamic insurance.²³⁹ Though initial rehabilitation efforts mostly failed, some security officials claim this has changed recently.²⁴⁰

their sources of funding, but they refused; it said the negotiations were led by the head of Qassam, Ahmed Ja’abari, and the leaders were “Abu-al-Mu’tasim al-Maqdisi (Mahmud Talib), Abu-al-Walid al-Masri, and Abu-al-Bara al-Maqdisi”. “The Salafis in Gaza reject a Hamas offer to disband their groups in return for an amnesty ...”, *Al-Sharq al-awsat*, 2 October 2010.²²⁷ Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010. “The price you pay for pardoning someone is almost always less than the one you pay for acting with an iron fist”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²²⁸ “Some of the Salafi-Jihadis had been kicked out of the military wings of established factions, not for divergent thinking but for lack of discipline. As soon as they were told they could return to their previous organisations, the problem was over”. Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

²²⁹ Crisis Group interview, Jaysh al-Umma leader, Gaza City, 31 May 2010.

²³⁰ Shortly after his release from prison, a Salafi-Jihadi said, “before releasing us, they make us sign a pledge to respect the legitimate authority and maintain general order. I signed just because I wanted to get out of prison, not because I’m convinced”. Crisis Group interview, “Abu Muaz”, Nuseirat, 27 February 2010.

²³¹ “In Rafah especially they are sternly educated in the mosques against their old ideology. They are watched closely. If they don’t go to 5am prayer, we follow up to find out why not”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010.

²³² Crisis Group interview, Chief of Police Abu Obeida al-Jarah, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

²³³ Hamas officials stated that Salafi-Jihadis were a major cause, though not the only one: “The Salafis were a very big reason we started the internal review”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²³⁴ Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar in Rafah, 16 October 2010.

²³⁵ “Those from the *daawa* wing of Hamas [devoted to recruitment through preaching and providing social and educational services] have more religious training and are not as easily seduced by Salafi-Jihadi ideas”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, 16 October 2010.

²³⁶ Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010.

²³⁷ It was mostly these, they said, who after being kicked out of the movement joined Salafi-Jihadi groups. Crisis Group interviews, Qassam commanders, Gaza City, November 2010; Hamas official working with the Internal Security Service, Rafah, October 2010.

²³⁸ Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010.

²³⁹ Crisis Group interview, Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010.

²⁴⁰ “In the beginning we didn’t have much success in reforming them. But lately we have had much more”. Crisis Group inter-

More sweeping than the steps Hamas has taken with its existing members are the changes it is preparing for the training of recruits. Officials describe a planned overhaul of teachings approved at the highest levels of the movement and meant to “reshape the Islamic thinking of the youth”. New educational materials are said to “stress the importance of tolerance as a fundamental value of true Islam”, to encourage dialogue and discourage literalist interpretations of scripture. Books and pamphlets to be distributed deal with issues considered controversial, such as elections, citizenship, loyalty to a constitution and how to treat non-Muslims in Muslim lands.²⁴¹ Weeks after the clashes with Jund Ansar Allah, the interior ministry brought in a leading Islamic scholar, respected by both traditional and jihadi Salafis (he mediated between Hamas and Jaysh al-Islam during the kidnapping of BBC reporter Alan Johnston), to teach its employees about moderation in Islam.²⁴² Qassam cadres have been required to read the movement’s newly created educational materials and attend weekly evaluation meetings.²⁴³

Hamas leaders’ attitudes toward these changes in recruitment, education and training are not uniform. Many were unwilling to speak about them, some downplayed their significance,²⁴⁴ and others seemed to contradict them, making intolerant public statements.²⁴⁵ Hamas has been reticent to discuss the reforms for reasons beyond the secrecy that normally attends its internal deliberations. Perhaps

the most important of these is that it is reluctant to admit it is changing, especially at a time when the harshest internal criticism it receives is for giving up resistance, entering elections or following in Fatah’s footsteps²⁴⁶ – steps that led to the first defections to Salafi-Jihadi groups.²⁴⁷ Hamas might be making adjustments many believe to be in its long-term interests, but – fearful of antagonising the very people it is seeking to influence – for the most part it is doing so quietly.

E. PRESSURE ON OTHER FACTIONS

Alongside the pressure Hamas is applying within have been sustained efforts to persuade other groups to better monitor their own members. Islamic Jihad and the PRC – after Hamas, two of the greatest sources of Salafi-Jihadi recruits – have at its urging undertaken their own reforms and purges of radical Islamist militants.²⁴⁸ Efforts by the PRC were deemed mostly successful, but Hamas says it is unsatisfied with those of Islamic Jihad,²⁴⁹ some of whose members continue to moonlight in and cooperate with Salafi-Jihadi groups.²⁵⁰ That is not to say that all Islamic Jihad militants who violate the ceasefire are sympathetic to Salafi-Jihadis;²⁵¹ some may read into Hamas’s periodically more bellicose public statements a temporary green light to resume rocket fire; others simply refuse to halt

view, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010. Others are more pessimistic: “We are sure we cannot bring most of them back. The process of review has not been enough to take care of the problem”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²⁴¹ Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010.

²⁴² The scholar was Sheikh Salman al-Daya. “Details of a mediation by the Popular Resistance Committees in the operation; a Sharia committee chaired by Salafi preacher Sulayman al-Dayah arbitrated Johnston’s release”, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, 5 July 2007.

²⁴³ Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010.

²⁴⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Hamas senior leader Khalil Hayya, Gaza City, 23 October 2010; Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010.

²⁴⁵ In a November 2010 speech, Hamas senior leader Mahmoud Zahar said Jews had been expelled from France, Britain, Russia and Germany “because they betrayed, stole and corrupted these countries” and would soon be expelled from Palestine. “Zahar: Jews will soon be expelled from Palestine”, Ezzedein al-Qassam Brigades Information Office (online), 7 November 2010. Days earlier, he told a Western interviewer, “You [in the West] do not live like human beings. You do not [even] live like animals. You accept homosexuality. And now you criticise us?” “Don’t preach to us, Hamas tells secular West”, Reuters, 28 October 2010.

²⁴⁶ Mahmoud Zahar has defended the movement by stating that it is not a “duplicate copy” of Fatah. “Hamas is more than a project to end occupation”, Qassam Brigades Information Office (online), 12 December 2010.

²⁴⁷ “Several former members of Qassam who joined the Salafi-Jihadis said they were unhappy with the elections. They felt betrayed. This is the word they used”. Crisis Group interview, international official who spoke with a number of former detainees, Gaza City, November 2010.

²⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Hamas security officials, Gaza City, December 2010.

²⁴⁹ A member of the Internal Security Service said Islamic Jihad had begun to apply more exacting standards and expelled Salafi-Jihadis in late 2010. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, December 2010.

²⁵⁰ A Jund Ansar Allah member in Rafah said Islamic Jihad was the only established faction to which some of his colleagues continued to belong. Crisis Group interview, Rafah, November 2010. A Qassam commander said many rockets coming from Gaza in mid and late 2010 belonged to Islamic Jihad but were caused by renegades ignoring their leaders’ pledge to abide by the ceasefire. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, November 2010.

²⁵¹ A low-ranking Islamic Jihad member recently caught violating the ceasefire said, “the majority of Islamic Jihad is sympathetic to the Salafi-Jihadis. Because we are both opposed to Hamas”. Islamic Jihad leaders vehemently denied this and were very reluctant to criticise Hamas. Crisis Group interviews, Islamic Jihad member, Gaza City, 14 November 2010; Islamic Jihad senior leader Muhammad Hindi, 18 October 2010; Islamic Jihad senior leader Sheikh Nafez Azzam, 2 November 2010.

attacks against Israel and have lost respect for a leadership seen as caving in to Hamas's demands.²⁵²

It used to be that members of established factions caught violating the ceasefire were arrested by the Internal Security Service, interrogated, forced to sign pledges not to commit further violations and then released to their factional superiors, whose job it was to monitor and punish them.²⁵³ This system was meant to give other factions some autonomy and also to avoid placing Hamas in the position once held by Fatah's Gaza leaders of suppressing groups fighting Israel. Arresting those firing rockets, whether Islamist or secular,²⁵⁴ is a delicate task for Hamas;²⁵⁵ the numerous Hamas informants on bicycles and motorcycles who line the borders are referred to by rocket launchers as *zan-nanat* (drones),²⁵⁶ a term meant to convey the similarity of their function to that of Israel's border guards.

After Islamic Jihad proved incapable of sufficiently controlling its lower-ranking cadres, a new arrangement was agreed upon in 2010.²⁵⁷ Those in established factions who violate the ceasefire (attacking Israeli troops making an incursion into Gaza does not fall in that category)²⁵⁸ are

now said to have lost the right to their "organisational cover" – that is, punishment is no longer left to their factional superiors, who have agreed to allow Hamas to treat them as it would Salafi-Jihadis and those with no affiliation to established militant groups.²⁵⁹ An Islamic Jihad member who had been caught violating the ceasefire said he and his colleagues were increasingly alienated from their leadership: "Hamas's boys walk with pride because their movement has their back. This is not the case with Islamic Jihad. Now when we are arrested for firing rockets, our leaders disown us".²⁶⁰

Kicking deviant members out of established Islamist groups is not without its dangers. Many early Salafi-Jihadi recruits had been expelled from the Qassam Brigades. It is an irony not lost on Hamas that one of its solutions to the Salafi-Jihadi problem risks perpetuating its cause. That Hamas is nevertheless proceeding to remove its members with Salafi-Jihadi sympathies is a sign that it prioritises internal cohesion above any threat from radical Islamist groups.²⁶¹ That could change if Salafi-Jihadis were to become stronger, but for now most inside and outside the movement agree with the assessment of a researcher at the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights: "Hamas has the Salafi-Jihadis totally under control. There are only a few of them".²⁶²

²⁵² Crisis Group interview, Islamic Jihad member, Gaza City, 14 November 2010.

²⁵³ An Islamic Jihad member caught firing rockets said that in the past, when the organisation was administering the punishments, a first violation might result in a termination of salary; a second violation might bring a ban on military activities, such as nightly border patrols; a third could mean expulsion from the organisation. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 13 November 2010. "When we catch those from established factions firing rockets, we complain to their leaders and direct supervisors. The Salafis have none, so we keep them in prison longer". Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²⁵⁴ A leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine complained: "Hamas does not want any rockets to be launched, so our military wing is forced to work underground". Crisis Group interview, Rabah Mohanna, Gaza City, 17 October 2010.
²⁵⁵ "It's very hard for Hamas to ask other factions to stop resistance". Crisis Group interview, Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²⁵⁶ Named after the sound the drones emit. Crisis Group interview, Islamic Jihad member, Gaza City, 14 November 2010.

²⁵⁷ Crisis Group interview, senior Hamas leader, Gaza City, January 2011.

²⁵⁸ Guarding Gaza's borders – known as *ribat* – is undertaken by all armed factions and is permissible for any unaffiliated individual. Some Salafi-Jihadis perform *ribat*, as do some non-militants: "Even an old person will sometimes do *ribat*, just to feel that he is a patriot. He won't be put on the front lines, but he will carry a gun". Crisis Group interview, Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010. Most guarding is by Qassam and other large militant groups. Conflicts over which faction may patrol a given area sometimes occur, as between Islamic Jihad and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine in August 2010.

²⁵⁹ A Qassam commander said that after tensions with Israel escalated in December 2010-January 2011, violators were beaten and given prison sentences of at least six months. Crisis Group interview, January 2011.

²⁶⁰ Asked why he did not leave Islamic Jihad to join a Salafi-Jihadi group, he said, "It's hard to leave your group for one that has been around for only two years. And you get arrested just for being a member. Why give myself the headache?" Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 13 November 2010.

²⁶¹ Hamas's efforts at re-educating members arguably have mitigated the risk: "Hamas sensed the danger of kicking people out. Now they rehabilitate. They don't give up on people so easily anymore". Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. Another benefit of purging Salafi-Jihadis from established factions is that it limits their access to weapons. Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

²⁶² Crisis Group interview, Bahjat al-Helou, Gaza City, 8 November 2010. "Hamas's control of Gaza is unprecedented. No one in the last 40 years has controlled it as well". Crisis Group interview, Issam Younis, general director, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

IV. ISLAMISATION IN GAZA

A. ISLAMISATION THROUGH GOVERNANCE

Coupled and often conflated with Western and Israeli concerns about Gaza's Salafi-Jihadis are worries that Hamas is Islamising the territory.²⁶³ The postulated connection between the two is that the latter fuels radicalism and stimulates the growth of Salafi-Jihadi groups.²⁶⁴ Hamas has been at pains to publicly deny any effort to Islamise Gaza. An adviser to Prime Minister Haniyeh said:

We have to distinguish between Hamas as a movement and Hamas as a government. Hamas as a movement emphasises Islam as a philosophy and a way of life. But when we decided to contest elections, we did so in the framework of civil law, and we are committed to abiding by it. We can have Islamic views, but they must be expressed within the framework of the law. No doubt some who elected Hamas do not understand this.²⁶⁵

The government spokesman echoed this view: "We made a decision not to Islamise society after we took power. Of course we call the people to Islam. But we do not force them. We are a civilian government with civilian laws".²⁶⁶

That said, there is little doubt that Hamas has taken steps – albeit unsatisfactory to Salafi-Jihadis – to increase the role of Islam in society, raising concerns in Gaza and abroad. The movement says it wishes to see Islamic practice spread voluntarily. "I'm not going to say I don't want society to be more Islamic", a senior police commander

said. "But there is a difference between us and the Salafis. They want to force Sharia on people. We do not".²⁶⁷ Hamas officials and police commanders claim citizens frequently implore them to prevent activities deemed immoral or un-Islamic.²⁶⁸ They have defended the enforcement of moral codes by stating somewhat paternalistically that such actions are undertaken for the population's protection,²⁶⁹ since ignoring complaints would lead to violence against the accused.²⁷⁰

In its approach toward the role of Islam in society, Hamas appears to be balancing competing considerations. It has hoped to open relations with the West, increase diplomatic ties and further loosen Gaza's closure, all of which have weighed against an aggressive effort to push an Islamic agenda.²⁷¹ Likewise, governing – and the need not to alienate important popular constituencies – has imposed certain restrictions; as a human rights activists put it: "Islamising will make the job of governing more difficult, because leftists and human rights activists will strongly oppose it".²⁷²

At the same time, Hamas's ideology and the stricter views of some of its own militants and Islamist rivals pull in a different direction. Many Islamists in Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the PRC and al-Ahrar want Hamas to apply Sharia more stringently,²⁷³ and they decry its slow pace in doing

²⁶³ "[Hamas's] strategic goal is to destroy Israel as a Jewish state in order to build on it a Sharia Islamic Taliban-style one Israel's current military all-out campaign in Gaza Strip is directed against a Hamas terror radical regime that has controlled the Gaza Strip since its 2007 coup, creating the conditions of the emergence of other militant global Jihad oriented Islamist organisations in Gaza in the past two years", Jonathan Figchel, "Islamisation or Secularisation of the Palestinian Cause", IDC Herzliya International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 29 January 2009.

²⁶⁴ "The strengthening of Global Jihad organisations and Salafi ideology (which supports the return to the golden age of Islam) can be seen through the on-going Islamisation and radicalisation processes within the Gaza Strip". "Islamisation Processes in the Gaza Strip since Hamas Takeover", op. cit. A number of analysts subscribing to this reasoning have described Hamas's Islamisation of Gaza as "Talibanisation", a term suggestive of a Hamas-driven move toward the goals and practices of those allied with al-Qaeda. See, "Hamas Rules: The Talibanisation of Gaza", *National Review Online*, 15 August 2007.

²⁶⁵ Crisis Group interview, Dr Mazen Haniyeh, cousin of and adviser to Prime Minister Haniyeh, Gaza City, 27 October 2010.

²⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, Taher Nunu, Gaza City, 13 October 2010.

²⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Subhi al-Batish, Gaza City, 11 November 2010.

²⁶⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Dr Abdallah E.A Abugrboah, assistant deputy *awqaf* (religious endowment) minister, Gaza City, 28 December 2010; Hamas police spokesman Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 10 November 2010.

²⁶⁹ "An unmarried woman could be killed by her family if she became pregnant. So you stop it early to protect her". Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior police commander Subhi al-Batish, Gaza City, 11 November 2010.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. "We had one case where a woman was stopped for riding a bicycle. Children were throwing stones at her, and she was arrested for her own protection". Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Ismail Ashqar, 27 October 2010.

²⁷¹ "Hamas doesn't want to give the impression that they are creating a Muslim state. This will give people the excuse to besiege and isolate them". Crisis Group interview, Islamic Jihad senior leader Sheikh Nafez Azzam, 2 November 2010.

²⁷² Crisis Group interview, Bahjat al-Helou, The Independent Commission for Human Rights, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

²⁷³ A human rights activist said, "the government is under pressure – severe pressure – from Islamic groups. They challenge the government on Islamic principle. This is very hard for the government to defend against". Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shacquara, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010. A Qassam commander expressed his frustration. "After the war, we as Qassam and Hamas wanted people to have better lives. We don't want to stop tourism. But to the extent God accepts. Certain red lines – for example, lovers touching in public – cannot

so.²⁷⁴ Most Islamist militants seem to assume a majority of the public shares their wish for greater enforcement of Islamic mores and to ignore the possibility that many do not. Several suggested Hamas was betraying its constituency, pointing out that its events now feature *dabka* (traditional line dancing), its music is indistinguishable from that played by non-Islamists, and its leaders uniformly stand for the national anthem, all of which would have been unthinkable less than a decade ago. Al-Ahrar's leader said, "the government is ready to offend the majority in order to defend a minority. This will cost them in future elections. It is what feeds Salafi-Jihadi groups. A party should satisfy the desires of its voters, not of everyone in society. It is Islamists who elected Hamas".²⁷⁵

But many of these same militants also acknowledged the difficulty of Hamas's position. A PRC leader said that though his group strongly urged Hamas to Islamise,²⁷⁶ he recognised that the government must also keep "foreign considerations" in mind: "If the West weren't applying pressure, Hamas would probably enact more Islamic laws".²⁷⁷ Internal divisions almost certainly are at play. There is debate within Hamas about the means and speed with which promoting Islam should be pursued, and disagreement among Gazans about the degree to which the movement has pursued it.²⁷⁸

be crossed. You have to respect the feelings of others. Get a room!". Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 28 October 2010.

²⁷⁴ A Qassam commander expressed approval of the burning of a resort in which he thought licentious activities had taken place. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 28 October 2010.

²⁷⁵ Crisis Group interview, Khalid Abu Hilal, Gaza City, 30 October 2010. A police spokesman agreed: "We were elected by a plurality because we are Islamists, not because we are good bureaucrats". Crisis Group interview, Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 13 October 2010.

²⁷⁶ "Most organisations are pressuring the government to Islamise, the PRC included. The government is trying hard to resist this pressure, but it knows that it must restrain that which violates tradition", Crisis Group interview, Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

²⁷⁷ "Many in Qassam are not happy with the actions of the government. You think if Hamas were the only one in Gaza they would allow water parks and internet cafes? Of course not". Ibid. Al-Ahrar's Khalid Abu Hilal said, "Hamas tries to please everybody. It wants to be both recognised internationally and popular at home". Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

²⁷⁸ "The debate is about speed. In principle, Hamas is not against implementing *hudud* [a category of strict Islamic punishment]. But first you must prepare the population. Many steps must be taken in advance, not least of which is that the PLC must pass new laws. We have not practiced Sharia in Arab lands in more than 100 years. It will take a huge effort to convince the people that this is desirable. They need to want it. It cannot be pushed. After you raise people to be true Muslims, they will choose

The competing pressures on Hamas have been reflected in a form of governance without clear or consistent objectives, with frequent zigzags characterised by a local analyst as "rule by trial and error".²⁷⁹ Islamising measures are put forth tentatively, then retracted when citizens object. The basis of much criticism of Hamas's Islamising measures was the "Yes to Virtue" (Na'am lil-fadila) campaign, launched by the religious endowments ministry (*wizarat al-awqaf*) in summer 2009. Preachers spoke from beachside tents and distributed leaflets calling on the public to attend prayers and abide by Islamic morals. They had no arrest power, but offered unsolicited advice to unmarried couples, men swimming shirtless, a hair salon with male coiffeurs for female clients and a store whose windows displayed posters of half-naked women and female mannequins in lingerie.²⁸⁰ In several cases, undercover police later approached the same people.²⁸¹ Human rights activists criticised the government harshly.²⁸² One said, "with the mannequins, there was an outcry, so only one store was approached. But that was enough to scare all the others. There is a lot of self-censorship".²⁸³

hudud on their own". Crisis Group interview, Hamas religious scholar, Rafah, October 2010. A human rights activist said, "the ones in Hamas who push hardest for the quick application of Sharia are the youth in the military wing who were recruited in recent years. I don't want to generalise but there are two sides to the movement. It's quite clear that the dominant stream advocates governance, truce with Israel, gradual implementation of law and accepting what the population wants. The other, weaker side is more conservative, more Salafi, an outlook many of them acquired while studying in Saudi Arabia and Sudan". Crisis Group interview, Issam Younis, general director, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 9 November 2010. That older, veteran Hamas leaders might take a more gradualist view is not surprising. A PFLP leader said, "this is in accordance with the beliefs of the Muslim Brotherhood, which believes in moving slowly and deliberately". Crisis Group interview, Rabah H. Mohanna, Gaza City, 17 October 2010.

²⁷⁹ "The government is ashamed of half of the Islamising measures taken by its employees. They are living in confusion". Crisis Group interview, Bahjat al-Helou, Independent Commission for Human Rights, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

²⁸⁰ Crisis Group interviews, lingerie store owners, Gaza City, November 2010.

²⁸¹ The ministry denies having coordinated with the police and says its preachers rarely approached citizens. Crisis Group interview, Dr Abdallah E.A. Abugrboah, assistant deputy minister, Gaza City, 28 December 2010.

²⁸² A human rights lawyer reported asking Prime Minister Hanieh: "Are you sexual maniacs? Do mannequins arouse you?!" Crisis Group interview, Raji Sourani, director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 29 December 2010.

²⁸³ Crisis Group interview, Bahjat al-Helou, The Independent Commission for Human Rights, Gaza City, 8 November 2010. The ban on female mannequins displaying lingerie applied only to store windows. From the street one can still see them inside (but not at the front of) stores. At the front, one can often see

The most controversial regulations – banning the smoking of *shisha* (water pipes) in open places but enforcing it only on women; forbidding female lawyers from appearing in court without *hijab* (head covering); allowing school principals to impose an Islamic dress code on female students; and demanding marriage certificates from young couples holding hands in the streets or in cars²⁸⁴ – were denounced and repealed or narrowly defined by the government. The repeals themselves sometimes are reversed.²⁸⁵

One example of how decisions evolve concerns the dress code. Before the beginning of the school year in fall 2009, a rumour circulated that the government would enforce a uniform of *jilbab* (robes) and *hijab* (head covering) on all female students, a subject that had been discussed in the PLC. On the first day of school, several principals enforced what was widely thought to be the new dress code; though nearly all female students outside the wealthiest part of Gaza City already wore the uniform, a number of parents were outraged. The education minister denied having given the order, and all schools rescinded the new code within two weeks. But though the regulation was officially retracted, a government critic said, it still achieved its desired effect: “80 per cent of Gazans are below the poverty line. They had already bought the new uniform. By the time the government put an end to the rumour, it was too late. Hamas got its way in the end”.²⁸⁶

The head of the *ifta'* (religious rulings) committee at Islamic University and an adviser to the prime minister explained:

I never accepted these regulations – making female lawyers wear *hijab*, the *shisha* ban and all the rest. Religion forbids asking for the IDs of a couple to see if they are married. These were big mistakes. Abu al-Abd [Prime Minister Haniyeh] was very unhappy about them. The head of the Mabahith asked me about the legality of these tactics, and I told him they were against Islam.²⁸⁷

them in short skirts. Crisis Group observations, Gaza City, November 2010.

²⁸⁴ “Recently a decision was made not to ask for marriage certificates. Now a police officer is allowed to ask only if people are doing something egregious, like kissing in public”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior police commander Subhi al-Batish, Gaza City, 11 November 2010.

²⁸⁵ The ban on male coiffeurs treating female clients, for example, was rescinded in the first half of 2010 but implemented again in February 2011. Crisis Group interview, interior ministry official, Gaza City, April 2010; “PCHR Condemns Illegal GIS Intervention into the Work of Women’s Hairdressing Salons”, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 21 February 2011.

²⁸⁶ Crisis Group interview, Mkhaimar Abusada, Al-Azhar University professor who conducted a recent study of Gaza’s educational system, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

²⁸⁷ Crisis Group interview, Dr Mazen Haniyeh, 27 October 2010.

And yet, new measures continue to be implemented. In January 2011, members of the interior ministry removed from local bookstores two novels said by a police spokesman to violate Sharia.²⁸⁸ The following month five male hairdressers who cut women’s hair were ordered not to work or enter their salons on pain of a fine of 20,000 NIS (\$5,516).²⁸⁹

Hamas’s explanation for these moves reflects a certain discomfort. In most cases, leaders deny having given the orders, saying they resulted from misunderstandings or unauthorised initiatives by low-ranking police²⁹⁰ and other civil servants whom there was insufficient time to properly train. A prime ministerial spokesman and adviser said:

Many of these measures were taken by people who wanted to impress and get close to us by showing they were religious. I gave many lectures on how to deal with people to policemen and other government employees. Many of them ask: “When are we going to start implementing *hijab* and Sharia?” I always say, “it will never happen”. They are shocked when they hear it. I don’t leave until they are convinced.²⁹¹

In others cases, infringements of civil liberties are blamed on the movement’s inexperience.²⁹² A Hamas legislator said, “many of the regulations were implemented too hastily and without wisdom. People are now learning from these

²⁸⁸ The novels were *Chicago* by Alaa al-Aswany and *Banquet for Seaweed* by Haidar Haidar. “Ministry of Interior in Gaza Confiscates Copies of Novels Claiming Their Violation Islamic Shari’a”, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 26 January 2011.

²⁸⁹ “PCHR Condemns Illegal GIS Intervention”, op. cit.; “Gaza: Halt Morality Enforcement Campaign; Hamas Police Target Male Hairdressers”, Human Rights Watch, 2 March 2011.

²⁹⁰ When deciding what to permit and what to forbid, police frequently rely less on legal codes than their own judgment: “I cannot allow women to swim on the beach in bikinis because this will upset people and result in the toppling of the government. You have to balance between freedom and the demands of a conservative society”. Crisis Group interview, Ayman Batniji, Gaza police spokesman, Gaza City, 13 October 2010.

²⁹¹ Crisis Group interview, Taher Nunu, Gaza City, 28 October 2010. A police spokesman added: “We are torn. We want to do what we believe, but we also want to implement the law. As a government, we do not have a free hand. But our voters do not understand that. This has led to an accumulation of pressure, which resulted in some people taking matters into their own hands, such as the burning of the water park [where immoral activities were thought to have taken place]”. Crisis Group interview, Ayman Batniji, Gaza City, 13 October 2010.

²⁹² In the view of one Hamas leader, the movement had been rash in taking power: “I told Hamas not to go to elections. I said we are not ready to govern. I knew the conditions were not right, that the international community would not accept it. Afterward, Zahar told me: ‘We won the elections in spite of you’”. Crisis Group interview, Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010.

mistakes”.²⁹³ An analyst said that though Hamas still behaves more like a movement than a government, it has learned relatively quickly during its short time in power, as reflected in its rapid responses to unpopular policies.²⁹⁴

A number of the movement’s critics challenge the view that Islamising measures have been, as the government claims, “individual actions” of misled junior staff. As they see it, retracted regulations were “trial balloons” that were ordered orally to provide senior leaders with deniability,²⁹⁵ which is also why, they believe, almost no Islamic legislation has been passed.²⁹⁶ Some assert that evidence of the government’s true intentions can be seen in the appointment of Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, who they say has close connections to the military wing, is a hardliner and has been responsible for many unpopular Islamising measures.²⁹⁷ Speaking with Crisis Group, Hammad condemned actions he attributed to overzealous security officers, said those responsible were punished or fired and spoke at length about the virtues of Islamic moderation.²⁹⁸

There are, of course, explanations that go beyond Hamas’s motivations. Some aspects of life in Gaza owe more to the society’s traditional outlook. Both friends and foes of the government stressed that it has always been far more conservative than the West Bank.²⁹⁹ “It’s a complex situation”, a human rights researcher said. “You have widely practiced customs, and then the government imposing what most of the population already accepts. They required female lawyers to veil and students to wear uniforms when nearly all of them already did so. Gaza is a conservative society”.³⁰⁰ Likewise, the increased popularity of conservative dress arguably could be traced less to Hamas rule than to the beginning of the second intifada, when the ostentatious Western clothing of the elite was abandoned out of solidarity with and deference to the disproportionately suffering poor.³⁰¹

Fatah supporters agreed with this assessment but pointed out that after Hamas’s takeover, conservative dress became more popular still.³⁰² This was not necessarily due to compulsion, they acknowledged, but to a self-censorship in which people attempted to demonstrate their piousness to the Islamists newly in power.³⁰³ Gaza is not a vacuum, of

²⁹³ Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Ismail Ashqar, 27 October 2010.

²⁹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Omar Shaban, president, Pal-Think for Strategic Studies, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

²⁹⁵ “Restaurant owners told not to allow women to smoke *shisha* are never given written orders – only oral ones – so Hamas can deny it”. Crisis Group interview, UN official, Gaza City, 25 October 2010. A human rights researcher said some regulations had been trial balloons, Crisis Group interview, Issam Younis, general director, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 9 November 2010. Omar Shaban said, “the problem is the government leaves things in a grey area. They don’t say one way or another what their intentions are”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

²⁹⁶ Presented with this theory, Bassem Naim, a Hamas senior leader and health minister, said, “it is true that they were trial balloons, but they were floated not by the leadership but by individuals mistakenly thinking these actions would please us”. Crisis Group interview, Mkhaimar Abusada, Al-Azhar University professor, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

²⁹⁷ Crisis Group interview, Bahjat al-Helou, Independent Commission for Human Rights, Gaza City, 8 November 2010. “Fathi Hammad wears too many hats and has too many sources of power”. Crisis Group interview, Omar Shaban, 30 October 2010. PFLP senior leader Rabah Mohanna said, “there are members of Hamas with Salafi thinking. Like our interior minister”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 17 October 2010.

²⁹⁸ Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010. Several NGO staffers and human rights advocates said he was made out to be more hardline than he is. “Many times I’ve found Fathi Hammad to be different from what you read about him”. Crisis Group interview,

Amjad Shawa, coordinator, Palestinian NGO’s Network, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

²⁹⁹ Crisis Group interviews, Amr Hamad, deputy secretary general, Palestinian Federation of Industries, Gaza City, 12 October 2010; Fatah Revolutionary Council member Muhammad Juda an-Nahal, Gaza City, 30 October 2010; Palestinian UN official, 24 October 2010; Omar Shaban, President, Pal-Think for Strategic Studies, Gaza City, 30 October 2010; Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010; Eyad Sarraj, president, Gaza Community Mental Health Program, Gaza City, 24 October 2010.

³⁰⁰ Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

³⁰¹ Crisis Group interviews, university students and shoppers, Gaza City, October 2010.

³⁰² Crisis Group interview, Mkhaimar Abusada, Al-Azhar University professor, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

³⁰³ A student at Al-Azhar, a Fatah-affiliated university, described a teacher who discriminated against pupils who did not wear headscarves and robes but said the teacher had done so because of personal preference, not factional affiliation. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 16 October 2010. Several female high school students said that in the first year after Fatah teachers went on strike, a number of Hamas-affiliated substitutes had criticised students for wearing make-up, plucking eyebrows and dressing immodestly; after parents complained, the education ministry reportedly ended such censure. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, March 2011. Several human rights lawyers said their wives and daughters wore no veil and had not been harassed. The health minister said he had forbidden female employees from wearing a *niqab* (a face-covering veil) when interacting with patients. Crisis Group interview, Bassem Naim, Gaza City, 17 October 2010.

course, and more conservative dress can also be attributed to changing customs throughout the region; older Gazans can remember a time in the 1960s and 1970s when their sisters and mothers wore short skirts, a fashion that faded long before Hamas arrived.

Likewise, a number of the measures criticised as forms of Islamising are continuations of policies enacted under Fatah. The PA occasionally demanded marriage certificates from couples and stopped male-female parties.³⁰⁴ It adopted a ban on smoking *shisha* in public.³⁰⁵ School curricula, according to a strong critic of the government who recently studied Gaza's educational system, have not changed³⁰⁶ (though he complained that extra-curricular Islamisation is taking place).³⁰⁷ Human rights lawyers say only one legislative amendment has been passed that could be considered Islamising: a 1936 law punishing adulterers was revised to criminalise all sex outside marriage.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ Crisis Group interviews, Fatah Revolutionary Council member Muhammad Juda an-Nahal, Gaza City, 30 October 2010; Omar Shaban, president, Pal-Think for Strategic Studies, Gaza City, 30 October 2010. Senior leaders described Hamas as "under a microscope" and held to different standards than Saudi Arabia or the PA, which recently imprisoned a blogger for heretical writings and convicted – then forcibly divorced – an Ahmadi Muslim couple for apostasy. "We are like a policeman who deals with 200 cases in a single day. He raises his voice once, and it is on this one case that everyone focuses. Yes, it does happen that we make mistakes in individual cases, but these are blown out of proportion by our critics". Crisis Group interview, Khalil Hayya, Gaza City, 23 October 2010; "Palestinian held for Facebook criticism of Islam", Associated Press, 12 November 2010; "Palestinian Islamic court forcibly divorces West Bank couple after declaring them 'apostates'", Associated Press, 20 January 2011.

³⁰⁵ The PA ban did not apply only to women. Senior Hamas leaders claim they planned for their ban to be applied to both sexes and that it was low-level officers who mistakenly had applied it only to women. Crisis Group interviews, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010; Health Minister Bassem Naim, Gaza City, 17 October 2010.

³⁰⁶ Crisis Group interview, Mkhaimar Abusada, Al-Azhar University professor, Gaza City, 9 November 2010. Several local teachers confirmed that Gaza curricula are identical to those in the West Bank, as did Deputy Education Minister Ziad Thabet. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, March 2011.

³⁰⁷ "At all-male schools, some teachers have encouraged students to pray at recess and have given breaks to failing students who pray". Crisis Group interview, Mkhaimar Abusada, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

³⁰⁸ The original law punished adulterers only when the police received a spouse's complaint. Crisis Group interviews, Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010; Raji Sourani, director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 29 December 2010. A lawyer mentioned a law regulating payment of *zakat* (alms) by Muslim citizens but said the government had

Finally, some of the criticisms of Islamising measures appear to be based on misinformation. News articles spoke of a dedicated "morality police" (no such unit existed), and the Israel Security Agency disseminated a report on Gaza's Islamisation filled with inaccuracies, such as that insurance is forbidden, Hamas separates boys and girls at UNRWA³⁰⁹ schools (they have had gender segregation for decades),³¹⁰ and proof of Hamas's ideology having penetrated the public sphere is the use in daily speech of blessings and praises for Allah (eg, "*al-hamdu lillah*" [thank God], as is uttered in every Arabic-speaking country by the religious and secular alike).³¹¹

More broadly, even Gaza human rights lawyers, many of them committed secularists, claim that the number of individual cases in which Islamic strictures have been forcibly imposed remains low. One alleged prohibition cited in the Western press³¹² – a ban on females riding motorbikes – was unknown to human rights researchers and senior police commanders alike.³¹³ The director of the Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights estimated that for all that has been written about a ban on men swimming shirtless, there have been perhaps ten cases where government employees have approached such swimmers.³¹⁴ A similar

decided not to implement it. Crisis Group interview, Jamil Sarhan, director of Gaza program, The Independent Commission for Human Rights, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

³⁰⁹ UNRWA, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, describes itself as "the main provider of basic services – education, health, relief and social services – to 4.8 million registered Palestine refugees in the Middle East". "About UNRWA", UNRWA (www.unrwa.org), 2011.

³¹⁰ Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

³¹¹ "Islamisation Processes in the Gaza Strip since Hamas Take-over", op. cit.

³¹² "Hamas bans women from riding motorbikes", *The Guardian*, 7 October 2009.

³¹³ "I've never heard of such a case. It's true that very few women ride bicycles in Gaza. It's not in our culture. But I see it sometimes, and we have no orders to stop it". Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior police commander Subhi al-Batish, Gaza City, 11 November 2010. "Women can't ride scooters? Never heard about it. Women don't ride bikes anyway". Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

³¹⁴ Crisis Group interview, Issam Younis, general director, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 9 November 2010. Several Gazans said they regularly swim at the beach without shirts. Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010; Omar Shaban, president, Pal-Think for Strategic Studies, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

figure was provided for the number of times police had asked couples to show their marriage certificates.³¹⁵

None of this is meant either to suggest the government has refrained from Islamising or to minimise the impact of such efforts on their targets. Alcohol consumption, for example – illegal for Muslims since 1936 – has been prohibited to residents and visitors of all faiths.³¹⁶ Men and women are prevented from dancing together at parties.³¹⁷ And human rights organisations have documented such cases as a nineteen-year-old man in jail without trial because he is gay and a mother of three incarcerated for committing adultery with her husband – because her family disapproved of the union and prevented her from obtaining a marriage certificate.³¹⁸

There are legitimate grounds for concern that Gazans have not seen the end of such policies. “In general, there is no serious attempt to restrict public freedoms”, said Jamil Sarhan, Gaza director of the Independent Commission for Human Rights, the quasi-official PA human rights ombudsman. “But we worry that we may be seeing the first steps of what is to come”.³¹⁹ A human rights activist said, “missionary work and implementing their Islamic vision remains a priority for those at the highest level of Hamas”.³²⁰ Another added: “One way or another, Hamas succeeds in spreading Islam, though the means are often indirect. They exercise soft power”.³²¹

One possible lesson is that the lack of greater engagement by the outside world has undermined those making the case that less strict religious policies could open doors to the West. Though reformists in the movement tend to be more optimistic that these openings will occur, they lament that the evidence is tilted toward those who argue that courting the West is futile.³²² Naturally it is in Hamas’s

interests to tell its Western interlocutors that isolation and blockade are radicalising some of its members and the population at large.³²³ But it is an argument also made by diplomats, NGO staff and leaders of other factions.³²⁴ In the words of a human rights lawyer, “if isolation weren’t imposed from outside, the hardliners would have to impose it themselves. Openness is their enemy”.³²⁵

B. ISLAMISATION THROUGH VIOLENCE

More worrying than the government’s Islamising measures have been a number of bombings, shootings, burnings and lootings aimed at targets that might be deemed un-Islamic and for which no suspect has been publicly tried. It is difficult to ascertain responsibility or motivation. Fatah leaders say many internet cafes and coffee shops were targeted not because they were seen as un-Islamic but because the owners were affiliated with their movement.³²⁶ Indeed, some attacks were aimed at Fatah leaders and ex-members of the PA security forces;³²⁷ several,

³²³ “As Muslim Brothers, we are very moderate. But as individuals, the ones who haven’t left Gaza, they are like the Taliban. If I were a millionaire, I would send each of our ministers to live in Britain”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010.

³²⁴ “I don’t think radicalism is growing in Gaza. But if there is no political solution to the division between Hamas and Fatah and no end to the siege, extremism will flourish”. Crisis Group interview, Eyad Sarraj, Gaza City, 24 October 2010. “As they are isolated, they self-radicalise”. Crisis Group interview, Amjad Shawa, Coordinator, Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), Gaza City, 9 November 2010. Crisis Group interviews, Fatah PLC member Ashraf Juma’, Rafah, 2 November 2010; Fatah Revolutionary Council member Muhammad Juda an-Nahal, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

³²⁵ Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shaqqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010. Analyses that divide Hamas leaders into headline and pragmatic camps risk being misleading. Such divisions exist, but they do not fall neatly into this dichotomy. Ahmed Yousef, frequently held up as a symbol of Hamas’s more moderate wing, defended the ban on female *shisha* smoking: “It disgusts me to walk into a restaurant and see women sucking pipe”. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 4 November 2010.

³²⁶ Crisis Group interview, Fatah PLC member Ashraf Juma’, Rafah, 2 November 2010.

³²⁷ On 5 March 2010, unknown assailants fired on the home of Fatah Revolutionary Council member Muhammad Juda an-Nahal; on 3 June 2010, a large explosion occurred at a house owned by a former member of the Preventive Security Organisation, Ghassan Burhom al-Jurf; on 6 August 2010, a bomb exploded outside the home of the sister of Fatah leader Tawfeeq Abu Khosa. “House of Member of Fatah’s Revolutionary Council Fired at”, 7 March 2010; “Two Persons Injured by Bomb Explosion in Khan Yunis”, 3 June 2010; “3 Explosions Target

³¹⁵ Crisis Group interview, Issam Younis, general director, Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 9 November 2010.

³¹⁶ Crisis Group interview, Slama Omar Bissiso, chairman, Palestinian Bar Association, Gaza City, 23 October 2010.

³¹⁷ However, men and women are permitted to dance together at weddings, where their families are present. Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior police commander Subhi al-Batish, Gaza City, 11 November 2010.

³¹⁸ “The Danger of an Islamised Gaza”, Human Rights Watch, 27 June 2010.

³¹⁹ Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

³²⁰ Crisis Group interview, Jaber Wishah, deputy director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

³²¹ Crisis Group interview, Eyad Sarraj, president, Gaza Community Mental Health Program, Gaza City, 24 October 2010.

³²² “The siege is radicalising Hamas”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010. “A lack of engagement means the moderates in Hamas have no leg to stand on”. Crisis Group interview, Sami Abu Sultan, board member, Sharek Youth Forum, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

perhaps in retaliation,³²⁸ have targeted Qassam, police and Internal Security Service members,³²⁹ others have resulted from fighting between militant groups.³³⁰

Still others have been conducted by Islamists allied with Hamas who have sought to punish perceived moral violations ignored by the government. Al-Ahrar's leader said he and his colleagues used to pressure Hamas to shut down "mixed" (male-female) parties: "We told them, 'If you won't stop it by law, we will stop it by force'. Their answer was religious: 'Having a mixed party is against Islam, but assaulting people is a bigger crime'".³³¹ A PRC leader suggested that some attacks are conducted not by Islamists revolting against Hamas but individuals attempting to please it: "Many organisations read Hamas's message incorrectly. They thought they were doing the government a favour, helping it do what it cannot because its hands are tied".³³² Nearly all Salafi-Jihadis, by contrast, deny responsibility for internal violence. Their leaders, like those of Hamas, concede that some attacks have been conducted by their members but claim these were the

result of "individual actions", not policies directed from above.³³³

What most troubles human rights activists is not so much the radical Islamists in Salafi-Jihadi groups but the minority of them within Hamas. Though some Hamas members have been involved in internal attacks, few believe the leadership approves of this violence.³³⁴ Human rights activists add that the movement has changed since the first intifada, when its members used to kill those engaging in "immoral" activity on the grounds that such behaviour endangered society, because it was a primary means by which Israel blackmailed and recruited collaborators. Dr Eyad Sarraj, a prominent Gaza psychiatrist and human rights activist, said, "those elements persecuting people today are not part of the mainstream of Hamas. The movement's leaders no longer want to do what they did during the first intifada".³³⁵

Still, while Hamas quickly condemns internal attacks, it has not taken responsibility when its members have been implicated. Several assaults in 2010 stood out for brazenness, organisation and suspected Hamas involvement. The first targeted one of several UNRWA-run summer camps for children.³³⁶ In the early hours of 23 May, several dozen masked gunmen vandalised and burned the

2 Cars and a House in Gaza City", 10 August 2010, all Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

³²⁸ Attacks on Hamas security forces spiked in early 2010, when there also were reports of Fatah members being kidnapped and tortured by unknown assailants. In Gaza City on 14 March 2010, a PA employee, Salah al-Masri, was kidnapped, tortured and questioned about his relationship with the Ramallah government. The next day, a bomb exploded beside a Gaza City police station. In Rafah on 13 March 2010, Hammad Muhammad Abu Jazar was kidnapped, tortured and accused of insulting a dead Qassam commander. A few days later, a bomb was put under a Rafah policeman's car. "Civilian Kidnapped and Tortured by Unknown Persons", 16 March 2010; "Armed Clashes in Jabalya and Explosion in Police Station in Gaza City", 16 March 2010; "Cafeteria Burnt in al-Maghazi and Bombs Detonated in Police Officer's Car in Rafah", 21 March 2010, all Palestinian Centre for Human Rights.

³²⁹ Hamas blamed Mahmoud Talib, a Salafi-Jihadi and ex-Qassam member, for some of the attacks against security forces, but others occurred after his February incarceration. Following arrests of Salafi-Jihadis and Fatah members, attacks dropped precipitously but have not ceased: On 2 January 2011 in al-Bureij, a car exploded in front of the home of a member of the Internal Security Service. "Car Explosion Injures 2; Causes Abortion", Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, 2 January 2011; "Bi-weekly safety report (13 December 2010-13 January 2011)", GANSO, January 2011.

³³⁰ In October 2009, for example, armed clashes between followers of Mumtaz Dughmush and of his relative, Zakaria, who leads a PRC faction, were accompanied by an explosion in front of a Dughmush-owned fuel station.

³³¹ Crisis Group interview, Khalid Abu Hilal, Gaza City, 30 October 2010.

³³² Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

³³³ "Jund Ansar Allah does not carry out internal attacks on cafés. To be frank, some of the members of Salafi groups have carried out several such attacks, but they did so in their personal capacity. Some other youths, not Salafis, have attacked Hamas members in retaliation for torture. But Hamas does not torture our members". Crisis Group interview, Jund Ansar Allah member "Abu Suhaib", Rafah, 21 February 2010.

³³⁴ "What is Hamas's strategic interest in blowing up the YMCA library?", a leading human rights lawyer asked. "What is Hamas's interest in killing a Christian missionary, embarrassing [Prime Minister] Haniyeh, and forcing [Heath Minister] Bassem Naim to apologise? If you speak to any leaders of Hamas, they are not less upset than we are about these violations". Crisis Group interview, Raji Sourani, director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 29 December 2010. In February, a Christian surgeon was attacked after receiving threatening text messages warning him to halt evangelical work that he denies conducting; a Hamas police officer said Salafi-Jihadi suspects were arrested. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, March 2011; "Rights group: Assailants plant small bomb under car of prominent Christian surgeon in Gaza", Associated Press, 27 February 2011.

³³⁵ Sarraj estimated that during the first intifada more Palestinians in Gaza were killed by Hamas than by Israel. Crisis Group interview, 13 November 2010.

³³⁶ UNRWA camps were attacked twice more in the following weeks: in central Gaza on 28 June 2010 and in Khan Younis two days later. "PCHR Condemns Continued Attacks on UNRWA Summer Games' Camps by Masked Gunmen". Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 28 June 2010; "Bi-weekly safety report (1-30 June 2010)", GANSO, July 2010.

camp.³³⁷ Upon leaving, one placed in the handcuffed and blindfolded security guard's pocket three bullets and a letter threatening three UNRWA officials, including its Gaza director. Several days earlier, a press release was circulated online and at mosques strongly criticising UNRWA (for teaching girls "swimming, fitness, and dancing") and Sharek, a local NGO it closely partnered with (for sponsoring mixed gender activities for children). "You, government of Gaza", it asked, "what is your attitude towards these criminal acts?"³³⁸ Hamas opened an investigation, announced the arrest of several suspects and apologised to UNRWA, but has not publicly admitted the perpetrators were Qassam militants, as several members of the group have privately said.³³⁹

Though the UNRWA camp burnings might seem straightforwardly to be Islamically-motivated attacks, the picture is not so clear.³⁴⁰ The camps were resented by Hamas and other factions not simply for their content but because they were seen as drawing children away from the factions' own summer activities: "It was transparent UNRWA was here to turn people away from resistance", a PRC leader said.³⁴¹ A board member of Sharek, whose offices the government raided a week after the first attack, said that though security officers had several times questioned staff about males and females working together, he believes

Sharek has been harassed purely for its perceived Fatah affiliation: "Workers are mixed in most NGOs and even in Hamas ministries. A question arises about mixed activities only when it comes to those who are not Hamas".³⁴² Several secular activists echoed this, attributing Hamas's behaviour not to Islam but to factionalism born of the Muslim Brotherhood's insular culture.³⁴³ "I fear they are a bit like our neighbours", a Palestinian UN official said, referring to Israelis. "It's all 'us versus them: if you are not in the Brotherhood, you are *goyim*'".³⁴⁴

The second large attack in which Hamas involvement was suspected also appeared to involve more than religious motives. On 19 September, more than twenty masked gunmen drove before dawn to the Crazy Water theme park, beat and handcuffed its guards and set fire to the grounds. They have not been arrested but are widely believed to be Qassam members, in part because the attack was so similar to the one on the adjacent UNRWA camp, but primarily because it seems implausible that dozens of masked men in trucks could act without Hamas knowledge and, at minimum, tacit consent.³⁴⁵

Several weeks before the attack, the park, which competes with similar Hamas-owned tourist sites, was shut down by the police after an event at which illicit activities were rumoured to have taken place.³⁴⁶ Here, again, a seemingly straightforward assault by radical Islamists has a messy back-story. The primary owner, Alaa Eddin el-Araj, was national economy minister in Hamas's first government (2006-2007). His relations with the movement soured two years later over a several million dollar financial dispute: Araj and a number of Hamas figures had invested in a

³³⁷ They shut down a section of the main coastal road, beat the security guard, destroyed the water tank, tore down canvas walls and set fire to equipment.

³³⁸ "PCHR Strongly Condemns Attack", op. cit.

³³⁹ Most Gazans believe the attackers were Qassam: "The attacks ... were both done by Qassam. I'm sure". Crisis Group interview, human rights activist, Gaza City, November 2010. "We know it was Qassam because a guard said the vehicles of the attackers had steering wheels on the right side. Only Hamas and a few NGOs have such cars". Crisis Group interview, local NGO board member, Gaza City, November 2010. Two Qassam commanders said fellow group members were punished. Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, November 2010. A government spokesman denied that those punished were from Qassam. Crisis Group interview, Taher Nunu, Gaza City, 14 November 2010. Several Gazans reported that senior government members told them that the Qassam members responsible were punished. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, October 2010.

³⁴⁰ The attackers reportedly had Salafi-Jihadi sympathies, but this was not their only motive. Crisis Group interview, Qassam commander, Gaza City, November 2010.

³⁴¹ "The resistance groups would have liked to burn all the UNRWA camps". Crisis Group interview, PRC senior leader Muhammad Abdel-Al (Abu Abir), Gaza City, 31 October 2010. "Some people thought UNRWA is not trying merely to provide education but advancing a hidden agenda: limiting attendance at summer camps for other factions (which provide 'organisational education'), not segregating boys and girls and simply providing kids with the opportunity to have fun instead of learning about Palestine and the Jewish enemy". Crisis Group interview, Fatah PLC member Ashraf Juma', Rafah, 2 November 2010.

³⁴² Crisis Group interview, Sami Abu Sultan, board member, Sharek Youth Forum, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

³⁴³ Crisis Group interview, PFLP senior leader Rabah H. Mohanna, Gaza City, 17 October 2010.

³⁴⁴ Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 24 October 2010.

³⁴⁵ "They used Mitsubishi Magnum trucks used only by Qassam". Crisis Group interview, Crazy Water park owner Alaa Eddin M. el-Araj, Gaza City, 24 October, 7 November 2010. "The names circulating of those responsible are all close to Hamas from Tel al-Hawa". Crisis Group interview, local observer, Gaza City, October 2010.

³⁴⁶ A DJ invited five men to sit in chairs on the stage, placed a curtain in front of them, switched the order of their seats, had them push their hands toward the audience through holes in the curtains and then asked their wives, sitting several metres away, to identify their husbands' hands. The rumour was that the wives were blindfolded and asked to find their husbands by touching several men. Despite the event having been broadcast live on a small satellite television channel in which Araj had invested, most Gazans knew only the rumour. Some were so outraged that they expressed sympathy with the attackers. Crisis Group interviews, Alaa Eddin M. el-Araj, Gaza City, 24 October, 7 November 2010; Palestinian security officials, Gaza City, January 2011.

large Ponzi scheme that collapsed; he and the government exchanged accusations of being owed large sums; and, a few months after the park was burned, he was jailed.³⁴⁷ Before his arrest, he told Crisis Group he placed ultimate responsibility not on the arsonists but on those who spread the rumour. He believed they disliked the park because “images of Gazans riding waterslides and lounging under palm trees contradicts the government’s message that Gaza is suffering from the siege”. Araj said senior Hamas officials condemned what happened but did not apologise or take responsibility.³⁴⁸

That no one has been arrested for the burning of Crazy Water and that there has been no public admission Qassam members were responsible for the attack on UNRWA has weakened the force of the government’s condemnations and made it appear complicit in or at least overly tolerant of the crimes.³⁴⁹ A UN official sceptical that Hamas had disciplined the UNRWA attackers said, “I can understand why Hamas is not announcing things. They don’t want to admit they are not in control, and they don’t want an open

fight with these Salafis. But why are they not incriminating them quietly?”³⁵⁰

Prosecuting its own members is not in Hamas’s nature, a Fatah leader stated: “After I was assaulted by 50 masked men in official cars, Hamas leaders visited me and said, ‘we don’t know anything about it’. The problem with Hamas is that their leaders cover for the mistakes of those who misbehave”.³⁵¹ Such secrecy has caused some to suspect Hamas encourages attacks in Gaza, either to hurt political rivals or to frighten businesses and institutions from permitting activities deemed un-Islamic.³⁵² Others believe not that Hamas leaders encourage such attacks but that they find it difficult to reprimand militants – inside³⁵³

³⁴⁷ On 5 September 2010, two weeks after the first closure, the government closed the park for 21 days, during which time it was burned. Crisis Group interviews, Alaa Eddin M. el-Araj, Gaza City, 24 October, 7 November 2010; Attorney General Muhammad Abed, Gaza City, 1 November 2010; Palestinian security officials, Gaza City, January 2011.

³⁴⁸ Crisis Group interviews, Alaa Eddin M. el-Araj, Gaza City, 24 October, 7 November 2010. Araj said he was assured by both the head of Qassam, Ahmed Ja’abari, and Hamas’s polit-buro chief, Khaled Meshaal, that there would be no recurrence. “Every member of the Hamas leadership condemned these acts, despite the fact that some people were very, very angry about the activities at the places that were attacked”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas senior leader Khalil Hayya, Gaza City, 23 October 2010.

³⁴⁹ Human rights activists applaud the condemnations but object to the secrecy in which Hamas has dealt with the attackers: “The government has been the first to denounce these internal attacks, which is good. But we need more transparency. Occasionally we hear from the interior ministry that they arrested a group of Salafis, but what they did with them we don’t know”. Crisis Group interview, Hamdi Shaqura, director, Democratic Development Unit, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010. “I don’t know that Hamas has encouraged bombings, but it has turned a blind eye to them”. Crisis Group interview, Slama Omar Bissiso, chairman, Palestinian Bar Association, Gaza City, 23 October 2010. “Hamas tolerates the attacks on internet cafés without pursuing the attackers seriously”. Crisis Group interview, Jaber Wishah, deputy director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010. Hamas leaders felt that such cases had been blown out of proportion: “How many crimes and murders are there in the U.S. every year that go unsolved? And yet the whole world is in uproar over two crimes that occurred under the rule of Hamas”. Crisis Group interview, Khalil Hayya, Gaza City, 23 October 2010.

³⁵⁰ Crisis Group interview, Palestinian UN official, 24 October 2010.

³⁵¹ Crisis Group interview, Fatah PLC member Ashraf Juma’, Rafah, 2 November 2010. A Hamas PLC member defended the secrecy: “If we made public the perpetrators of some of these criminal acts, it would cause great bloodshed. We are a tribal society”. Crisis Group interview, Ismail Ashqar, Gaza City, 27 October 2010. In the view of some non-Hamas militants, this emphasis on cohesion is a virtue: “Why is Hamas the most feared organisation? Because they back up all their members, no matter what. If someone makes a mistake, he will be punished, but in secret”. Crisis Group interview, Islamic Jihad member, Gaza City, 13 November 2010. That said, Hamas has expelled those it considers deviant. “I didn’t say Hamas are angels. But we educate people, and we get rid of the ones who can’t be taught”. Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010.

³⁵² “Hamas is using the Salafi groups to implement the social agenda that it fears implementing itself”. Crisis Group interview, Palestinian UN official, 24 October 2010. A human rights researcher who believed Hamas leaders, not just low-ranking cadres, had pushed Islamising measures said he did not think the leadership was involved in the attacks on UNRWA or Crazy Water: “All the Islamising measures were done as trial balloons, except UNRWA and Crazy Water. The leadership didn’t want these”. Crisis Group interview, Bahjat al-Helou, The Independent Commission for Human Rights, Gaza City, 8 November 2010.

³⁵³ A sense of impunity reportedly possessed by some Qassam members has caused problems with police. In October 2010, a fight between an officer and several Qassam members caused the police chief to threaten to quit. “The poor policeman is told to apply the law to everyone, and the resistance is not prepared to be dealt with as citizens”, he said. “On one occasion, a policeman pulled over two Hamas PLC members driving in the wrong direction on a one-way street. They told the officer, ‘We are PLC members’. If PLC members don’t understand the law applies to them, can you imagine how the resistance thinks?”. Crisis Group interview, Abu Obeida al-Jarah, Gaza City, 8 November 2010. After the October 2010 altercation, both the Qassam members and the police officers were prosecuted, which Hamas senior leaders cited as a victory for rule of law and as evidence that Qassam members do not receive special treatment. “Those involved are in jail as regular citizens. The punishments

and outside the movement – who are dissatisfied with Gaza’s leadership, whether for perceived inadequacies in implementing Islamic law or for having imposed a ceasefire with Israel.³⁵⁴

V. CONCLUSION

A large proportion of Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis are former Hamas members who left the movement in objection to several of its choices: participation in elections, failure to implement Sharia and acquiescence in multiple ceasefires with Israel. Hamas’s response to the defections has been ambivalent. It has sought to maintain faith with its own ideological base by cautiously putting forward some Islamising measures and continuing to speak the language of resistance. But until the escalation in March 2011, it had broadly aimed to maintain the ceasefire (albeit with apparent exceptions),³⁵⁵ arrest rocket launchers, revise its training of new recruits, re-educate members with Salafi-Jihadi sympathies and expel those who could not be reformed.

Though Hamas has given its more militant Islamist rivals less room to manoeuvre, it has fallen short of fully controlling or entirely eradicating them, something most Gazans and Israelis believe to be well within its power.³⁵⁶ Some analysts surmise that it is turning a blind eye³⁵⁷ to rocket fire in order to bolster its legitimacy and pressure Israel, while maintaining deniability. Others speculate it is too costly for it to take harsher measures against militants: “Hamas is not in full control in Gaza”, a senior Israeli security official said. “Not because they can’t be, but because politically it’s too expensive”.³⁵⁸ Hamas leaders acknowledge the tension between ensuring security and not clamping down too hard on those who engage in violence against Israel. Bassem Naim, a senior leader and health minister, said, “At the end of the day, Hamas has

will be made public. We’ve learned our lesson”. Crisis Group interview, Hamas PLC member Ismail Ashqar, 27 October 2010.

³⁵⁴ Hamas leaders partly conceded that enforcing a ceasefire unpopular with militants gave them less room to be seen opposing those pushing for Islamisation. Crisis Group interview, Khalil Hayya, Gaza City, 23 October 2010. “Hamas’s inability to apply the slogans of resistance made internal conflicts come to the fore”. Crisis Group interview, Jaber Wishah, deputy director, Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Gaza City, 31 October 2010.

³⁵⁵ Israeli security officials say they have strong evidence Qassam was responsible for rockets fired from Sinai toward Eilat and the Jordanian city of Aqaba on 2 August 2010. Crisis Group interview, senior official, strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 15 November 2010. Hamas officials and Qassam commanders deny any involvement. Crisis Group interviews, Muhammad Lafi, director, Internal Security Service, Gaza City, 27 December 2010; Qassam commanders, Gaza City, November 2010.

³⁵⁶ The head of the IDF’s southern command, however, recently stated: “Hamas has lost control of other organisations within the Gaza Strip. There is anarchy among them and within Hamas itself. There’s no authority over any facet and it’s difficult for Hamas to regain control”. “GOC Southern Command: ‘Hamas has lost control of Gaza Strip’”, Israel Defense Forces website, 26 March 2011. Hamas officials denied they had lost control but acknowledged Islamic Jihad had become more recalcitrant and grown too big for its britches. Crisis Group interviews, Gaza City, 26 March 2011.

³⁵⁷ “Deterrence tested in Gaza”, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 18 March 2010; “New clash with Hamas looms – defense officials”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 December 2010.

³⁵⁸ Crisis Group interview, senior official, Israel strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 15 November 2010.

two choices: fight the resistance or allow the resistance to retaliate against Israel. Both hurt Hamas".³⁵⁹

Many current and former Israeli security officials privately agree³⁶⁰ "Hamas is doing everything in its power to stop al-Qaeda and is pretty much doing as good a job as can be done toward the Salafi-Jihadis".³⁶¹ This differs markedly from government statements. From Hamas's perspective, that is just as well: it is not eager for Israeli officials to applaud it or publicly concur with charges by its rivals that it follows in Fatah's footsteps. Yet, such satisfaction with Hamas's efforts risks producing a complacency that ignores the impact of Israeli policies on the growth of Salafi-Jihadi groups. Israel's response to rockets from Gaza had ranged from retaliating against launchers to punishing Qassam in the hope of forcing Hamas to exert more pressure on ceasefire violators. Until the recent escalation, the latter, increasingly prevalent, strategy seemed to work. A senior official explained: "Hamas wants to put less pressure on the Salafis than we want them to. We realise they will not reach where we want them to be. But by moving them from the position they'd be in without Israeli pressure, we reach a compromise. When they need an incentive to work harder, we provide it".³⁶²

By punishing Hamas for others' rockets, Israel had forced the movement to rein in launches in order to protect its own members; this also helped discredit the movement in the eyes of the Palestinian public, which saw it both failing to retaliate and hypocritically opposing the resistance it claimed to endorse. However, by targeting Qassam for others' actions,³⁶³ Israel is provoking precisely the militants Hamas had been making efforts to keep in line and to prevent from defecting to groups that are fighting Israel. Israeli security officials expressed surprise upon learning how many Salafi-Jihadis were ex-Hamas members; awareness of this might induce greater caution when pressuring the movement.³⁶⁴ The recent escalation had a number of likely causes, but at least one among them was that for

months Qassam commanders had been asking themselves why they should keep their powder dry when they are targeted whether they do so or not.³⁶⁵

Israel is not unaware that Hamas has faced difficulties in preventing rocket attacks: "We raise the pressure on them, there are less rockets on us, and they have to pay the price of confronting these guys".³⁶⁶ For the most part, however, officials discounted the possibility that this price could be a reversal of the pacifying steps Hamas had taken. In November 2010, a UN diplomat offered the following prescient words: "How long can Hamas sustain a policy of not engaging in resistance, while this non-engagement doesn't produce any results in terms of liberating Palestine, easing the blockade, or any other political goal for which the movement exists? The longer they sustain a calm without showing dividends, the more those wanting a resumption of violence will prevail".³⁶⁷

What is ultimately at stake in Israeli and Western policies toward Gaza is not the potential recruitment of another several hundred Salafi-Jihadis so much as Hamas's future outlook. Until the uprising in Egypt, which Hamas leaders hope will produce a real change in Gaza's and their own status, the movement was at something of a strategic dead end: prospects for a lifting of the closure, Palestinian reunification, a prisoner exchange and greater engagement with the outside world all seemed bleak.³⁶⁸ Its leadership had been attempting to uphold the ceasefire primarily to avoid another Operation Cast Lead, yet continued to believe that the purpose for which the movement was established – liberating Palestine – would never be achieved without, in the words of a senior leader, "making history's cheapest occupation more expensive".³⁶⁹ In the months preceding Hamas's mortar attacks on 19 March 2011, the move-

³⁵⁹ Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

³⁶⁰ Though one said, "Hamas's best is clearly not good enough. They use force against them, they try to convince them to behave, and they have a very intense intelligence collection effort vis-à-vis these groups. Without such actions, the situation could be much worse. But still Hamas doesn't control them as much as we would like". Crisis Group interview, senior official, Israel strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 15 November 2010.

³⁶¹ Crisis Group interview, Yohanan Tzoreff, Israeli analyst now at the strategic affairs ministry, Tel Aviv, 16 November 2010.

³⁶² Crisis Group interview, strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 4 January 2011.

³⁶³ Though the majority of members of the Internal Security Service are also in Qassam. Crisis Group interviews, Sayed Abu Musameh, Rafah, 26 October 2010; Qassam commanders, Gaza City, November 2010.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ "Israel is asking from Hamas more than can be realistically done. This is the longest *hudna* [truce] we have had with Israel. For two years we have had self-restraint. And in these two years, Israel has continued the siege, the incursions, the bombings". Crisis Group interview, Interior Minister Fathi Hammad, Beit Lahia, 28 December 2010.

³⁶⁶ Crisis Group interview, senior official, Israel strategic affairs ministry, Jerusalem, 4 January 2011.

³⁶⁷ Crisis Group interview, Gaza City, 4 November 2010.

³⁶⁸ Acknowledging this situation, a senior Hamas leader said, "we recognise that everything is blocked. What will change things is when the current Egyptian regime falls". Crisis Group interview, December 2010. That was a month before the Tahrir Square events.

³⁶⁹ Crisis Group interview, Health Minister Bassem Naim, Gaza City, 27 December 2010.

ment's officials spoke openly of preparing for the next confrontation with Israel, which they saw as inevitable.³⁷⁰

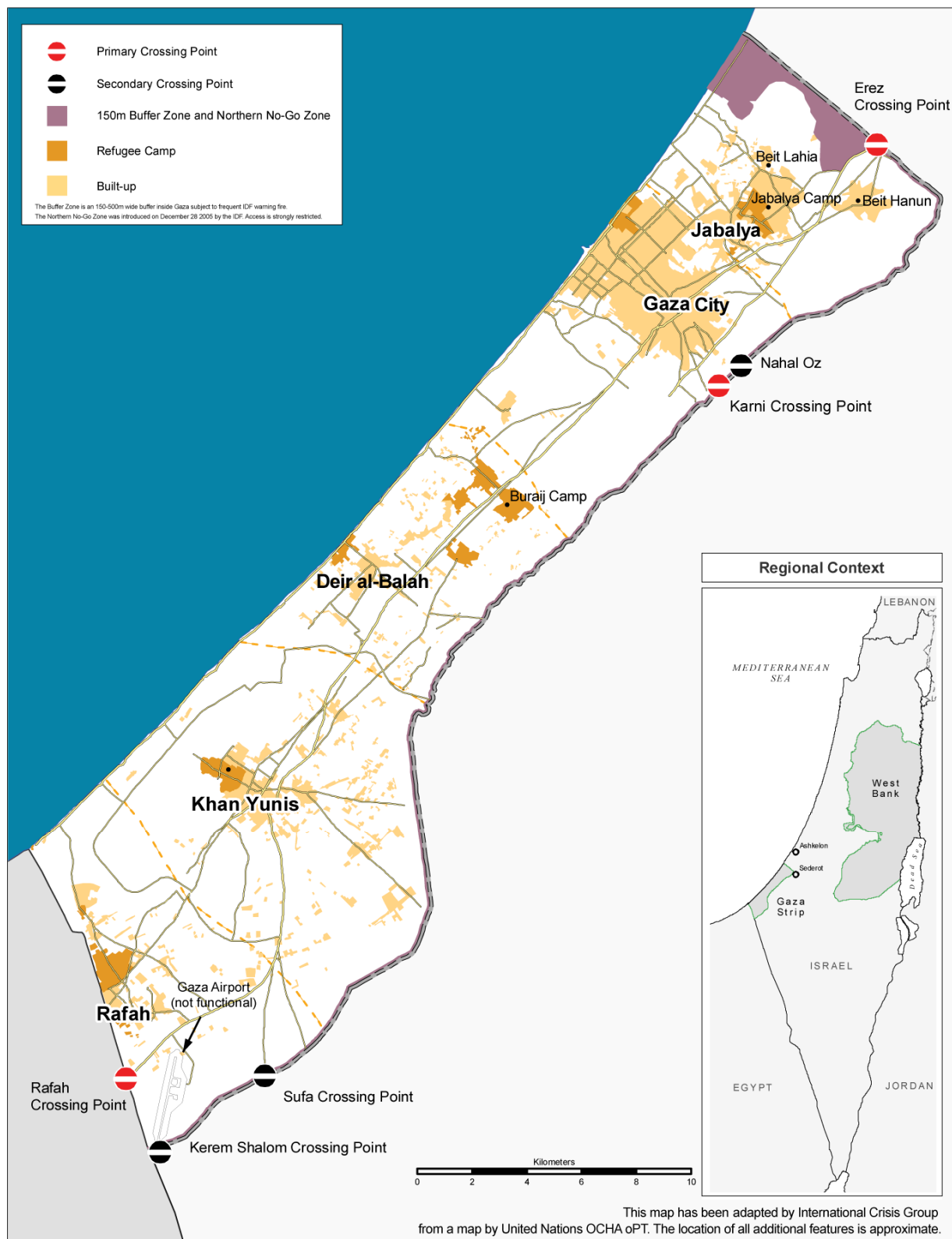
It remains uncertain how quickly the current escalation can be contained and whether another major round of violence can be avoided. What is certain is that the consequences of another war, particularly in the current state of regional unrest, would be devastating; that the beneficiaries would be both Hamas's more militant members and the Salafi-Jihadis seeking to recruit them; and that the best way to minimise the risk is to deal with Hamas not only as a military organisation but also as a political movement to be engaged.

**Gaza City/Ramallah/Jerusalem/Brussels,
29 March 2011**

³⁷⁰ "Hamas has not been sleeping for the last two years. It learned something from the last war and has been preparing for the next one". Ibid.

APPENDIX A

MAP OF GAZA STRIP



APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY

Al-Ahrar	Literally, “The Free”. Militant faction closely allied with Hamas that was formed by former Fatah members shortly after Hamas’s June 2007 takeover of Gaza under the name Fatah Al-Yassir; changed its name in May 2008 to Al-Ahrar to avoid confusion with the mainstream Fatah movement.
<i>Ard al-ribat</i>	A name for Palestine; literally “the land of ribat”; see <i>ribat</i> .
Ansar al-Sunna	A Salafi-Jihadi group whose full name is Jamaat Ansar al-Sunna (Group of Supporters of the Prophet’s Sayings and Practices).
<i>Bayt al-Maqdis</i>	One of the Arabic names for Jerusalem; literally, “House of Holiness”.
<i>Daawa</i>	Drawing people to Islam through scholarship, education and social outreach; also, propaganda.
Dabka	Traditional line dancing.
GANSO	Gaza NGO Safety Office.
<i>Hijab</i>	Literally, “covering”; used to refer both to the covering of a woman’s entire body and also to a woman’s head covering.
<i>Hudud</i>	Fixed punishments prescribed in the Quran and <i>sunna</i> .
<i>Ifya’</i>	Religious opinions issued by a religious scholar or authority.
Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades	The armed wing of Hamas.
<i>Jaljalat</i>	Literally, “rolling thunder”; it is used to refer collectively to Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis.
Jaysh al-Islam	Army of Islam; one of Gaza’s oldest Salafi-Jihadi groups, founded around the end of 2005.
Jaysh al-Umma	Army of the Nation; one of Gaza’s oldest Salafi-Jihadi groups.
<i>Jilbab</i>	Loose robe worn by women covering the body from ankle to neck.
Jund Ansar Allah	Soldiers of God’s Supporters; once one of Gaza’s largest Salafi-Jihadi groups, it is now much diminished.
<i>Kufar (sing., kafir)</i>	Unbelievers.
<i>Maqdisi</i>	A <i>nisba</i> (name based on place of origin) used as a nom de guerre by many of Gaza’s Salafi-Jihadis; see <i>Bayt al-Maqdis</i> .
<i>Mujahidin</i>	Those who exert themselves for the sake of Allah; more commonly, “holy warriors”.
<i>Munadilin</i>	Literally, “those who struggle”; fighters for a just cause, freedom fighters.
Niqab	Face-covering veil.
<i>Nisba</i>	A name based on place of origin.
PRC	The Popular Resistance Committees, a militant faction established during the second intifada.
<i>Ribat</i>	Standing guard at an outpost.
<i>Salaf al-salih</i>	The first three generations of Muslims, known as the pious ancestors.
<i>Salafis</i>	Sunni Muslims who adhere to a literalist reading of scripture and attempt to follow the example of the <i>salaf al-salih</i> .
<i>Salafi-Jihadi</i>	The small fraction of Salafis who espouse violence, taking up what they perceive to be the armed defence of the Muslim community against non-Muslim enemies.
Sharia	Islamic law.
<i>Shisha</i>	Water pipes.
<i>Sunna</i>	The sayings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad.
Tawhid wa al-Jihad	A Salafi-Jihadi group whose full name is Jamaat al-Tawhid wa al-Jihad (Group of Monotheism and Jihad).
<i>Takfir</i>	The practice of naming and denouncing Muslim “deviants” as unbelievers.
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.
<i>Wali al-amr</i>	Legitimate ruler; guardian.
<i>Zakat</i>	Alms.

APPENDIX C

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP

The International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organisation, with some 130 staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and resolve deadly conflict.

Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is co-chaired by the former European Commissioner for External Relations Christopher Patten and former U.S. Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

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Arab-Israeli Conflict

- Ruling Palestine I: Gaza Under Hamas*, Middle East Report N°73, 19 March 2008 (also available in Arabic).
- Lebanon: Hizbollah's Weapons Turn Inward*, Middle East Briefing N°23, 15 May 2008 (also available in Arabic).
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- Gaza's Unfinished Business*, Middle East Report N°85, 23 April 2009 (also available in Hebrew and Arabic).
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- Gaza: The Next Israeli-Palestinian War?*, Middle East/North Africa Briefing N°30, 24 March 2011.
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- Oil for Soil: Toward a Grand Bargain on Iraq and the Kurds*, Middle East Report N°80, 28 October 2008 (also available in Arabic and Kurdish).
- Turkey and Iraqi Kurds: Conflict or Cooperation?*, Middle East Report N°81, 13 November 2008 (also available in Arabic, Kurdish and Turkish).
- Iraq's Provincial Elections: The Stakes*, Middle East Report N°82, 27 January 2009 (also available in Arabic).
- Yemen: Defusing the Saada Time Bomb*, Middle East Report N°86, 27 May 2009 (also available in Arabic).
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- Iraq and the Kurds: Trouble Along the Trigger Line*, Middle East Report N°88, 8 July 2009 (also available in Kurdish and Arabic).
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- Iraq's Civil War, the Sadrists and the Surge*, Middle East Report N°72, 7 February 2008 (also available in Arabic).
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