

# Bayan بیان ביאן The Arabs in Israel הערבים בישראל

Editors: Itamar Radai and Arik Rudnitzky

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## Table of Contents

<b>From the Editors' Desk .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Eran Tzidkiyahu / "Whose surroundings we have blessed": The Islamic Movement in Israel Unites around the Al-Aqsa Mosque .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Brief Background .....	3
The dynamics of exclusion and radicalization .....	5
Between Earthly Jerusalem and the Capital of the Caliphate .....	6
Unity Rather than Division .....	7
<b>Arik Rudnitzky/ Between al-Aqsa and Sakhnin: Arab Leadership and the Facebook Generation.....</b>	<b>9</b>
The al-Aqsa rally: A crack in the consensus.....	9
The online revolution in Arab society.....	11
The challenge of Arab leadership .....	14
<b>Itamar Radai/ Between Palestine and Israel: The Significance and Implications of the Supreme Follow-Up Committee Chair Elections</b>	<b>15</b>
Historical background.....	16
The internal dynamics of the elections .....	17
Significance and implications .....	18

## From the Editors' Desk

This issue of *Bayan* focuses on the tumultuous events of the past month in Israel, following the crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations revolving around the al-Aqsa mosque, and their effects on the Arab public in Israel. The three articles in this issue were all written before the Israeli government's recent decision to outlaw the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement. Eran Tzidkiyahu's article discusses the Islamic Movement's actions concerning al-Aqsa, Arik Rudnitzky reviews the status of Arab leadership in Israel among the younger generation of the Arab public, and Itamar Radai analyzes the recent elections to the Supreme Follow-Up committee and their significance.

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**The Editors**

## Eran Tzidkiyahu\* / "Whose surroundings we have blessed"<sup>1</sup>: The Islamic Movement in Israel Unites around the Al-Aqsa Mosque

The current wave of violence did not spring up *ex nihilo*; it should be situated in a broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general, and is related to the tensions involving the sacred sites to Jews and Muslims, specifically the sites in Jerusalem. The wave of stabbings appeared in early October but it was preceded by a considerable worsening of tension and violent incidents on the Temple Mount/ al-Aqsa Mosque esplanade. The deterioration began with the *Tisha B'Av* incidents in the same place, and the tension that triggered these events had continued and escalated through the Jewish High Holiday period. One of the responses of Israeli authorities was to outlaw the groups called *Murabitun* and *Murabitat* operating in Al-Aqsa Mosque. (*Ribat* is to voluntarily defend Islam from external enemies. This Islamic term goes back to the Muslim-Christian 8<sup>th</sup> century encounter in North-West Africa. Its original meaning was a fortification post on the frontier with the infidels. Those who volunteered to station those posts, combining holy war with a pious way of life, were called *Murabitun* and for woman *Murabitat*. Today this term carries more complex meanings, such as inner-spiritual struggle of the believer against mundane challenges. Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque are often described as places of *Ribat*, and the current use of the term in al-Aqsa, describing groups of Muslims who stay at the al-Aqsa compound, study Quran and confronts religious Jewish visitors at the site, echoes back the original meaning of *Ribat*).

The Outlawing of the *Murabitun* and *Murabitat* was accompanied by additional changes, which were considered by the Palestinians as deviations from the status quo in the holy esplanade, and a significant first step toward dividing prayer time there between Jews and Muslims, in a manner similar to the schedules instituted by Israel in Hebron's Cave of the Patriarchs/al-Haram al-Ibrahimi following Baruch Goldstein's murder spree there in 1994. Efforts to put an end to the violence through police tactics and legislation backfired and contributed to the spillover of violence beyond the holy esplanade into the Old City of Jerusalem, and from there to the streets of the city and the entire country.

### **Brief Background**

Any person walking up to the Temple Mount/ al-Aqsa Mosque compound in recent years cannot help but notice the conspicuous changes that have been taking place at this site; groups of men, women, and children sit in the esplanade studying Quran and demonstrating an increased Muslim presence there. These groups have responded harshly and even aggressively toward the tourists and non-Muslim visitors to the site, especially visitors whose outward appearance seems Jewish. Another sign of escalating religious radicalism is the application of a strict dress code to Muslims and non-Muslims alike by Waqf guards.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quran, Surat al-Isra' [The Nocturnal Journey] 17:1, on the al-Aqsa Mosque.

<sup>2</sup> The waqf is the Islamic endowment that administers the site.

These changes should be understood as a response to the increased presence of religious Jews on the Temple Mount. Since late 2005, the sight of yeshiva students, police officers, and Waqf staff following each other around and scrutinizing each other's moves has become common at the sacred site. Since 2010, this tragi-comic scenario has been accompanied by raging masses of hundreds of Muslim men, women, and children of all ages, who spend time studying the Quran in groups, and whose function is to bellow "Allahu Akbar" (in Arabic: "God is the greatest") every time a visibly religious Jew passes. Lately, as tensions increased, these calls have expanded to target all Jews and tourists on the Temple Mount.

In April 2001, shortly after Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount and the outbreak of the Second Intifada (also known as the al-Aqsa Intifada), the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement in Israel launched its *Masirat al-Bayariq* (Flag Parade) project, which was designed to bring worshippers from all parts of the country to the al-Aqsa Mosque. The Southern Faction of the Islamic Movement in Israel conducts a similar project called *Shad a-Rihal* (Fasten the Saddles [for a pilgrimage]). Both terms originate from Islamic traditions that emphasize the sanctity of the al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>3</sup> Since initiating these projects, the Islamic Movement has brought tens and possibly even hundreds of thousands of worshippers to pray at al-Aqsa every year. Sociologist Nohad Ali notes that the slogan "al-Aqsa laysa wahidan" (al-Aqsa is not alone) has become common among the supporters of both factions of the Islamic Movement in Israel.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Association for the Revival of Al-Aqsa and the Holy Places (*Mu'assasat - 'Imarat al-Aqsa wal-Muqaddisat*), which operates the project on behalf of the Northern Faction of the Movement, considers the project "the al-Aqsa Mosque's first line of defense."<sup>5</sup>

A documentary disseminated by the Islamic Movement in Jerusalem explains that the *Masirat al-Bayariq* project provides free transportation, which encourages worshippers from all the villages and cities within pre-1967 Israel to come and pray at al-Aqsa.<sup>6</sup> The filmmakers stress the project's significance in reinforcing al-Aqsa's role in Palestinian-Muslim culture in Israel, in weakening what they call "the Israeli siege on the al-Aqsa Mosque," and in revitalizing the Palestinian economy in Jerusalem. This last is due to the fact that Israel, contrary to the past, has prevented since the Second Intifada West Bank and Gaza residents from reaching the city and the al-Aqsa Mosque.<sup>7</sup>

In 2010, the Islamic Movement operated another project *maṣāṭib al- 'ilm fī al-masjid al-Aqsā* – Quran study circles. Initially, 30 students attended, but after three years this has expanded to more than one thousand and counting. These study circles constitute an increased Muslim presence in the al-Aqsa courtyard during all hours of the day, and especially during times when the holy esplanade is open to non-Muslim visitors. The project emerged as a response to the reduced Muslim presence in al-Aqsa following the construction of the Separation barrier around Jerusalem and the city's subsequent isolation from the West Bank. The amplified presence of Muslim citizens of Israel at al-Aqsa also represents a response to the steady increase in the number of

<sup>3</sup> Nohad Ali, "Religious fundamentalism as ideology and practice: The Islamic Movement in Israel from a comparative perspective," doctoral thesis, Haifa University, 2006, pp. 73-74.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pls48.net/?mod=articles&ID=1192735#.VcoJ9vmqkqo>

<sup>5</sup> *Masirat al-Bayariq* is another name for the Nabi Musa festival, a parade that the Muslims of Palestine used to hold around Easter toward the al-Aqsa Mosque, and from there to Makam Nabi Musa situated on the road to Jericho. *Shad al-Rihal* alludes to the hadith that urges Muslims to make a pilgrimage only to three mosques: The mosque in Mecca, the Mosque of Prophet Muhammad in Madina, and the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. See the association's website: <http://www.aqsai.com>.

<sup>6</sup> For a link to the film, see the website of the Islamic Movement in Jerusalem <http://bit.ly/1HEfSdq/>.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vA4BZ1Lc5I#t=28>.

Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount. In an interview to the London *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper in November 2013, project director Hikmat Na'amna described the study circles as “a way to undermine the plans to Judaize al-Aqsa.”<sup>8</sup> Na'amna explained the project's strategy: continuous Muslim presence on the mountain in the form of Quran study circles of men, women, and school children, dispersed over the length and width of the compound, at increased concentrations along the routes of the Jewish visitors – who, due to restrictions of Jewish law, follow a relatively fixed route along the perimeter of the Dome of the Rock. In this manner, from their positions in the study circles, the Muslims can track the Jews' movements and respond in real time to any act that they consider a provocation. The Association's website expressly describes the study circles as “the first line of defense of al-Aqsa Mosque.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The dynamics of exclusion and radicalization**

The Oslo Accords, the Camp David Summit (2000), the subsequent Second Intifada and its implications, and even the 2005 Disengagement from Gaza Program gradually eroded the Jewish Orthodox religious taboo against entering the Temple Mount. This was followed by the erosion of the political taboo on dealing politically with the status quo on the Temple Mount. In Parallel to the growing religious Jewish interest regarding the Temple Mount, the institutional process of expelling the Palestinian Authority from Jerusalem and weakening the local Palestinian leadership in the city took place. The construction of the Separation barrier along the “Jerusalem envelope” effectively detached East Jerusalem from the Bethlehem-Ramallah metropolitan area and from the West Bank in general. The absence of Palestinian leadership in the city, East Jerusalem's physical isolation, and the escalating messianic discourse and increasing traffic among religious-nationalist Jews occurred coincidentally, within a brief period. All these developments evoked a Muslim response, at the international Arab-Islamic level, as well as at the regional and grassroots level.<sup>10</sup>

The Islamic Movement in Israel has stepped into the aforementioned vacuum. In response to the declining number of Palestinian Muslims from the West Bank who visit the city, the Islamic Movement intends to reinforce and expand the presence in Jerusalem and al-Aqsa of Palestinian Muslims who are citizens of Israel. Indeed, since 2001, tens and sometimes hundreds of buses arrive from the Galilee, the Negev, and the Triangle every Friday, and sometimes in during the week as well. These buses carry thousands of Muslim men and women who come to pray at al-Aqsa and then visit the Old City markets, and have a meal. Thus, the visitors at once reinforce the Muslim presence at al-Aqsa and also support the Palestinian shopkeepers in the Old City of Jerusalem, whose trade has declined because of the Israeli Fence, separating the West Bank from Jerusalem, or because of the crisis in tourism. Thus, many of the Old City merchants are grateful to the Islamic Movement.

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<sup>8</sup> *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, November 6, 2013. <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=100785>; Interview with Na'amna for Palestinian Television, July 2013: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ai0N8J0EnYI>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.aqsai.com/?mod=articles&ID=264>; March 15, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Dotan Halevi and Eran Tzidkiyahu, “The Temple Mount/Al-Aqsa: Two side of the same coin,” May 6, 2015: <http://bit.ly/1JSNaM2>; Eran Tzidkiyahu, “Ziara and politics in Jerusalem,” May 17, 2012: <http://bit.ly/1Kg2w9o>; Idan Volkan, “On the way to a confederation? An agreement between Jordan and the Palestinian Authority determines Jordanian trust over Jerusalem,” Megaphone, April 6, 2013: <http://bit.ly/1MiaYsY>.



## **Between Earthly Jerusalem and the Capital of the Caliphate**

Through a series of alliances with clerics and other figures, Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Islamic Movement's Northern Faction, managed to erode the dichotomy created by the Green Line border. These allies included former Mufti of Jerusalem Sheikh Ikrima Sabri, and others such as Yusuf Mukhaymar,<sup>11</sup> resident of Ras Khamis in East Jerusalem (beyond the Separation barrier) and President of the *Murabitun* Committee in Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> Sheikh Salah thus managed to challenge Israel's policy of division in the Occupied Territories, and to position the al-Aqsa Mosque as the unifying factor of the Palestinian people. The Islamic Movement's intense involvement with the al-Aqsa Mosque cause and in East Jerusalem in general, can be traced to the Western Wall Tunnel Riots in 1996. At the time, the Movement became involved in the restoration — in conjunction and collaboration with the Awqaf — of the "Marwani prayer hall", established in Solomon's Stables (located in the lower part of the southern Temple Mount), and even began to organize mass rallies in Israel in a campaign known as "al-Aqsa is in danger."<sup>13</sup> A decade later, in late 2005, the Movement's activities swelled considerably when the stream of Jewish visitors to the Temple Mount increased and Sheikh Salah returned to Jerusalem after a 30-month absence.<sup>14</sup>

The Islamic Movement's organizational skills, its success as a champion of Jerusalem, and its placing of the al-Aqsa Mosque at the center of Palestinian national-religious consciousness transformed the Movement into one of the city's most dominant forces. According to the vision of Sheikh Raed and his deputy Kamal Khatib, the role of the capital of the future Islamic Caliphate is reserved for Jerusalem,<sup>15</sup> although, as Hillel Cohen notes, in contrast to the Liberation Party,<sup>16</sup> Khatib and Salah believe that "yearning for the Caliphate cannot replace political action."<sup>17</sup> Until the vision of salvation is realized, the Movement has positioned itself as the main organization that assists Palestinians in East Jerusalem to cope with life's hardships.<sup>18</sup> Since the Movement operates in an area subject to Israeli civil law, and is thus not subject to the

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.panet.co.il/article/362543>

<sup>12</sup> *Ribat* is literally a military outpost. In many traditions, *Ribat* is a border city on the terrestrial boundary between the Islamic world and the non-Islamic world. The *ribat* commandment is observed by staying in a frontier city and combining worship of god with a holy war. Today, due to what Muslims perceive as the political and religious threats to Jerusalem, the city is considered a *ribat* in the Islamic world, and extended stay in a specific place, such as the al-Aqsa Mosque, is considered to be a *ribat*. Men and women who observe the *ribat* commandment are called *Murabitun* and *Murabitat*, respectively. See for example Yusuf al-Qaradawi, "Al-Quds Qadiyat Kull Muslim" (Cairo, 2000), p. 14. Available online at: [http://imcpal.ps/new/alquds\\_book/14.pdf](http://imcpal.ps/new/alquds_book/14.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> Yitzhak Reiter, "From Jerusalem to Mecca and back: Muslims Rally around Al-Aqsa," 2005, p. 91. Nimrod Luz astutely described this process: "Haram al-Sharif in Arab Palestinian discourse in Israel: Identity, collective memory, and modes of construction," Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 2004, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> He was arrested and imprisoned for 26 months and was prohibited from entering Al-Aqsa for an additional four months. Hillel Cohen, *The market square is empty: The rise and fall of Arab Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, 2007), p. 121.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.pls48.net/?mod=articles&ID=1188641>.

<sup>16</sup> The Islamic Liberation Party ( *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*) is an international Islamic movement that was established in the 1950s in Jerusalem under Jordanian rule by Taqi al-Din al-Nubhani, a Palestinian born in the village Ajzim (now the site of Kerem Maharal), a qadi in the shari'a court of Jerusalem at the time. The organization's goal is to renew the Caliphate, and believes that this goal supersedes jihad. Organizational supporters do not generally participate in armed struggles. During 2006-2007, the organization gained strength in the West Bank and Jerusalem. For additional information see [http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF\\_07\\_166\\_1.pdf](http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/data/pdf/PDF_07_166_1.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Cohen, 2007, p. 123.

<sup>18</sup> Eran Tzidkiyahu, "Education doesn't interest me," The Forum for Regional Thinking, October 29, 2014: <http://bit.ly/1weIKI5>

restrictions that apply to Palestinians in the Territories, it enjoys relative freedom of action in Jerusalem. In fact, the Islamic Movement operates both in al-Aqsa and in the Old City and other East Jerusalem neighborhoods through a host of associations and non-profit organizations devoted to development and welfare, which run an intricate network of websites and presence in social media.<sup>19</sup>

The Islamic Movement operates in Jerusalem and at the Al-Aqsa Mosque through volunteers whose numbers include Palestinian citizens of Israel, residents of Jerusalem and residents of the Territories. Many contribute through their labor, while others help by providing construction materials or funds. Mass transport from the Negev, the Galilee, and the Triangle to Jerusalem is offered at no charge, but all participants are invited to contribute by becoming “bus trustees” (*Kafil Hafila*).<sup>20</sup> The Movement has also proved that it tied strongly to the al-Aqsa Mosque as any other Palestinian organization. Through these actions, the Islamic Movement has proven its ability to influence the events on the ground more than any other entity. Sheikh Raed Salah has consequently become a popular figure in East Jerusalem and earned the title of “Sheikh al-Aqsa.”

### **Unity Rather than Division**

Over the past decade and a half, Arabs in Jerusalem have lacked local leadership. Hamas’ ability to act greatly diminished since 2006 (in the West Bank in general, and specifically in Jerusalem), the Palestinian Authority is regularly excluded from city affairs, the local Jerusalem leadership collapsed after the death of Faisal Husseini in 2001, and it seems Israel acts in the eastern part of the city without any hindrance. Still, Arab MKs of the Joint List, including members of the Southern Faction of the Islamic Movement, such as Talab Abu ‘Arar and Mas‘ud Ghanaim, participate in Knesset debates on the Temple Mount and regularly visit al-Aqsa. Other factions of the Joint List have involved themselves as well. MK Ahmad Tibi visits the holy esplanade regularly, and a delegation of Arab MKs, including ostensibly ‘secular’ Arabs as Ayman Odeh, recently visited the Mount.<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Palestinian-Israeli MKs refrain from deeper, more intense involvement in East Jerusalem affairs including issues related to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, based on their belief that the site is occupied territory that belongs to the Palestinian Authority or is under Jordanian responsibility. Yet the Palestinian Authority is not permitted to operate in the city. Both factions of the Islamic Movement in Israel identified and entered this lacuna, successfully realizing the city’s potential. The Movement’s Northern Faction, which boycotts the Israeli political system, has effectively stepped into the shoes of the weakened Hamas, and demonstrates strong presence in the Mosque and its East Jerusalem surroundings through dynamic organizational efforts and socio-religious activities, study circles, events for children, and mass Iftar feasts during Ramadan. The Northern Faction has established maintenance crews for the al-Aqsa Mosque,

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<sup>19</sup> See for example: <http://www.iaqsa.com/>; <http://www.aqsai.com/>; <http://www.foraqsa.com/index.php>; <http://pls48.net/?mod=print&ID=1156169>; <https://www.facebook.com/0202updates/posts/1443043285990526>

<sup>20</sup> Ali 2006, p. 74. Based on his experience of these trips, Ali (ibid) notes that “most of the travelers donate between NIS 20-50 per trip, an amount that covers the costs of the bus [...] there is no obligation to make a donation. Movement members and supporters always donate generously, other donate less.”

<sup>21</sup> On Joint List MKs’ ascent to Al-Aqsa, see Shabtai Bendet, “After the Tisha b’Av riots: Members of the Joint List ascend to Al-Aqsa,” July 28, 2015: <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2876521>. See NRG June 26, 2016, Arnon Segal, “Confrontation between Zahalka and Gal blows up Internal Affairs Committee meeting”: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/702/457.html>.

funds a massive transportation project that reinvigorates the city's markets and the Mosque, monitors the events in al-Aqsa, among other activities. As a result, the Northern Faction is considered the primary force influencing events related to al-Aqsa and East Jerusalem at large. Due to its "al-Aqsa in Danger" rallies and the mass transportation project, Muslims in Israel — who live within the Green Line Border and hold Israeli citizenship — have gained a renewed sense of ownership of the al-Aqsa Mosque and strengthened their ties to the holy place.

The Islamic Movement in Israel enjoys civil and legal status in Israel. Consequently, it operates with relative freedom in East Jerusalem, unlike Palestinian factions in the West Bank. While sections of the Palestinian people are invariably separated from each other, the Islamic Movement identified the potential that Jerusalem offers, and has channeled religious-national sentiment to the Al-Aqsa Mosque. Thus, it has transformed the site into a powerful symbol of Islamic-Palestinian unity<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> As a reminder, this article was written before the recent outlawing of the Northern Branch of the Islamic Movement. The full consequences of this act on the Movement's activity in East Jerusalem are yet to be seen.



## Arik Rudnitzky\* / Between al-Aqsa and Sakhnin: Arab Leadership and the Facebook Generation

### The al-Aqsa rally: A crack in the consensus

The public demonstration of Arab national unity at the mass demonstration in Sakhnin on October 13 indicates that identification with the al-Aqsa Mosque continues to act as a powerful cohesive force for Arab society. Among the many images recorded during that event, cameras caught Sheikh Ra'ed Salah, head of the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement — who earned the label of “Sheikh al-Aqsa” for his self-appointed championing of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in the past two decades — poised between MK Jamal Zahalka, Chair of the Balad faction in the Knesset, and As'ad Kana'neh, leader of "Sons of the Village" (*Abna el-Balad*) movement.



**Caption, left to right: As'ad Kana'neh (Abnaa el-Balad), Sheikh Ra'ed Salah (Islamic Movement), and MK Jamal Zahalka (Balad).  
Source: alarab.com**

On any other occasion, there would be little chance that Salah would have inserted himself into such a demonstration of unity with two of his sharpest disputants. Salah heads the Islamic stream, whose (utopian) vision is to transform Arab society into an independent self-sustaining community governed by Islamic religious law, in no need of the State's assistance (*al-mujtama' al-issami*).<sup>23</sup> In contrast, Zahalka and Kana'neh are unmistakable representatives of the nationalist stream in Arab society, which believes in the liberation of Arab women from the bonds of tradition and in their

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<sup>23</sup> Nohad Ali, "The Islamic Movement's concept of *al-Mujtama' al-Issami*." In: Elie Rekhess (editor), *Arab Minority in Israel and the 17<sup>th</sup> Knesset Elections* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 2007), pp. 100-110. [Hebrew]

advancement to key positions of influence in society. Advocates of this stream support the supreme goal of establishing a secular bi-national state, either within the 1967 borders or in the entire area extending from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River.<sup>24</sup> The issue of the al-Aqsa mosque, therefore, reflected a consolidation of forces that were affiliated with diverse streams in Arab society; some view the al-Aqsa affair as a purely religious issue, while others see the mosque as a symbol of Arab nationality and culture.

The mass demonstration in Sakhnin and the contemporaneous general strike were together the climax of a stormy week of public disturbances and violence in Arab towns around Nazareth and in the Triangle (Israel's central region), as well as in mixed Jewish-Arab cities such as Jaffa and Ramleh. Despite the demonstration of unity in Sakhnin, the strike was not wholeheartedly embraced by the Arab public. In the days preceding the strike, most of the attention focused on Ali Salam, mayor of Nazareth, who repeatedly criticized the youth-organized demonstrations in the city's streets, which rapidly deteriorated into public disturbances. At the conclusion of a spontaneous demonstration in Nazareth, which took place several days before the Sakhnin rally, Ali Salam lashed out in public against MK Ayman Odeh, head of the Joint List, and his reproof was caught on film. The personal rivalry between Salam and Odeh can be traced to the 2013 local elections in which Odeh supported Ramez Jeraysi, the representative of his own party (Hadash), who ultimately lost to Salam. But more than merely reflecting this rivalry, Salam's criticism represents a fundamental attitude shared by the local leaderships of Arab towns and cities: although they understand the Arab public's outbursts of rage regarding the al-Aqsa mosque issue, they preferred to dampen the outpouring of anger and control its flames. More specifically, they wished to restore life to its usual course as quickly as possible, in order to prevent economic repercussions that would be detrimental to the residents of their towns and cities.

Sharper and more principled criticism of the decision to hold a general strike and mass protest rally came from an unexpected direction. Sheikh Nasser Darawshe, Imam of the White Mosque in Nazareth — a well-known mosque located in the heart of the city's Old Market — firmly argued that the Follow-Up Committee's decision to hold a general strike was irresponsible. He cautioned that the only parties that would be injured by the strike and the concomitant absence of public services would be the Arab residents, and especially pupils and tradesmen. "If you wish to hold a strike, it should be in protest of the spreading violence in Arab society; dozens of incidents of crime [have occurred] since the beginning of the year, and the situation is only getting worse," the Imam lamented. Darawshe addressed the members of the Joint List directly, by stating that, "the Arab MKs, whom we elected, should sit down with [Prime Minister] Netanyahu and resolve all the problems and not stand on the sidelines and observe how the young people break, burn, and hurt the economy. The only thing we want is to live in peace and security."<sup>25</sup>

The question must therefore be asked: Why did the Supreme Follow-Up Committee organize a general strike in the Arab towns and a mass protest rally in Sakhnin despite such overt, albeit minority, criticism? The Committee's disregard of such opposition was grounded in what appear to be the underlying considerations motivated the strike and rally in the first place. One point, the obvious consideration, is related to national aspirations. The general strike and demonstration of strength in Sakhnin conveyed a

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<sup>24</sup> *Fasl al-Maqal*, 24 May 2013. [Arabic]

<sup>25</sup> Sheikh Nasser Darawshe, "The strike will harm no one but us. The anarchy must stop." *alarab.com* (*Kull al-Arab* weekly website), 12 October 2015. (<http://www.alarab.com/Article/708377>).

message to the government and Israeli right-wing politicians and citizens that they cannot ignore the existence of the (rather large) Arab minority that continues to adhere to its national Palestinian identity, despite attempts by the government and state agencies to stress Jewish character to the State of Israel.<sup>26</sup> It is also a message to the Palestinian Authority, by its expression of the central role of the Arab minority in Israel within contemporary Palestinian national activity. It is not a coincidence that MK Odeh stressed in an interview to Radio a-Shams (broadcasting from Nazareth) on the eve of the mass demonstration in Sakhnin that no strike related to al-Asqa been organized on a similar scale, not even in the West Bank.<sup>27</sup> The message was clear: The Arab minority in Israel is the gatekeeper of Palestinian nationalism.

While nationalist sentiments adequately explain the organizers' motivation to organize the Sakhnin strike, they do not explain why the Arab leadership waited an entire week since the flare-up before announcing the general strike and protest rally. This delay highlights a second consideration that apparently influenced the Follow-Up Committee's decision, one that is related to the inter-generational conflict in Arab society.

### **The online revolution in Arab society**

Over the past decade, Arab society has undergone a complete transformation, not least as a result of the online revolution that it experienced. Involvement of youngsters and young adults in public affairs and their influence on the public discourse in Arab society has increased in pace with the growing use of the Internet. Indeed, over the past decade, Internet use in Arab society increased at least threefold, from 23% in 2003 to 71% in 2012 (see Figure 1). The most impressive penetration rate is evident among young adults between the ages of 18 and 29, who account for more than one third of the entire population (compared to only one quarter among the Jewish population).<sup>28</sup> Research findings from 2012 indicate that 97% of this age group use the Internet every day, including one third who are "heavy users," who browse the Internet between three and four hours every day. Three of every four use Facebook every day. According to statistics for 2011-2012, Internet use among Arab teenagers and young adults is similar to Internet use of this group in Jewish society (approximately 92%). For 82% of Arab youth, the Internet is the main source of information and news. To comprehend the influence of the virtual sphere on the worldviews of Arab society's younger generation, it is sufficient to mention a 2012 survey that indicated that 77% of the Arab respondents consider Facebook to be a medium that eliminates societal restrictions and conventional norms.<sup>29</sup>

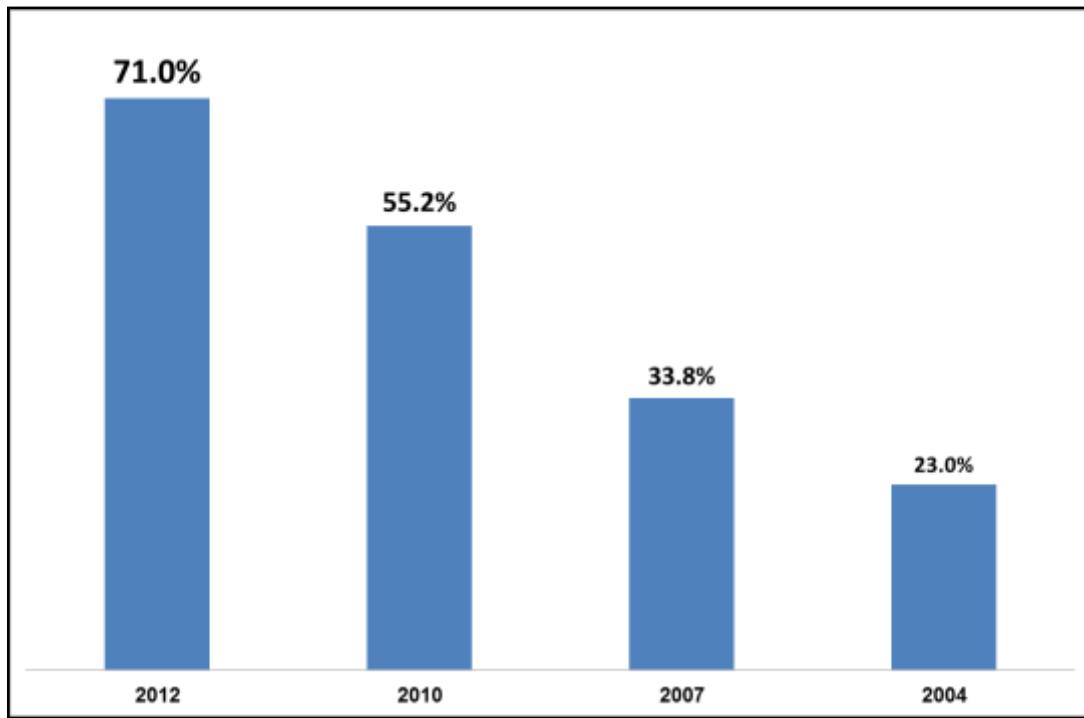
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<sup>26</sup> See: Arik Rudnitzky, *The Arab Minority in Israel and the 'Jewish State' Discourse* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> Ayman Odeh, "Netanyahu is a big liar; This is not a war between civilians." [www.ashams.com](http://www.ashams.com) (*Radio a-Shams* web site), 13 October 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), *Statistical Abstract of Israel 2015* (no. 66), table 2.3.

<sup>29</sup> Tal Pavel, "Arab Communication in Israel." In: Rafi Mann and Azi Lev-On (eds.), *Annual Report, The Israeli Media in 2012: Agendas, Uses and Trends* (Ariel University: School of Communication, June 2013), pp. 97-102; Harlan Lebo, *World Internet Project International Report – Third Edition, 2012* (University of Southern California, 2012), p. 33.



**Figure 1. Arab households connected to the Internet (selected years)**

These statistics point to one of the major changes that have affected Arab society in the past decade. During the preceding period, the primary sites of political mobilization were political parties, universities, civil society organizations, and mass rallies that coincided with national or religious events (such as the "Al-Aqsa In Danger" rally organized by the Islamic Movement). Today, mobilization has shifted to Facebook pages and online social networks. Events in the late 1990s and the events of October 2000 led to the emergence of the "Stand-Tall generation",<sup>30</sup> a generation of young people born in the 1970s and 1980s who emphasize their Palestinian identity and simultaneously demand that the State grant them full equality on the basis of their Israeli citizenship. In contrast, more recent political activism has been influenced by the emergence of the "smartphone and Facebook generation". These youngsters, born in the 1990s, are highly aware of the events as they unfold in real time, are extremely responsive to mobilization efforts, and are even more enthusiastic than members of the Stand-Tall generation to go out into the streets and to establish their presence. One of the signs of the emerging generation was evident on Nakba Day in May 2011. Influenced by the events of the Arab Spring, and the willingness of young people throughout the Arab world to take to the streets to protest against the existing political *status quo* in their countries, the young generation of Arab society in Israel responded to Facebook calls to go out and give public expression to the Nakba memory and the Right of Return.<sup>31</sup>

A similar situation developed in recent weeks. In the week preceding the general strike, spontaneous calls to action appeared on Facebook, urging youngsters in the Triangle area to mask their faces and go out to the streets in order to actively show

<sup>30</sup> Dan Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker, *The Stand-Tall Generation* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2002) [Hebrew].

<sup>31</sup> See: Uzi Rabi and Arik Rudnitzky (eds.), *Nakba Day and the Arabs in Israel* (Tel Aviv University: The Konrad Adenauer Program for Jewish-Arab Cooperation, 11 July 2011) [Hebrew].

their support for al-Aqsa.<sup>32</sup> *al-Hirak a-Shababi* (the Youth Movement) launched its own efforts to organize a popular demonstration in Nazareth that would express people's rage and protest against the situation in the al-Aqsa mosque.<sup>33</sup> This loosely structured organization draws its power from the social network activities of young Arabs, and its name has been cited in the media in recent years in the context of Arab Spring events. Organizations with similar names have also sprung up in neighboring Arab countries.



**Figure 2. Tweet preceding the scheduled demonstration in Nazareth, sent on Sunday, October 4, in the morning: “Demonstration of al-Hirak a-Shababi. Thursday. Nazareth / BIG [mall] junction. 6 PM”**

As members of the Joint List convened in Nazareth on Thursday morning (October 8) for a press conference to express their identification with the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement, the members of the younger generation had already organized and were ready to conquer the scene in a spontaneous demonstration scheduled for that same evening. The demonstration, which spun out of control and was forcefully dispersed by the police, received the brunt of Nazareth Mayor Ali Salam's criticism, for the economic damage that it caused. Nonetheless, the groups that identified with *al-Hirak a-Shababi* proudly highlighted the authentic nature of the youngsters' expression of rage, which one of the supporters described as follows: “The actions that are currently taking place in among the 'Palestinians of the Interior' [i.e. Palestinian citizens of Israel] are the spontaneous actions of youngsters, who are not following any specific political party or stream. These actions symbolize the growing awareness of this important sector of the Palestinian nation — the youth — and especially members of the fourth generation [after the Nakba]. This is the post-Oslo generation that was ignored by the PLO, the organization once considered the sole legitimate representative of all sectors of the Palestinian nation.”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> "Al-Hirak a-Shababi: Demonstration in Nazareth still valid. Our nation is one and indivisible." *alarab.com web site*, 8 October 2015. [Arabic]

<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Omar Kabha, "The role of al-Hirak a-Shababi." *arab48.com*, 12 October 2015 [Arabic].



### **The challenge of Arab leadership**

In the emerging circumstances, the Arab leadership was unwilling to hand over control of the events to such grassroots entities. Leaders of the Arab public preferred to channel the national passion into a singular collective event that would express strong protest against the al-Aqsa events, but would do so in an orderly and legal manner. Three days after the protest in Nazareth, the Supreme Follow-Up Committee convened an emergency meeting in Kufr Qara and decided to hold a general strike and protest rally in Sakhnin two days later (on October 13). The Follow-Up Committee denounced in its press release the policy of the government in Jerusalem and its intention to outlaw the Islamic Movement. The remainder of the press release was no less important. The Follow-Up Committee urged all popular entities and youth organizations to contribute to the success of the general strike, and to play a role in a popular campaign that would unite the entire Arab public. In the same breath, however, Committee members urged youngsters to demonstrate restraint and prevent damage to public property, vendors' stalls, and other facilities that serve the public.<sup>35</sup>

The general strike and protest rally in Sakhnin was the pinnacle of a tempestuous week for the Arab public, which was largely committed to the strike and appeared at the rally by the thousands. However, the demonstration of strength in Sakhnin also marked the storm's abatement. At the rally, protesters heard impassioned speeches assailing the policy of the government in Jerusalem, but public order was maintained and the police was hardly required to intervene. The cycle of spontaneous demonstrations and disturbances stopped completely, and it seems as if the rally opened a valve to release "nationalist steam," allowing life in the Arab towns to return to normal. This outcome can be attributed to the efforts of the town leaders and Arab MKs to calm passions. In the week preceding the rally, including the day of the rally itself, the Arab MKs cancelled and rescheduled plans to visit the al-Aqsa to signal their identification with the cause no fewer than three times. Ultimately, the recent events are a clear indication of the growing complexity of the challenges facing the leaders of Arab society, which corresponds to increasing sophistication of the smartphones wielded by its youngsters.

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<sup>35</sup> "Supreme Follow-Up Committee: General strike on Tuesday and nationwide demonstration in Sakhnin." *panet.co.il web site (Panorama's weekly website)*, 11 October 2015 [Arabic].

## Itamar Radai\* / Between Palestine and Israel: The Significance and Implications of the Supreme Follow-Up Committee Chair Elections

On October 24, 2015, Muhammad Barakeh was elected chair of the High Follow-Up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel, the fourth person to head this organization since 1982, and the first former MK to do so.<sup>36</sup> Barakeh's election ignited hopes in the Arab public in Israel that the Follow-Up Committee's activities would take on a new form, and that the long-standing vacuum in Arabic leadership would be finally filled, especially in light of the fact that no dominant Arab leader has managed to rise above the political or other disputes to genuinely represent the entire Arab public in Israel.<sup>37</sup>



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<sup>36</sup> Reverse situations occurred in the past, where the Follow-Up Committee's actions served as a stepping stone for candidacy for the Knesset. Such was the case of MK Hashem Mahamid, who headed the Umm al-Fahm local council before his election as MK representing HADASH, or Salah Murshid, head of the I'blin local council, who competed for the fourth slot on HADASH's list for the 13<sup>th</sup> Knesset. Also see As'ad Ghanem, "The Municipal leadership among the Arabs in Israel — Continuity and change," in *The Arab citizens of Israel approaching the twenty-first century. Hamizrach He-Hadash*, 37, 1995, 152.

<sup>37</sup> Zuhayr Khouri, "Nazareth: Muhammad Barakeh elected to head the Supreme Follow-Up Committee," October 24, 2015. <http://www.panet.co.il/article/1108885>. Jawwad Boulus, "Muhammad Barakeh: Chair of the Follow-Up Committee or a leader to the public?" 30 October 2015. <http://www.alarab.com/Article/711337>

### **Historical background**

The Supreme Follow-Up Committee of the Arab Public in Israel was established in 1982 at the initiative of Ibrahim Nimr Hussein, the then-chair of the National Committee of Heads of Arab Localities (NCALC; established in 1974), with the aim of creating an umbrella organization representing Arab citizens. At the time, the establishment of the Follow-Up Committee was considered the pinnacle of political organization efforts of the Arabs in Israel. The original members, 11 heads of local councils and the Arab MKs (Arab MKs representing Zionist parties have not been Committee members), were eventually joined by representatives of the Islamic movement (the southern and northern factions), the "Sons of the Country"<sup>38</sup> movement, the Arab Students' Association, and other organizations. The Follow-Up Committee operates through sub-committees on health, education, sport, social services, and agriculture.<sup>39</sup> The Committee has not received official recognition from the State of Israel although prime ministers have met with Committee members several times over the years. In the absence of official recognition, the Committee's main means of exerting its authority are demonstrations and national strikes, which the Committee has organized and declared several times, the most recent occasion being the demonstration in Sakhnin on October 13, 2015.<sup>40</sup> No elections were held for the position of chair until 2008, and the position was always filled by the NCALC chair (who was elected by all the heads of Arab governments, excluding the Druze governments, which have a committee of their own). Since 2009, these two positions were separated and it was decided that the Follow-Up Committee would elect one of its members as its chair. In recent years, the Follow-Up Committee seemed to be nearly paralyzed, and it remained leaderless for several months after the former chair, Muhammad Zaydan, stepped down. Meanwhile, Mazen Ghanaim, Sakhnin Mayor and NCALC Chair, filled the position temporarily. The establishment of the Joint Arab List on the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> Knesset elections and the internal dynamics in the List, deflected attention from the Follow-Up Committee and issues surrounding the elections for the Committee's chair: The debate over the Committee's role and its functioning as the leadership of the Arab public in Israel were deferred until after the national elections, when the political situation stabilized.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Abna al-Balad", literally "Sons of the Village", or "Sons of the Country". May be also translated as "Native Sons".

<sup>39</sup> Yaakov Landau, *The Arab Minority in Israel 1967-1991: Political aspects* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1993), pp. 76-77.

<sup>40</sup> See the article by Arik Rudnitzky in the current issue.

<sup>41</sup> Aziz Haidar, "The Joint List and the 2015 elections: Its formation, platform, and the challenges it faces," *Bayan*, 5, 2015. Abd al-Wahab Habayib, "The Joint List: Election tactic or strategy," *ibid*.



**Electing a chair: Seated from left to right: MKs Hanin Zoabi, Jamal Zahalka, Ayman Odeh; Standing: MK Ahmad Tibi.**

### **The internal dynamics of the elections**

Four candidates ran in the elections that were eventually held despite repeated delays: HADASH chair Muhammad Barakeh; Secretary General of Balad 'Awad 'Abd al-Fattah; Sheikh Kamel Rayyan, member of the Southern Faction of the Islamic movement; Attorney Muhammad Abu Raya, who ran on an independent ticket. The candidates thus represented the three major political streams in contemporary Arab society: the nationalist stream, the Islamist stream, and the stream that advocates Jewish-Arab cooperation, also known as the communist stream. However, unlike other elections, whose results have been described as being “foretold,” the Follow-Up Committee’s 56 members (including only two women – MK 'Aida Tuma-Suleiman of HADASH and MK Hanin Zoabi of BALAD) needed three rounds before they were able to elect a new chair.<sup>42</sup> In the first round, Barakeh received 21 votes, Shiekh Rayyan and Abd Al-Fatah received 16 and 9 votes, respectively, while Abu Raya received only one vote. The six representatives of the Northern Faction of the Islamic movement abstained. In the second round, in which the two leading candidates competed against each other, Barakeh won by a hair’s breadth, 24 votes to 23, with the members of the Northern Faction abstaining once again. Barakeh’s dramatic victory came from the votes of the “Sons of the Country” representatives, an extreme nationalist faction that boycotts national elections for ideological reasons. Their support for Barakeh may have stemmed not only from their shared secular agenda, but also from their affinity to Barakeh’s views on the civil war in Syria.<sup>43</sup> The Follow-Up

<sup>42</sup> Samah Salayma, “The Follow-Up Committee: The Arab Elections in which results are not known in advance,” Siha Mekomit, 25 October 2015 (<http://mekomit.il>).

<sup>43</sup> Wadea Awawdy, “The Palestinians Inside are electing a chairman to the Follow-Up Committee.” Al-Quds Al-Arab, 25 October 2015 (<http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=424123>). See additional arguments against positions of HADASH, BALAD and “Sons of the Country” on the civil war in Syria in Abd al-

Committee's by-laws mandated a third round in which a two-thirds majority was needed to ratify the leading candidate's election. This time, Barakeh received 38 votes, four more than the required minimum, apparently reflecting the Committee members' preference to elect a new chair rather than avoid a stalemate. In fact, the election of Barakeh, a seasoned politician, was accompanied by sighs of relief, and he was immediately congratulated by all Committee members, including his contenders and members who did not vote for him. MK Ayman Odeh was noteworthy among Barakeh's well-wishers: Odeh, head of the Joint List, had recently defeated Barakeh, his senior in HADASH, in the party's internal elections that preceded the Knesset elections. Barakeh's announcement of his intention to retire from his roles in the party was interpreted as a step toward building his new image as being above personal and party disputes.<sup>44</sup>

### **Significance and implications**

Media coverage and commentaries on Barakeh's election stressed his good relations with the Palestinian Authority. In an interview to the Hebrew-language press, Barakeh himself showed no reluctance to mention the telephone call he received immediately after his election from PA President Mahmoud Abbas ("Abu Mazen").<sup>45</sup> Abu Mazen rarely intervenes directly in the politics of "the Inside Palestinians," as most of the Arab citizens in Israel are known in PA media, or comments on their role in the Palestinian national struggle. In one of these infrequent comments, which he made after the recent Knesset elections, he stated, "We have reiterated that we will not intervene in internal affairs in Israel, although we have a right to ask how the Arab citizens of Israel are doing, what options of action they have, and how they are fulfilling their national duty and exercising their rights as citizens."<sup>46</sup> On this point Abu Mazen has been the loyal follower of official PLO policy since Yassir Arafat's era, according to which the historical role of the Arab citizens of Israel is not to play an active part in the Palestinian struggle, but to exercise their rights within the State of Israel, and thus express their identification with their brethren who are struggling within the 1967 territories.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, the PA has intervened in Arab society and politics in Israel several times over the years. Recently it was even published in Israel that Abu Mazen personally contacted MKs from the Joint List one month ago and asked them to refrain from visiting the Temple Mount /Al-Aqsa Mosque, expressing his objection to their active participation in the Palestinian struggle.<sup>48</sup> Wadea Awawdy, one of the most senior Arab journalists and analysts in Israel, urged the newly elected Barakeh to develop a policy that would be independent of Ramallah yet take into consideration the differences of opinion on the PA and its leader that divide the various streams in the Arab public, including BALAD and the Islamic Movement<sup>49</sup> Indeed, immediately after his election, Barakeh quickly called for

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Hakim Mufid, "The truth about what happened in Sakhnin," 22 May 2015 (<http://almnar.co.il/?mod=print&ID=8559>).

<sup>44</sup> Awawdy, "The Palestinians Inside are electing a chairman."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid; Arik Bender, "First of all, the State has to be loyal to us". Interview with Muhammad Barakeh, *Maariv*, 26 October 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Itamar Radai, "'We have no partner': Palestinians responses to 20th Knesset elections in Israel". *Tzomet Hamizrah Hatichon*, 2 April 2015.

<sup>47</sup> See for example, Zeev Shiff and Ehud Yaari, *Intifada* (Jerusalem: Shoken, 1990), pp. 205-221.

<sup>48</sup> Shmuel Even, "Abu Mazen's opposition to recognize Israel as a Jewish state: Strategic Significance", *INSS Insight*, 3 November 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Awawday, "The Palestinians Inside are electing a Chairman".



internal unity, reconciliation with his political rivals, and joint action in the interests of the Arab public, and additionally sent “his salutations to our Palestinian brethren who are uprising against the Occupation.” Sharp-eyed observers will note that his call is firmly aligned with the view that defines the historical role of the Arab citizens of Israel as “steadfastness” (*sumud*) and not “uprising” (*intifada*). This view is also consistent with the platform of HADASH, which advocates cooperation between Arabs and Jews and a civic agenda alongside its support for the national cause. Barakeh’s endorsement of such an agenda was also reflected in a statement he made to the Israeli newspaper Ma’ariv upon his election: “This is largely good news for people who voted for me and for everyone that I am supposed to represent, in other words, for the entire Arab population in Israel, but it is also good news for everyone [Arabs and Jews alike] who seeks justice, peace, and equality in Israel [...] I will represent the combined engagement in the national Palestinian cause and in our civic issues here.”<sup>50</sup> In this respect, Mohammad Barakeh’s view is the classic position of HADASH, and of MAKI before it, and is not substantially different from the position espoused by his fellow party member, MK Ayman Odeh, head of the Joint List.<sup>51</sup>

Barakeh’s election as Chair of the Follow-Up Committee marks HADASH’s continued recovery, after it reached a low point in its popularity when the party lost the 2014 municipal elections in Nazareth. HADASH’s recent status has given it and the supporters of Jewish-Arab cooperation, whom it represents, unprecedented dominance in the Arab political field in recent years. HADASH currently enjoys impressive political representation: five party members are MKs, more than any other party within the Joint List, one of them head the Joint List and another one, who is not a MK anymore, the High Follow-Up Committee.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, the internal dynamics of the elections for Follow-Up Committee chair highlighted the Islamic movement Northern Faction’s relative political weakness, isolation and marginalization of recent years. The movement’s boycott of the national elections, and subsequent boycotts of local government elections and even, since 2013, the local elections in Umm el-Fahm — the bastion of the movement’s Northern Faction — crippled the Movement’s ability to translate its popularity into political gains. The Northern Faction has now come to a dead end, and was unable to express support for any of the candidates in the internal elections for the Follow-Up Committee chair — including the secular candidate Barakeh and even the cleric Sheikh Rayyan, member of the more moderate Southern Faction. In such a situation, the Northern Faction’s only option was to continue to champion the Al-Aqsa Mosque cause, which has attracted the religious and national consensus among the Arab public.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Bender, “First of all, the State has to be loyal to us”.

<sup>51</sup> Shlomi Deskal, “A visionary leader? Ayman Odeh and the Arab Israeli political arena.” *Bayan* 5, May 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Imad Jeraysi, “HADASH – From collapse to steadfastness.” 4 November 2015 (<http://aljabha.org>).

<sup>53</sup> See Eran Tzikiyahu’s article in this issue.



**Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the Northern Faction of the Islamic Movement, casts a blank vote. Source: [www.panet.co.il](http://www.panet.co.il)**