

The Islamic Movement in Israel

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Just before the last Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah-September 1999) car-bombs exploded in Haifa and in Tiberias, injuring several passersby. The investigation by the security authorities found that each terror attack had been conducted by a cell of Israeli Arabs belonging to the extremist northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel. The cell was headed by a young *imam* who graduated from the Islamic College in Um el-Fahm. These Israeli Arabs were inducted into the movement by the HAMAS organization in the West Bank, and they were assigned the mission of planting bombs on Egged buses with the goal of causing mass fatalities. Evidently, due to a malfunction, the bombs exploded prematurely in their cars. Thanks to this, a heavy tragedy was averted and damage to relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel was prevented.

These attacks by Israeli-born Arab citizens shook Israeli public opinion, raising concern and questions regarding the Islamic Movement in Israel: Does the Islamic Movement present a danger to Israel's defense? Does its continued activity endanger the delicate fabric of relations — created with great effort over the course of many years — between the State of Israel and its Arab citizens? And, how should the government act toward the movement and deal with

it. I will try to respond to these and other questions in this article.

First Steps

The growth of the Islamic Movement among the Arabs of Israel is linked to the Islamic wave which began in the Middle East at the end of the 1970s. It gathered momentum and encouragement following Khomeini's revolution in Iran in 1979. During this period, there has been a growing and expanding phenomenon of return to faith among Arab Israelis, particularly among the young. The slogan, "Islam is the solution," has caught on in a variety of Israeli Arab circles; especially in the "Triangle" region, whose population is completely Sunni Muslim. The "born-again" phenomenon was also influenced by Islamic circles in the West Bank and by economic plight.

The driving force behind the Islamic Movement in Israel is its spiritual leader, Sheikh Abdallah Nimr Darwish, from Kafr Qassem. In 1979, Darwish organized scores of religious penitents into an underground framework named *Usrat al-Jihad* ("The Families of Jihad"). The goal of the group was to establish "an Arab Islamic state in Palestine." Its members stockpiled weapons, burned fields, and murdered an Arab in Um el-Fahm whom they suspected of collaborating with Israel. The military commander

of the group was Farid Abu-Moh, from Baka'a al-Gharbiyya. In March, 1981, the group's activities were exposed and its members were arrested, tried, and sentenced to various terms in prison. They were released in 1985 in the framework of a prisoner exchange between Israel and Ahmad Jibril's terror organization (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command).

Upon his release from prison, Sheikh Darwish studied the lessons of the past and concluded that organizing an underground to wage a jihad against Israel had been ill-considered decision because of the negligible chance of success for such an effort when pitted against Israel's military capability. He decided that, in the future, the Islamic Movement would engage only in lawful activity, with an emphasis on Islamic proselytizing, education, and development of health and welfare services for the Arabic populace. The Islamic Movement did, indeed, establish educational and health systems for the Arabic sector at large, along with broadening its services, building mosques, and amplifying proselytizing and study of the Quran.

In 1983, the movement ran for office in local municipal elections for the first time, winning the mayoralty of two local councils. During the 1989 elections, it won the races in six municipalities, including the city of

Um el-Fahm. The success in Um el-Fahm was repeated in 1993 and 1998, along with victories in Nazareth and additional locales.

Ideology and Structure

The ideology of the Islamic Movement is identical to that of the central stream of the Islamic Brotherhood, its parent movement. Its strategic goal (like that of all Islamic movements) is the establishment of an "Islamic state in Palestine." The movement is careful not to declare this goal in public or within the borders of the State of Israel.

The structure of the Islamic Movement in Israel is based on the concept of the Muslim Brotherhood. The central apparatus is *da'awa* (proselytizing), and it is divided among open *usras* and closed *usras* (*usra* meaning *family*, the term used for the cells into which the movement is organized). The open *usras* absorb all who join the movement, while the closed *usras* are for the more veteran and faithful members exhibiting leadership potential. The closed *usras* operate in secrecy.

The Islamic Movement denies the existence of these secret cells, and it is likely that many branches do not have them, because of the great risk involved in operating them within the State of Israel. There is no doubt, however, that, as a subsidiary of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Islamic

Movement has an orientation of secrecy and stealth. This concept is based on a saying from the period of the Brotherhood's founder, Hassan el-Bana: "Proselytizing is open, and the organization is secret." This means that the systems of Islamic proselytizing and education are open in nature, while all other systems of the Muslim Brotherhood and its activities are secret and should not be discussed with outsiders. The establishment of secret cells is an outgrowth of this concept, and it can be assumed that there also are secret cells within the Islamic Movement in Israel. The concept of secrecy reinforces internal discipline, loyalty and obedience to the leadership. It engenders volunteerism for jihad and the sense among the members of secret cells that they are "soldiers in the army of Allah."

The Islamic Movement in Israel has established a multi-faceted social-religious system. By doing so, it sees itself as an alternative to Israeli authorities who neglected the Arab sector and did not provide it with necessary services on an appropriate level. In recent years, it has established schools, pre-schools, medical clinics (for which only token fees are charged), mosques (which serve both as houses of worship and community centers), libraries, book stores, sports clubs and an Islamic football league incorporating 38 teams. It operates an

ambulance service and pirate radio and television networks, and it offers computer courses. In this way, the fundamentalist movement exploits advanced technologies while simultaneously condemning modern values from the pulpit and soapbox. The movement operates volunteer organizations which offer welfare services to needy residents and assist in finding solutions for housing and income problems.

In Um el-Fahm, it is readily apparent how this system separates itself from both the institutions of the State of Israel and those of Arab society. There are two colleges for training Moslem religious leaders (imams and preachers). One is located in Um el-Fahm and is operated by the Islamic Movement. The second, in Baka'a al-Gharbiyya, belongs to the Sufi order and is recognized by the Ministry of Education. The movement has various non-profit organizations, the most important being the al-Aqsa Association, the role of which is to preserve and protect Islamic sites around the country, such as mosques and cemeteries.

The movement's official newspaper, *Sawt al-Haq wa-al-Huriyya* ("the voice of truth and liberty"), is published in Um el-Fahm, and it frequently expresses harsh anti-Semitic condemnations of Jews and the State of Israel.

The activities of the Islamic Movement are funded from outside Israel by various foundations. Movement representatives occasionally travel abroad to raise monies, and its members and its supporters contribute to it generously.

Attitude toward the State of Israel

Since the establishment of the Islamic Movement, there have been disagreements about its attitude toward the State of Israel as a Jewish state and with regard to the form of the movement's activities within it. The debate sharpened when the question was raised as to whether it was appropriate and desirable to run in elections to the Knesset. Regional diplomatic developments — which included the Madrid Conference (October 1991) and the Oslo Accords (September 1993) — aggravated the dispute. That is because these events marked the onset of a deep divide between the PLO leadership, on one side, and HAMAS and Islamic Jihad on the other. Against the backdrop of these disagreements, two camps formed within the Islamic Movement. One, the pragmatic, was headed by Sheikh Abdallah Darwish, who claimed that the Islamic Movement had no choice but to integrate into the political life of the State of Israel and even run for the Knesset, while continuing its program of Islamic proselytizing and all of its other activities. Darwish also supported the political agreement

between Israel and the PLO, thus earning the support of Yasser Arafat and the central stream of the PLO. By contrast, the second camp is radical and separatist. It is headed by Sheikh Ra'id Salah, the Mayor of Um el-Fahm, and Kamal Hatib, a resident of Kafr Kana and leader of the movement in the Galilee. These leaders believe in religious, cultural, and social separatism for the Arabs of Israel. They argue that there is no reason the Islamic Movement should not take part in elections to head the local authorities, since the movement thereby serves the Arab residents in accord with Islamic principles and precepts. Furthermore, Islamic leaders elected mayor do not have to swear allegiance to the State of Israel. In addition, the leaders of the extreme factions stressed that heading local councils affords them the opportunity to implement Islamic beliefs through their power to issue orders and devise regulations forbidding the sale and consumption of alcohol, while imposing separation between boys and girls in the educational system. Above all, by virtue of their presence on the local councils, the Islamic activists can accelerate the Islamization of society through proselytizing and education. Nonetheless, the heads of the extreme factions maintain the Islamic Movement is forbidden from running for Knesset, for there each member must swear loyalty to the State of Israel, the state of the Jewish people. Such an oath amounts to recognizing Israel as

the Jewish state and the right of the Jews to continue ruling Palestine, which is sacred Islamic land (*waqf*) which must be liberated by jihad.

Sheikh Darwish, who, as noted, endorsed participating in elections, claimed that this would strengthen the Islamic movement politically and economically, while enhancing its status within the Arab sector. During the course of the intense arguments between the two camps, each side sought religious rulings from senior leaders in the Islamic world in order to strengthen its respective contentions. Ultimately, Sheikh Darwish ruled in favor of running for parliamentary elections in 1996. His decision brought about the formation of two different factions in the movement, though this division has never been officially acknowledged.

Darwish's faction joined the United Arab List (RA'AM), together with the Democratic Arab Party (MADA) of MK Abd al-Wahab Darawshe. The RA'AM list won four Knesset seats in 1996, two of them for the Islamic faction. During the May 1999, elections, the RA'AM list won five seats. Two of those elected, MK Abd al-Malek Dahamshe and MK Tawfik Hatib, are from the Darwish faction of the Islamic Movement. The status of Sheikh Darwish's faction is particularly strong in the Triangle and the Negev, while that of the radical faction, headed by Sheikh Ra'id Salah, is strong in Wadi Ara (Western Galilee) and the Galilee.

The newspaper *Sawt al-Haq wa-al-Huriyya* remains under the control of the northern radical faction, while the pragmatic faction distributes its own newspaper, *al-Mithaq* ("the covenant") in the Triangle.

The radical faction does not conceal the fact that it does not recognize the State of Israel. Accordingly, it refuses to take part in the political process along with the rest of the Arab sector. This attitude and the striving for religious-cultural-social separation of the Arab sector have a negative effect on the continuing efforts to integrate the Arabs of Israel into the mainstream of the country's life. The goal of the extreme faction is to establish a state based on Islamic law. Indeed, the faction's structure and methods raise additional problems, which must be addressed both by the authorities and the Arab public.

The first problem is terrorism. The Arabs of Israel were almost never involved in terrorism in the past. During the course of Israel's existence, there were only isolated examples of such activity among Israeli Arabs and these were immediately condemned by the Arab public. This approach by the Arabs of Israel derives from the sober recognition that engaging in terror would shred the special fabric of relations between them and the State of Israel, while also damaging the social and economic achievements for which they have worked so hard. Nonetheless, three terrorist attacks have been carried out during the past

decade by members of the Islamic Movement, primarily by its radical faction: The murder of soldiers near Kibbutz Gal-Ed in 1992; the murder of an Israeli couple in the Meggido Forest in August, 1999; and the explosions of the bomb-carrying cars in Tiberias and Haifa in September, 1999. It can be assumed that the terrorists who carried out these attacks were not sent by the Islamic Movement. It also can be surmised that Movement leadership would have advised them not to take these actions had it known about the plans in advance, in order to prevent harm to the movement. Nonetheless, it is not possible to excuse the Islamic Movement completely of responsibility for the attacks — for a number of reasons.

The first reason is that the public pronouncements of identification with HAMAS by the leaders of the radical faction — as they find expression in the declarations at rallies and sermons in the mosques — are equivalent to identifying with the terrorist actions of HAMAS. The HAMAS movement carries out cruel and heavy acts of terror against Israel which are different in their motivations from the Islamic terror directed against the various governments in Arab countries. For example, Muslim zealots seek to remove the leaders of Egypt and Algeria because they regard them as heretics deviating from Islam, although those leaders are both Arabs and Muslims. At the same time, they perceive Israel as being the only place

in the world where Islamic land is being ruled by a foreign government. According to their beliefs, this land is holy (*waqf*) land which, by divine right, should be ruled by Muslims, thus making the Islamic struggle in Israel a struggle of the highest priority. This struggle is seen as being justified and urgent, and the end justifies all means, including suicide missions (which are not employed in the framework of Islamic terror in Egypt). The leaders of the southern faction harshly condemned the suicide missions, and Sheikh Darwish characterized those who ordered them as "criminals." By contrast, the heads of the northern faction expressed "understanding" for the motivations of the terrorists in their newspaper, *Sawt al-Haq wa-al-Huriyya*.

Members of the extremist faction maintain contacts with HAMAS in the Territories. Dr. Saliman Aghbariyya, an activist in this faction from Um el-Fahm, has been arrested more than once for having financial connections with HAMAS. Sheikh Ra'id Salah, leader of the extremist faction, is a member of the board of governors of the Islamic University in Gaza; the most important stronghold of the HAMAS in terms of organization and education. Sheikh Ra'id rushed to Jordan, at the head of a mission, to congratulate Khaled Mash'al for surviving an attempt on his life by Israel's Mossad in September 1997. Similarly, he and his supporters went to Gaza to congratulate Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the leader of HAMAS, upon his

return home after being released from prison in Israel.

An additional reason for the Islamic Movement's responsibility for the terrorist attacks in Israel is the ongoing preaching in the mosques, particularly the Friday sermons, which includes both direct and indirect incitement against Israel. In many of these sermons, the clerics bring up the value of jihad and the importance of liberating Islamic land from the yoke of infidels. And they repeatedly refer to the fact that the Muslims ultimately defeated the Crusaders.

The heads of the extreme faction and its activists frequently declare that "al-Aqsa mosque is in danger." They have waved this slogan on a banner for four consecutive years at mass Islamic rallies held in Um el-Fahm, and the banner has become a permanent fixture in the city's football stadium.

In recent years, Sheikh Ra'id has been drafting Muslim volunteers "to rescue the al-Aqsa Mosque." In this framework, members of the extreme cell worked to rehabilitate "Solomon's Stables," located in the Temple Mount enclosure. They refer to the stables as the Marwan Mosque named after one of the Omayyad caliphs. These activities by Sheikh Ra'id and his people are causing great tension between Jews and Arabs and between the Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Those faithful believers who hear and see these messages easily understand that the "foreigners" and "Crusaders" who rule Islamic land and who

endanger al-Aqsa Mosque are none other than the Israelis. These words trickle down among the Islamic faithful and influence them.

The men who carried out the murders in the army camp near Kibbutz Gal-Ed told their interrogators that they were affected by the Islamic sermons and decided to fulfill their jihad obligation personally. They tried getting to Afghanistan, "to join the jihad warriors against the Soviets," but after failing in their attempt, they decided to begin their jihad in the army camp.

At first glance, it would seem that proselytizing and sermons do not involve incitement, and they do not violate Israeli law. In comparison, Egypt and Jordan have clear laws barring this phenomenon, and their authorities take decisive action against imams and preachers who violate the sermonizing laws. There is no such law in Israel, and it is doubtful whether any government would initiate the passage of laws in this area.

To date, these phenomena have influenced only a handful of individuals to set out on the path of subversion and terrorism. However, this is not the case with the next level of Islamic indoctrination, which features within it expressions of enmity against Jews and Judaism. This higher level, which includes anti-Jewish incitement using images evoking the Crusaders, has the potential to spur separatism, subversion, and terrorism.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Israeli authorities have, in the past, taken actions against Islamic activists, such as administrative detentions, examination of bank accounts and financial sources of the movement, searches of its offices, and temporary closures of newspaper offices. In the absence of effective laws preventing incitement, these steps are taken so as not to allow the heavy incitement against Israel, Judaism, and the Jews to pass with impunity. Such actions will never restrain the Islamic Movement, however, because it will always find more sophisticated ways to make its voice heard.

The manner in which Israel addresses the Islamic Movement must find expression in a comprehensive governmental approach to the Arab sector. This must be combined with the ongoing actions of the security authorities charged with rooting out and preventing subversive and terrorist activity. The comprehensive approach must be based on the assumption that the majority of Israel's Arab citizens aspire to integration within Israeli society as part of their coming to terms with the essence of the country's Jewish character. Still, even those who believe in such integration do not aspire to assimilate completely into Israeli society. They believe that Israel's Arabs must preserve their uniqueness, while demanding that the government assure equal opportunities on a par with Jewish citizens. This equality must be

seen in development local authorities, education, and the other aspects of everyday living. Closing the gaps and advancing technology within the Arab sector will advance the process of modernization in this sector of the population—a process which is detested by the Islamic Movement and which undermines its base of operations.

Particular attention must be devoted to the Negev Bedouins, including renewal of land registration arrangements, establishing the Bedouins in permanent settlements, reducing the growing unemployment among them, investing in the construction of classrooms, and extending better social and welfare services. Extensive resources need to be invested in the Negev, in order to stop the drift towards the Islamic Movement: about 70% of the Bedouin population voted for candidates of the movement during the last Knesset elections. No Israeli government has ever taken adequate steps to close the gaps, thus amplifying the sense of alienation from the country — even among those who favor integration into it — and strengthening the perception of the Islamic Movement as an attractive alternative to Israeli authorities.

A distinction must be made between the two factions of the Islamic Movement. The extreme faction, headed by Ra'id Salah, does not recognize the right of Israel to exist, and it strives, as noted, for the religious, cultural, and social separatism of the Arab sector. When the major argument

took place within the Islamic Movement as to whether to field candidates for the Knesset elections, the leaders of the radical faction, Salah Ra'id and Kamel Hatib, turned for advice to Sheikh Dr. Yusef el-Kardawi, in the Persian Gulf, who issued a religious ruling forbidding integration into Israeli political life. Kardawi's decision was based on the view that the State of Israel is not legitimate—a view also held by those who received his ruling. Kardawi also issued the religious rulings that paved the way for the suicide missions against Israel.

By contrast, the moderate faction, whose leadership includes Abdallah Nimr Darwish of Kafr Kassem, learned its lessons from the failed past attempts to organize a jihad against Israel. It came to the conclusion that there was no choice but to integrate into the political life of Israel, as long as Muslims were allowed to preserve their religious identity.

The Arab public in Israel, most of which, as noted, supports integration into the general society, must be alerted to the dangers that the Islamic extremists pose to Arab integration in Israel. In this context, it is regrettable that the Arab-Israeli leadership (the Supreme Oversight Committee) demonstrated solidarity with the Islamic Movement following the decision by the Israeli government to take steps (which were extremely moderate) against the movement in response to the attempted terrorist attacks in Tiberias and Haifa in

September, 1999. One would have expected the Arab leadership to take advantage of the severe incident to convey a clear message to the younger Arab generation to reject the extreme Islamic faction, because it endangers the delicate fabric of relations with the State of Israel. A sharp and unequivocal public condemnation of the initiators of these attacks and those who tried to carry them out was voiced by Abdallah Nimr Darwish, who characterized them as "criminals."

The State of Israel must mobilize the Arab public to place brakes on the extreme faction. It can do so if it takes determined and continuous action to create equality between the Arabs and Jews of the country. This would strengthen the majority of the Arab public that supports integration into society, while weakening the Islamic Movement. The peace process also is connected to the strength of this movement. Failure of the process will strengthen HAMAS and the extreme faction headed by Ra'id Salah. Success will strengthen the majority supporting integration.

Israel's policy toward the Islamic Movement must, therefore, be systemic, systematic and comprehensive, and not reactive, fitful or piecemeal. Extreme Islam in Israel, as in the entire Arab world, is not only a religious-political movement. Its sources are also in economic distress, in social gaps, and in lack of faith in governing bodies. The State of Israel can and must direct its attention to all of these areas.