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Iran's Relations with Palestine: Roots and Development

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration for SOAS PhD thesis

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For my Parents

Abstract

Despite a growing body of literature on the Iranian Revolution and its impacts on the region, scholars largely neglected Iran's connections with Palestine. This thesis is intended to fill the lacuna in the literature and to assist readers to unpack a history of Iran's relations with Palestine. To this end, I analysed connections of the Iranian revolutionary movements both from the perspective of the Left and the Islamic camps. In order to provide a historical background to the post-revolutionary period which is my main focus, I trace the genealogy of pro-Palestinian sentiments before 1979 as well. Moreover, the main focus in this thesis is on the causes and roots of Iran's post-revolutionary state's pro-Palestinian stance. I attempt to demonstrate that the Iranian revolutionary movements championed pro-Palestinian ideas mainly based on their ideological outlook, and then in the interest of the state.

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Introduction

“The conscience of Iranian intellectual should be bothered by the fact that Iranian oil burns in the tanks and airplanes that are killing his Arab and Muslim brothers”.

– Jalal Al-e Ahmad¹

The 1979 Islamic revolution dramatically transformed Iran’s foreign policy behaviour. This transformation included a change of official Iranian attitudes towards Palestine – from antagonism, to cordial relations, at least on the surface. This Iranian-Palestinian relationship has become a vital part of the political puzzle in the Middle East. Yet there is a lack of research on the dynamics of contemporary political relations between Iran and Palestine. This thesis attempts to fill a lacuna in existing academic literatures, and increase the understanding of relations between Iran and Palestine. The principal question of this thesis focuses on the roots of Iranian-Palestinian relations, and aims to answer the question of why the Islamic Republic of Iran has pursued pro-Palestinian policies since the Islamic revolution in 1979. What is the rationale behind Iran’s attitude towards Palestine? How does revolutionary Iran view the Palestinian question? And how have Iranian-Palestinian relations developed within the Islamic Republic?

Theoretically, I believe that constructivism is the best approach for studying Iranian-Palestinian relations. More specifically, given that constructivism comprises a wide spectrum of theories, I adopt Alexander Wendt’s approach in this thesis in order

¹ David Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power*, London: Frank Cass, 2001, p. 273.

to analyse Iranian-Palestinian relations². Wendt's approach allows me to throw light on this topic and support the answers to my principal questions. In this pursuit, despite of the absence of a stringent methodological approach, I am trying to give due attention to Michael Barnett's application of constructivism in his emphasis on the Middle East and to a lesser extent and without the claim to be comprehensive, Brent Steele's focus on ontological security.

My main argument is that Iranian-Palestinian relations are guided by ideational and normative structures, rather than solely the materialist ones. Although I do not deny the significance of material factors in helping guide Iran's policies towards the Palestinian question, my assessment – based on the constructivist approach – is that material factors are themselves created by a self-imposed social context. In other words, I believe that interests are constituted by ideas and belief systems. As such, I argue that the Islamic revolutionary identity of Iran plays a central role in shaping Iranian attitudes towards Palestine, as well as helping define the Islamic Republic's national interests. As Michael Barnett pertinently argues: "National identities are typically situated within a broader historical narrative."³

Since my main concern is the nature of Iran-Palestine relations after 1979, this thesis will not focus upon a discussion of Iran's broader foreign policy. Iran's broader foreign policy will however be referred to in order to enhance my argument and within the framework of primary research questions. The thesis will also touch upon Iran's engagement with the Palestinian cause in the pre-revolutionary era in the literature review. This is not in order to compare two historical periods, but purely in order to analyse and present the roots of Iranian involvement in the Palestine question. Finally,

² Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999

³ Shibley Telhami and Michael Barnett, *Identity and Foreign policy in the Middle East*, London, Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 65

it should be stated at this stage that this thesis is not a theoretical project, and as such I shall be limiting the theoretical discussion to applying aspects of constructivism as outlined by Alexander Wendt. Thus, I shall not engage with theoretical debates between realists and constructivists. It is also vital to indicate that some of the quotations are verbatim as they were presented to me by my interviewees during my conversations with them.

This thesis begins by evaluating and reviewing the existing academic literatures regarding Iranian-Palestinian relations. I aim to review the history of Iranian engagement with the Palestinian issue since its beginning in 1948 and identify the roots of Iran's behaviour towards Palestine, even before the establishment of Israel in 1948. In the section following the literature review, attention is directed towards introducing a theoretical framework by analysing and explaining the constructivist approach of Alexander Wendt. After this section, I introduce my main argument, which is divided into two parts. First, I emphasise the pan-Islamic rhetoric behind Iran's foreign policies. Second, I highlight the significance of material factors in constituting Iran's pro-Palestinian policy. A preliminary assessment of the roots of Iranian-Palestinian relations is offered in the conclusion. The outline of the research plan, the methodological framework and fieldwork plan is offered in the final section.

Literature review

There is a consensus amongst scholars that Iranian-Palestinian relations can be dated back to Iran's pre-revolutionary period. From Hamidreza Dehghani's point of view, Iran's engagement with the Palestinian question can be traced back far earlier than the 1979 Islamic revolution and Ayatollah Khomeini's pro-Palestinian rhetoric. Dehghani's essay focuses on Iran's opposition to a "two state solution", and the partition of Palestine advocated by the great powers. Dehghani's essay gives a brief

introduction of Iran's position with regards to the Palestinian question since 1947 until the end of the Shah's regime in 1979. Following the migration of a group of Iranian businesspeople in the late 19th century, Iran established a public relations office in Palestine - one which growingly became less functional due to financial difficulties, and the British occupation of Palestine in the early 20th century.⁴

Dehghani indicates that Iran was appointed with eleven other countries to join the special committee on Palestine by the United Nations General Assembly in May 1947. Two suggestions were initially made. First, 'the Minority Plan' proposed by Iranian delegates – and backed by India and Yugoslavia – suggested the end of British mandate in Palestine, and the formation of a federal government that included both Arabs and Jews, with Jerusalem as its unified capital.⁵ The second, known as the 'Majority Plan', was proposed by Holland and Australia, and suggested the partition of Palestine and designating of around 56 percent of the land to a Jewish state. The majority plan was passed and culminated in Resolution 181 in November 1947. Israel occupied the western part of Jerusalem despite Resolution 194 demanding that Jerusalem be given a special status and controlled by the international community. The state of Israel was declared following the end of the British mandate in Palestine.⁶

According to Dehghani, Iran's representative to the UN, Mr. Nasrollah Entezam visited Palestine at the time and warned that the partition of Palestine would turn the region into a battlefield, writing: "I did not want to be seen as pro-Palestine but at the same time I wanted the resolution to meet their interests".⁷ Shortly after declaring its

⁴ Hamidreza Dehghani, "Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine", *The Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Summer, Vol. XXI, No. 3, Tehran 2009, p.40.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 45-47.

⁷ Ibid., p.54.

foundation, the Israeli foreign minister Moshe Shertok sent an official telegraph to Tehran and asked Iranian authorities to recognise the Jewish state. In response, according to Dehghani, the Iranian government appointed a representative to supervise the concerns of Iranian citizens' residing in Palestine. Such a response by the Pahlavi's regime created a historical mass uprising by the Iranian clergy and society that became the precedent for Iranian-Palestinian relations until the present day. In 1948, Ayatollah Abol Qassem Kashani, a prominent Iranian Shia cleric, called for popular gatherings in support of the Palestinian people.⁸ Ayatollah Kashani announced that

“[b]y the support of great powers, these Jews have forcefully established an entity and are now naming Palestine their land and to achieve this they spill the blood of Muslims, day and night. Considering that the sacred religion of Islam in this situation makes it mandatory for all Muslims to support the oppressed Palestinian Arabs and Muslims”,⁹

Ayatollah Kashani further stated that, “[w]e Iranians will rebel even when the (Shah's) government recognised Israel”.¹⁰ The mass protests ended when Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq shut down the consulate and recalled all Iranian officials from Palestine in 1951. Mossadeq's deputy, Hussein Fatemi, stated that “[t]his government is determined not to officially recognise the Israeli regime and will not accept any representation of that regime in Iran”.¹¹

After the fall of Mossadeq's democratically elected government by the Anglo-American coup in 1953, the Shah's regime resumed relations with Israel. Gawdat Bahgat, Sasan Fayazmanesh, and Dehghani have all respectively highlighted that in this

⁸ Hussein J. Agha and Ahmad S. Khalidi, *Syria and Iran: Rivalry and Cooperation*, London: Pinter, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995; and Dehghani, “Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine”, p. 33.

⁹ Dehghani, “Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine”, p.70.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.71.

period, the Shah's secret police – SAVAK – established closer cooperation with Mossad until the fall of the Shah in 1979.¹² Ayatollah Khomeini was of the opinion that the Shah's assistance to Israel – which included the provision of substantial oil supplies – was one of the main issues turning people against the royal regime.¹³ He announced that “the Shah appropriated the oil that belonged to Muslims and gave it away to Israel. This has been one of the main reasons why I opposed the monarch”.¹⁴

Furthermore, Dehghani highlights that Ayatollah Khomeini's support for Palestine dates back to the establishment of the Israeli state itself in May 1948 and that it gained momentum thereafter. Dehghani stresses that in a speech in 1963 which led to his arrest and exile, Khomeini stated that “[t]oday I was informed that a number of clerics have been taken to SAVAK, where they have been asked not to talk about the Shah and avoid mentioning Israel and saying that religion is in danger”.¹⁵ Ayatollah Khomeini publically denounced Israel's occupation of Palestine at the time when supporting Palestine was a controversial topic. According to Hussein Agha and Ahmed Khalidi, in late 1968, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* supporting the Fatah's call for armed struggle against Israel and authorising Iranians to pay their *Zakat* in support of Palestinian fighters as part of the holy Muslim obligation to donate a percentage of salary to charity.¹⁶ Dehghani concludes his essay by indicating that Mossadeq's

¹² Sasan Fayazmanesh, *The US and Iran: Sanctions, War and the Policy of Dual Containment*, New York: Routledge, 2008, p.52; Gawdat Bahgat, *Israel and the Persian Gulf: Retrospect & Prospect*, USA: University Press of Florida, 2008, p.41; Dehghani, “Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine”, p.72.

¹³ After six days war in 1967, the Shah's government supplied Israel with crude oil and also shipped its oil to the Western markets via the joint Iranian-Israeli Eilat-Ashkelon pipeline. For more information, see:

Uri Bialer, “Fuel Bridge across the Middle East—Israel, Iran, and the Eilat-Ashkelon Oil Pipeline”, *Israel Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Fall 2007). According to Uri Bialer, the entire Israeli-Iranian pipeline project shut down after the Shah's fall and the decision of the Islamic government to sever all ties with Israel. (p.50)

¹⁴ Dehghani, “Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine”, p.75.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.77.

¹⁶ Agha & Khalidi, *Iran and Syria*, p.5. Zakat is a percentage of Muslim income that is devoted to charity.

national government cut off ties with Israel. These ties were resumed as the Shah regained power following the 1953 coup. He concludes that Iran's position towards Palestine has been principally based on the teaching of Islam, the Quran, and the directives of the late Ayatollah Khomeini.

In another Persian-language study of the subject matter published in Iran, Ali Akbar Velayati, a former foreign minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1981-1997) and current advisor to the Supreme Leader in International Affairs, offers a brief history of Iran's policy towards Palestine in the period between 1979 to 2006 in his book *The Islamic Republic of Iran and Palestine Developments*. Velayati clarifies that, the "formation of an Islamic world society" requires supporting "oppressed" against "oppressors". As such, protecting Muslim nations is a strategic objective of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy.¹⁷ The book emphasises that the most vital source for understanding Iran's foreign policy is the Islamic Republic's constitution whose articles are taken from the Quran and Islamic principles.¹⁸ Velayati points out that according to Verse 29 of Surat Al-Anbiya (The Prophets), which is embedded in Article 11 of Iran's constitution, all Muslims comprise a single nation. As such, the Islamic Republic is obliged to employ its foreign policy as a means to unifying all Muslim nations.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jumhouri Eslami Iran va Tahavolla'at-e Felestin 1357-1385* [Islamic Republic of Iran and Palestine Development 1979-2006], Tehran: The Centre for Documents and Diplomatic History of the Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1386 [2007]., pp. 12-15.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁹ Velayati, *Jumhouri Eslami Iran va Tahavolla'at-e Felestin 1357-1385*, p. 54. Chapter 21:92 of the Holy Quran states: "Indeed this, your religion, is one religion, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" (see <http://quran.com/21>). Velayati states that the constitution of the Islamic Republic reflects the Quran's teachings, and that Iran's foreign policy is directed accordingly. Article 11 of the constitution declares that "[i]n accordance with the sacred verse of the Qur'an ('This your community is a single community,' [21:92]), all Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world" ("Islamic Republic of Iran Constitution", *Iran Online*, available at: <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution.html> [Accessed 16 January 2017]). Also see Dehghani Firooz-Abadi, "the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ideal International System", p. 54 in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Reza Molavi (eds), *Iran and the International System*, London: Routledge, 2012.

According to Velayati, from the beginning of his revolutionary movement (in the 1960s), Ayatollah Khomeini has placed Palestine at the heart of the Islamic revolution's moral principles based on the teachings of Islam.²⁰ Velayati begins by quoting from the Ayatollah's speeches before and after the revolution in regard to the Islamic link between Palestine and Iran and states that the Palestinian issue has been the core element in the Islamic revolution. Ayatollah Khomeini designated the last Friday of each Ramadan as the '*Yom al-Quds*' (the Day of Jerusalem) urging all Muslims to actively participate in protests against the Zionist state.²¹ The PLO leadership was warmly received by Khomeini, and the building once occupied by the Israeli diplomatic mission in Tehran was handed over to Palestinian delegates. Iran furthermore severed its relations with Egypt due to its recognition of Israel, and fully endorsed the PLO's struggle against Israel.²² However, due to Yasser Arafat's support for Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war, relations between the PLO and Tehran deteriorated. Iran's pro-Palestinian policy was re-directed towards movements that were closer ideologically to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Yet although Iran began to review and redirect its support from the PLO to other Palestinian movements such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, its support for the Palestinian cause continued due to being ingrained in Iran's revolution.²³

A number of peace-proposals and agreements were rejected by the Islamic Republic, such as the "Fahd Peace-Plan" in 1981, the "Madrid Conference" in 1991, the "Oslo Accords" in 1993, the "Wye River Memorandum" (signed in 1998), the

²⁰ Velayati, *Jumhouri Eslami Iran va Tahavolla-e Felestin 1357-1385*, pp 24-25.

²¹ Ibid., p.28.

²² Ibid., p.28.

²³ Ibid., p.43.

Camp David Summit in 2000, and the “Road-Map” (2002-2003).²⁴ Velayati argues that the Islamic Republic refused to endorse these plans because they ignored the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people to have their home-land liberated from Zionist occupation.²⁵ From the Islamic Republic’s viewpoint, the Palestinian issue is not only an Arab issue but also an Islamic problem, and hence Tehran has obligations and duties rooted in Islam to publicly pursue its policy in this area.²⁶ Velayati cites former President Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, who states that “[t]he Islamic Republic of Iran like many other Palestinian factions does not concur with the peace-plans because the agreements are not just and do not address the issue of Palestinian rights to return to their homeland”.²⁷ According to Velayati, the Islamic Republic’s key figures have reached a consensus regarding the Palestinian question because “[t]he Palestinian issue has its place within Ayatollah Khomeini’s ideology and it resembles a battle between oppressed Muslims and non-Muslim oppressors”,²⁸ and according to the Quran the Islamic Republic has its moral duty to stand and reject any domination of non-Muslim oppressors against oppressed Muslims.²⁹

In one of the very few articles in English about the subject which can be found in the edited volume, *Arab-Iranian Relations*, Khair el-Din Hasseb provides a conceptual account of Iran’s engagement with the Palestine issue. The editor designates a chapter written by Ahmad Sudki El-Dajani to Iran’s ideological position towards the

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., pp.167-177.

²⁶ Ibid., p.169.

²⁷ Ibid., p.170.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 99.

²⁹ Ibid., p.15. See also Quran 4:141, which states “Allah will judge between [all of] you on the Day of Resurrection, and never will Allah give the disbelievers over the believers (Muslims) a way [to overcome them].” (see <http://quran.com/4>)

Palestinian cause. From El-Dajani's point of view, the Palestine Question is significant to both Arabs and Iranians. Al-Dajani states:

The attachment of our Arab and Iranian brethren to the Palestine question is a strong one, with deep historical roots lodged in historical memory and popular conscience. Palestine in popular conscious of every Arab and Iranian is a land blessed by God, it contains the Aqsa Mosque, associated with the prophet's ascension to heaven and containing the Mosque of Abraham, visiting it is a dream to be sought.³⁰

From El-Dajani's perception, the sense of belonging to a single civilization – 'the Islamic dominion' – is what binds Arabs and Iranians together. This crucial fact should anchor our understanding of Arab-Iranian relations. The author's view is that the place of the Palestine Question forms the backbone of Iranian-Arab relations from 20th century onwards. The Palestine Question materialised because of the Zionist colonialist settlement of Palestine, at a time when all elements of the Islamic dominion confronted European colonialism. Iranians experienced Tsarist Russian interference from the north, and British intrusion into their internal affairs from the South. Arab states under Ottoman rule, on the other hand, experienced Anglo-French colonial invasion. It was not difficult, according to Al-Dajani, for Iranians and Arabs to discern a correlation between colonialist stratagem in Palestine and what the colonial powers had plotted for both of them in all the Islamic dominion.³¹ In other words, history matters in understanding the roots of Iranian-Palestinian relations.

A number of scholars offer equally valid points that Iranian-Palestinian ties are rooted in history as well as Islam. From the perspective of Eric Hooglund, "the events

³⁰ Khair el-Din Hasseb, *Arab-Iranian Relations: Present Trends and Future Prospects*, Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1998, p.347.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.348.

in British mandatory Palestine coincided with a period of anti-British sentiment in Iran (during late 1940s) causing Iranians to identify with Palestinians as fellow victims of British imperialism".³² According to Hooglund, Palestine has a historic-Islamic status for "pious" Iranians as "a Muslim-land that has been forcibly alienated from Muslim rule by non-Muslims".³³ He believes that there is a consensus amongst Iranians that Iran should have a pro-Palestinian policy, despite there being varying levels of enthusiasm amongst different generations.³⁴ Hooglund concludes that religious sentiment plays a vital role in formulating Iranian behaviour towards the events in Palestine and Lebanon.³⁵

A group of influential Shias such as Seyyed Tabataba'i and Seyyed Hussein al-i-Kashef al-Ghata' were present at the Islamic Conference in 1931, demonstrating a sign of Iranian historical solidarity with the Palestinian people.³⁶ According to Al-Dijani, the prominence of Palestine for both Arabs and Iranians demonstrates that both Sunnis and Shias have the capacity to unite under the common banner of Islamic civilization. Moreover, the Arab world witnessed how the Iranian youth responded and supported the revolution of the Palestine Liberation Organisation since the very beginning of its foundation in 1964.³⁷ In Al-Dijani's view, the expansion of Zionism and American hegemony within the Islamic dominion is the backbone of the Middle East order, as advocated by Americans and Western elites, prompting popular resistance from both Iranians and Palestinians. For the Arab nation, the Palestine issue has become 'an

³² Eric Hooglund, "Iranian Views of the Arab-Israeli Conflict", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1995, pp. 89-90.

³³ Ibid., p. 89.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 91.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

³⁶ Khair el-Din Hasseb, *Arab-Iranian Relations*, p.350.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 351.

Islamic-Arab question' and for the Iranians an 'Islamic-Iranian question'. Al-Dajani concludes his argument by pointing out that both Iranians and Arabs view the Zionist regime as a racist entity at the heart of Palestine, the heart of the Arab world, and the heart of the *ummah*. As such, a colonial entity of this kind cannot be a part of the regional order. It is obvious, that such books lack the scholarly acumen of Hooglund's and that they were written within a context that was distinctly ideological and political geared to the politics of revolution.

Zamel Saeedi writes from a similar partial perspective. He concentrates on similarities and differences between the manners in which both Arabs and Iranians have confronted and dealt with the issue of Palestine. From Saeedi's point of view, the similarities between the two are far greater than the differences, the Palestinian cause serves to unite the Islamic *Ummah*.³⁸ For this reason, there was a dichotomous relationship between the people of Iran and the Shah's government concerning the Palestinian cause. Cooperation between Iran and Israel went against the wishes of the Iranian people, and was one of the major causes of the Islamic revolution in 1979. The Palestinian cause was ever-present in the consciousness of the Iranian people in the lead up to the Revolution. According to Saeedi, "revolutionary Islamic Iran always believed that the Palestinian cause was a just one".³⁹ It can be said that it was because of this belief that the Islamic Republic did not change its pro-Palestinian stance despite Arafat's pro-Saddam's position during the Iran-Iraq war. According to Bahgat, Iran always distinguished between the broader Palestinian people on one side, and Arafat and his top aides on the other.⁴⁰ From Al-Dajani's point of view, Iran's attachment to the Palestine issue remained steadfast under the most difficult of conditions, whether

³⁸ Ibid., p. 367.

³⁹ Ibid., p.352.

⁴⁰ Gawdad, *Israel and the Persian Gulf*, p.42.

during the Iran-Iraq war, or as the position of the Palestinian leadership towards Iran changed.⁴¹ Saeedi concludes his essay by indicating that the Palestine issue has become a cause close to the hearts of all Muslims, and as such a concern of all Muslims who refuse to forfeit Islamic land and rights. Again, this kind of approach seems to abstract and does not give and answer to the nuances of the Iranian position towards Palestine (and much less about the so called Muslim strategy).

There is a more nuanced and scholarly approach in Houchang Chehabi. Although he is not comprehensive in his chapter on the subject matter, Chehabi investigates the anti-Shah Iranian opposition in Lebanon and their relations with the Palestinian issue in chapter eight of his edited book.⁴² According to Chehabi, most of the Iranian revolutionary factions were sympathetic towards the Palestinian cause, and as such established friendly ties with their Palestinian counterparts, supporting them morally in their struggle against the Zionist regime. Chehabi classifies the political tendencies of these Iranian opposition groups as Leftists, Mossadeqist Nationalists, and Islamists; examining their connections with the Palestinian rebels during the 1960s and 1970s. He adds that the presence of many PLO military camps in Lebanon made it an ideal place for Iranians to organise and seek military training. The external wing of the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI) – established by Dr. Mostafa Chamran, Ibrahim Yazdi, Sadeq Qotbzadeh, and Ali Shariati – formed strong ties with Musa Sadr, and began to establish an intimate relationship with Fatah in Lebanon. Arafat visited the LMI camps in Lebanon and, in collaboration with the Lebanese Amal, they facilitated training for a number of Shia youth near the Syrian border. However, according to

⁴¹ In Khair el-Din Hasseb, *Arab-Iranian Relations*, p.352.

⁴² Houshang Chehabi, "The Anti Shah Opposition and Lebanon", in Houshang Chehabi (ed.), *Distant Relations: Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, pp. 180-197.

Chehabi, Dr. Chamran's focus was mainly on the social welfare and training of local youth, and as such he did not agree with the PLO's factional policies.

Chehabi rightly observes that the left wing guerrilla groups of Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MKO) and the Marxist group of the Fadaïyan-e Khalq established ties with the PLO in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Mujahedin-e Khalq (MKO) contacted Fatah in March 1970 via a contact in Dubai, and some of its members including Masoud Rajavi (who later became the group's leader) attended Palestinian training camps in Jordan. After the so called 'Black September' when the Jordanian authorities brutally ended the Palestinian military presence in Jordan, left wing Iranians left Jordan for Dubai. Upon being arrested, and prior to being deported, these MKO members hijacked a plane and landed in Iraq. In Baghdad, Fatah rescued them from being deported to Iran and sent them instead to Syria. In total, around thirty activists of the MKO were given Palestinian ID cards and were trained at PLO camps near Tartus in Syria, and in Beirut.⁴³ According to Chehabi, two members of the Marxist Fadaïyan received military trainings as early as 1967 at Fatah camps in Jordan. In the 1970s, the Marxist Fadaïyan maintained close ties with George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and Ahmad Jibril's splinter group the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine General Command (PFLP-GC). Indeed, George Habash even wrote a number of prefaces to theoretical essays written by the Fadaïyan activists. There were close links between Mossadeqist Nationalists that established their headquarters near the Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, and the Palestinian fighters. Their pamphlets were printed in the Palestinian printing houses in both Arabic and Persian, and distributed amongst Iranians in Lebanon, Kuwait and Iraq.⁴⁴

⁴³Ibid., pp. 182-189.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.189

Chehabi regards the connection between Islamist followers of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Palestinian cause as having been very strong, deeply rooted, and unique. While followers of Musa Sadr were preoccupied with Lebanon's internal affairs during the Lebanese civil war, the main focus of Ayatollah Khomeini's followers was to support Palestinian factions. In Chehabi's view, Ayatollah Khomeini attempted to break through the Shia-Sunni divide by prioritising the liberation of Palestine. Seyed Akbar Mohtashami once reported to Ayatollah Khomeini that there were some signs of hostility towards the Palestinian rebels in South Lebanon within the Shia local population, incited by some local clerics due to Israel's attacks on their villages. In response, Khomeini strongly rejected all forms of localism and sectarianism, and in October 1972 used the onset of Ramadan to issue a declaration calling on all Muslims – particularly those residing in areas where the Palestinians were active – to support the struggle against Israel. Ayatollah Khomeini stated,

[t]oday we observe what the agents of colonialism have done to the (Palestinian fighters), first in Jordan and then in Lebanon. We observe the propaganda and conspiracies directed at them by the agents of colonialism, all with the aim of separating Muslim groups from the Palestinian fighters and expelling them from strategically vital locations.⁴⁵

While in his Iraqi exile, Khomeini continued to pay considerable attention to the Palestinian cause. Chehabi characterises the Palestinian cause as an Islamic priority for Ayatollah Khomeini, and as such something that transcended local political conflicts and regional matters related to the Shia-Sunni divide. He concludes that a wide spectrum of Iranian oppositional groups maintained close ties with the Palestinians.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 192-193.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 197.

For those Iranians, their activities, along with the Palestinians and Muslim Lebanese, were part of a wider struggle of the oppressed (*mutadafin*) against the oppressors (*mutakbarun*).

Agha and Khalidi offer a thorough history of political cooperation between Syria and Iran since the 1979 revolution, arguing that Lebanon and Palestine proved key arenas for an alliance given that both Tehran and Damascus opposed Israel's invasion of Palestine and south Lebanon.⁴⁷ Yet Khalidi believes there to be several factors which helped cause the decline of the bond between the PLO and the new leaders in Iran. One major factor was the divergence between the PLO's secular nationalism and Iran's Islamic ideology (Ayatollah Khomeini and other Islamic revolution's leaders including Rafsanjani had urged Arafat to adopt Islam in his struggle against Zionism).⁴⁸ The readiness of the PLO to strike a deal with Israel, its opportunism in mediating between Iran and the West, and most importantly its support for Iraq against Iran during the Iran-Iraq war were also crucial factors in the decline of the Iranian-PLO relationship.⁴⁹ Iran, according to Khalidi, lost faith in the PLO, but not in the Palestinian cause, turning instead towards the Palestinian factions that shared its ideological tendencies.⁵⁰ From Khalidi's point of view, for Palestinian 'rejectionists', Iran as a regional power and its stance to uphold fundamental Palestinian claims – such as the right to self-determination, and the right of return of all refugees, which could have been overlooked or abandoned – was important. This stance led Palestinian

⁴⁷ See Agha and Khalidi, *Syria and Iran*, chapters 2 & 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.80.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.81.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.81.

Islamic factions such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad to welcome Iranian support and established close ties with Tehran.⁵¹

Khalidi and Agha also weave in a realist approach to their study, indicating that Iran has sought to create a balance of power by supporting “Palestinian rejectionists” in order to weaken the U.S. and Israel in the region. Nevertheless, they clarified that this is in accordance with Iran’s revolutionary ideology to support Palestinian Islamic factions.⁵² Agha and Khalidi conclude their chapter by pointing out that Iran’s offer of high-spirited support contrasted with the homogenous immobility of the rest of the Arab world and the Soviet Union, and hence was valuable and influential for the Palestinian resistance.⁵³

Elaheh Rostami-Povey demonstrates in chapter six of *Iran’s Influence* the connection between Iran and the Palestinian question from a distinctly scholarly perspective. Rostami-Povey’s analysis can be divided into two sections. The first offers information regarding Iran’s relationship with the Palestinian Islamic movement, Hamas, and the second focuses on Hamas’ political structure and its position within Palestinian politics. The failure of the Arab states in confronting Israel and the signing of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt coincided with the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. According to Rostami-Povey, the revolutionary slogan of “Iran today, Palestine tomorrow” resonated with the Palestinians. The disorganisation and lack of success of the secular Arab Left, and dissatisfaction with nationalism as a political force, paved the way for the Islamic resistance to what was referred to as Zionism and imperialism.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

⁵² Ibid., pp. 92-94.

⁵³ Ibid., p.15.

⁵⁴ Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Iran’s Influence: A Religious-Political State and Society in its Region*, New York: Zed, 2010, p.159.

Rostami-Povey cites Laleh Khalili in arguing that a number of Palestinian thinkers and intellectuals who believed in the liberation of Palestine were impressed by the Islamic revolution, and responded positively to its pro-Palestinian discourse.⁵⁵ Fathi al-Shaqqi who wrote *Khomeini, The Islamic Solution and the Alternative*, within which he announced that the Islamism of Khomeini was the only viable programme for Palestinian emancipation.⁵⁶

From a comparable point of view, Michelle Browsers offers a theoretical explanation of how the political ideology of the Arab world has been influenced by the Islamic discourse of the Iranian revolution. According to Browsers, the Islamic revolution of Iran became an influential motivation for a number of well-known Palestinian activists with nationalist or secular tendencies as well as Islamists. For instance, Monir Shafiq – a Christian Palestinian and a former Marxist-Leninist activist (within the Democratic People’s Front for Liberation of Palestine) – under the influence of the Islamic revolution began to undertake an analysis of the failure of pan-Arabism in resisting the Zionist regime. Shafiq converted to Islam in 1980, and pronounced Islam as the core element for unity among Palestinians. Shafiq joined Islamic Jihad and became a vital ideologue and spokesperson for Hamas.⁵⁷ The Islamic revolution in Iran also influenced other well-known influential Arab thinkers such as Adil Husayn, Hassan Hanafi, Al-Dijani, and Fathi Shaqaqi. After the Iranian Revolution, al-Dijani, the Palestinian historian, began a process of reframing the Palestinian struggle from an

⁵⁵ Laleh Khalili, quoted in *Ibid.*, p.158.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.158.

⁵⁷ Michaelle L. Browsers, *Political Ideology in the Arab world: Accommodation and Transformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p.24.

Arab nationalist framework to one that saw the conflict as the central component in a confrontation between Islam and the West.⁵⁸

Afshin Matin-Asgari narrates a captivating story of the foundation and growth of the Iranian student movement from the 1930s to 1979 revolution. His main analysis is on the evolution of the Confederation of Iranian students National Union (CISNU) and the Iranian students Association in the U.S. (ISAUS). Matin-Asgari highlights that the CISNU established itself as the voice of Iranian opposition at the global level.⁵⁹ Matin-Asgari magnifies the links between the Iranian student movement abroad and other international students movements and he elaborates how Iranian student movements were part of and contributed in crucial ways to the global protest movement of students of the 1960s. His narrative emphasises that following 1953 coup against Premier Mosasseq, the environment of political suppression within Iran averted the formation of social movements. Matin-Asgari underlines a shift from the Iranian terrain to the global arena, at least during the 1960s. His narrative confirms the internationalism of CISNU and ISAUS, in the shape of their ethical solidarity with people and movements around the globe, particularly with the Palestinian people.

On the otherside of the spectrum, Meir Hatina in his book of *Islam and Salvation in Palestine* traces the rise of the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine. He thoroughly investigates the evolution of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's ideological outlook and its relations with other political powers outside Palestine, specifically with the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁶⁰ Hatina investigates how the founder of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Fathi Shiqaqi was influenced by Ayatollah Khomeini's ideological outlook. Hatina's

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.34.

⁵⁹ Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, California: Mazda Publishers, 2002

⁶⁰ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001

narrative confirms that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad consistently embraces the position of the Islamic Revolution of Iran towards the Palestinian cause. In fact, I contend that the driving factors of Iranian-Palestinian relations following 1979 were not one-dimensional (e.g. purely driven by material interest), but motivated by several factors that I will explore in the core chapters of this dissertation. Suffice it to say at this stage that for many Palestinians such as the aforementioned Shaqaqi, Tamimi and Sheikh Odeh, the Islamic revolution in Iran was a serious attempt to achieve a form of ‘Islamic awakening’. Certainly, for leading activists within HAMAS and Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian issue was not merely a national problem but an Islamic one.⁶¹ The evidence marshalled in this dissertation seems to suggest, that such shared Islamic values between the Iranian revolutionaries and the Islamist factions in Palestine became a binding force between the Islamic revolution in Iran and Islamic Jihad and Hamas followers. So strong was this binding force that it affected the course of the Palestinian struggle, and at times it even overshadowed the so called Shia-Sunni divide.⁶² Ultimately, Palestine served Iranian interests to project power in the region after the revolution of 1979. But this interest to support the Palestinian cause grew out of a revolutionary consciousness that was pregnant with anti-imperial and third worldist ideas especially in the 1960s and 1970s, as will be suggested.

Theoretical Framework

Perhaps the most influential ‘constructivist’ in recent years has been Alexander Wendt. Here in this section I will explain Wendt’s constructivist theory in order to provide a comprehensive framework for the theoretical aspect of this thesis.

⁶¹ Elie Rekhess in David Menashri, *The Iranian Revolution and the Muslim World*, Oxford: Westview Press, 1990, pp. 192-197.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp.192-197.

The key to Wendt's technique lies in his critique of realist, rationalist or materialist theories of 'interest'. Materialist theories postulate that interests are exogenously given, and once established, never change. Wendt proposes a state-centric approach to IR that is advocated by Realist scholars like Kenneth Waltz. However, from Wendt's point of view the state-centric structure does not restrict the significance of non-state actors (whether domestic or transnational) in determining inter-state conflict.⁶³ In this regard Wendt, states: "it may be that non-state actors are becoming more important than states as initiators of change, but system change ultimately happens through states."⁶⁴ And in the medium term states will remain the authoritative actors in the international system".⁶⁵

From Wendt's perspective, the debate between neo-realists and neoliberals takes place even though both share a pledge of 'rationalism' to treat identities and interests as exogenous, rather than socially constructed. Both theories share the similar presupposition that states define their security in 'self-interested' terms.⁶⁶ According to Wendt, Waltz's main argument is that the interests of states are in turn constituted by material forces and that states are egoistic or "self-regarding".⁶⁷ Neo-realists and neoliberals regard power and interests and sometimes institutions as "material factors", treating them as idea-free baselines. In other words, what matters for neo-realists like Waltz is the number and power of states. It is at this junction that Waltz's theory turns into a "structural materialist" one.⁶⁸ Waltz synthesises such a materialistic approach

⁶³ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁵ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is What States Make of it: the Social Construction of Power Politics", *International Organisation*, Vol. 46, No.2, 1992, p.424.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p.392.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.392.

⁶⁸ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p.92.

with anarchy which means the international system is by definition a “self-help” system.⁶⁹ It is against this materialistic background that Alexander Wendt advances his “idealist” argument. From Wendt’s point of view, states are to be treated as agents having identities, interests and rationality.⁷⁰ Barnett confirms this point by alluding to the constructedness of national identities which in turn informs the interest of the state as defined by powerful elites.⁷¹ As such we can categorise four sorts of identities: 1) personal or corporate, 2) type, 3) role and 4) collective.⁷²

‘Personal’ or ‘corporate’ identity (in the case of groups or organisations) comprises self-systemising constructions that turn actors into individual objects. Corporate identity is about self-memory and presumes actors have collective identities.⁷³ ‘Type’ identity relates to a social description appertained to individuals that share some characteristics such as values, knowledge, or historical commonalities.⁷⁴ In other words, type identity is about shared characteristics that have social meanings. In this regard Wendt classifies the state system as a type identity.⁷⁵ Wendt argues that ‘role identity’ is based upon how an actor perceives itself in others’ eyes, and therefore implies that actors are unable to discard this type of identity because it is contingent on the perception of the other.⁷⁶ Wendt indicates that what matters in describing ‘roles’ is the level of interdependence or association between the self and other.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.99.

⁷⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Constructing International Politics”, *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 1995,, p.392.

⁷¹ Telhami and Barnett *Identities and Foreign Policies*, p. 65

⁷² Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p.224.

⁷³ Ibid., p.225.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.225.

⁷⁵ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, pp. 226-227. Type identities correspond to regime types or forms of states, such as ‘capitalist’, ‘socialist’ or ‘Islamic’.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 228.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 228.

Collective identity, according to Wendt, “takes the relationship between self and the other to its logical conclusion, i.e. identification”.⁷⁸ In other words, the sense of being a part of a social or collective grouping (i.e. ‘we’) is a social or collective identity providing actors with an interest in the conservation of their culture.⁷⁹ Collective identity, from Wendt’s point of view, refers to “positive identification with the welfare of another, such as the other is seen as a cognitive extension of the self, rather than independent”. This is the foundation for perceptions of unity, devotion, community and therefore for a collective description of interests.⁸⁰

Peter Katzenstein and Michael Barnett in the book of the Culture of National Security; Norms and Identity in World Politics share Wendt’s view, stating that actors cannot decide what their interests are until they comprehend what they are representing (in other words, “who they are”).⁸¹ It can be stated that identities shape and direct interests, and that interests act as motivational forces for identities. The importance of identity is reflected in Katzenstein’s statement that “identities shape actor interests or shape policy”.⁸² According to him, “many national security interests depend on a particular construction of self-identity in relation to the conceived identity of others.”⁸³ Katzenstein even goes a step further, arguing that changes in state identity can advance significant transformation in interests that shape national security policy. Therefore, state policy and agency might be a straight performance or impression of “identity

⁷⁸ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p.229.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.337.

⁸⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State”, *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 2, 1994, p.386.

⁸¹ Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 60. Michael Barnett argues that a shared identity is likely to generate a shared definition of the threat, see Michael Barnett in Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, 1996, p.408

⁸² Ibid., p. 54.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 60.

politics”.⁸⁴ This point is reemphasised by Brent Steele’s concept of ontological security which posits that states follow particular foreign policies because of a sense of commitment and loyalty towards a cause – indeed contradicting that sentiment would create a sense of “shame”.⁸⁵

Steele and Katzenstein emphasise the importance of identity in domestic politics, and in defining norms and culture. The latter regards norms as “collective expectation about proper behaviour for a given identity”: in other words, norms function from time to time as regulations for identity.⁸⁶ Culture refers to a set of appraising criteria – such as norms, values, rules and models – that describe how states function and impact one another.⁸⁷ Katzenstein summarises his argument by emphasising that “norm”, “identities” and “culture” matter.⁸⁸

Having outlined the importance of identity in international politics, we should now proceed to discuss Wendt’s specific conceptualisation of ‘interests’. Wendt categorises two kinds of interests: ‘Objective’ and ‘Subjective’⁸⁹. Objective interests are requirements or operational necessities that must be satisfied if an identity is to survive. Wendt clarifies that all four sets of identities (as indicated in previous sections) require not only to survive, but also to reproduce themselves. For instance, a Western state cannot exist as such without solidarity with other Western states.⁹⁰ My contention

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

⁸⁵ Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-identity and the IR State*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 3

⁸⁶ Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 58.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 57.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 57. Peter Katzenstein argues that norms shape national security and state identity, and that any change in state identity affects the policies of a given state.

⁸⁹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p.231.

⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 231-232.

is that this principle also applies to the Islamic Republic's solidarity with Palestine, given that Iran identifies itself as an Islamic state, a leader of the Islamic world, and ultimately as a supporter of the oppressed around the globe. Subjective interests (or "preferences")⁹¹ by contrast are normative values held by actors concerning the best ways of satisfying their identity requirements.⁹² Back to Wendt's formula, we can argue that from this perspective state behaviour is an outcome of produced desires and the ways it thinks it can conceivably achieve them.

It can be understood from Wendtian constructivism that ideas are the conclusive tunnels that states and non-state actors travel through in order to relate to one other. Wendt's theory aims to demonstrate that ideas and cultures determine the implications and substance of power and interests. My understanding of Wendt's argument is that his theory tries to create a balance between the two traditional approaches of materialism and constructivism. It can be concluded that Wendt aims to emphasise that material factors should not be ignored, but be viewed according to the context of ideational and social structures. Throughout my thesis I shall argue that Iranian-Palestinian relations are constituted by ideas, norms, culture and history – in agreement with the theories of Katzenstein and Wendt suggesting that ideas as well as material factors matter. In relation to Iran and Palestine, I believe and argue that Islamic shared values are one important factor in shaping the Iranian approach towards Palestine, to the degree that the Iranian state repeatedly felt an almost moral commitment to the cause - moral in the sense that contradicting it causes a sense of guilt as Steele

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 232.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 232-233. Philosophers often refer to subjective interests as "desires". Wendt labels objective interests as interests and, in order to prevent confusion, he prefers to use the term 'preferences' or 'desires' for subjective interests.

conceptualises it. Undoubtedly, this attitude also served and informed the material interest of the post-revolutionary Iranian state.

The Main argument of the thesis

In light of the literature review and theoretical discussion, this thesis proposes that the revolutionary and Islamic identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran has been the major motivational factor behind Iran's relations with Palestine. However, this is not to deny the significance of material factors and national interests. My position is that Iran's Islamic collective identity and its understanding that Palestine shares its Islamic values are critical for an understanding of Iranian-Palestinian relations after 1979. This thesis has taken a constructivist approach based on Alexander Wendt's theory to discuss the nature of Iran's attitudes towards Palestine. Wendt's argument is persuasive when applied to the Iranian-Palestinian example due to the recognition of material factors and the statement that "identities are the basis of interests."⁹³ Wendt's theoretical discussion emphasises that material factors should be understood within the framework of identity and social structure. This is not to exaggerate the role of identity and religion on Iran's behaviour towards the Palestinian cause, but to view the strong link between Islamic identity and interests as a motivational vehicle behind Tehran's policies since the triumph of the revolution. Analysing Iran's foreign policy and international relations in general is beyond the scope of this thesis, therefore, my concentration in the literature review and my exploration of Alexander Wendt's theory is specifically in relation to Iranian-Palestinian relations.

There is a consensus amongst a number of scholars that the Islamic revolution brought about a transformation of the identity of the Iranian state that influenced Iran's

⁹³ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what States Make of it", p. 398.

foreign policy. As Arshin Adib-Moghaddam observes, “[r]evolution in Iran changed the state identity of the country from a monarchic-nationalist system to a revolutionary, Islamic-republican one.”⁹⁴ According to Suzanne Maloney, the impact of Iran’s revolutionary identity was especially clear in Iran’s post revolutionary foreign Policy.⁹⁵ From Maloney’s stand point, “the narrative of Iran’s dramatic transformation from one of the pillars of American interests in the Persian Gulf to one of its perils demonstrates identity and interests intermingle”.⁹⁶ To demonstrate the importance of identity and national interests in regard to Iranian-Palestinian relations, I divide my argument to two parts. First I examine the significant role of the Islamic agenda behind Iran’s approach towards Palestine. Second, I identify the importance of the material factors in this regard.

a) Islamic agenda:

Shortly after the triumph of the revolution in 1979, the state designated itself as an ‘Islamic Republic’ in order to represent a new identity at a regional and global level. This could imply that Iran’s revolutionary state is rhetorically destined to bear some responsibility to advocate the Islamic agenda, promoting the idea of ‘Islamic unity’ and lending support to fellow Muslims internationally, particularly those need protection and the “oppressed”. As Ayatollah Khomeini stated: “[w]e support the oppressed. We support whoever is oppressed wherever they may be, and the Palestinians are oppressed, the Israelis oppress them. For this reason, we support them”.⁹⁷ The new

⁹⁴ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *The International Politics of the Persian Gulf: A Cultural Genealogy*, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 23.

⁹⁵ Suzanne Maloney, “Identity and Change in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, in Shibley Telhamy and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, London: Cornell University, 2002, p.89.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp.93-94.

⁹⁷ Rouhollah Khomeini, *Filistin az didgaheh Imam Khomeini* [Palestine from Imam Khomeini’s View], Tehran: Imam Khomeini’s Publishing Institute, 1382 [2003], p.112. For the English translation, see: http://www2.irib.ir/worldservice/imam/palestin_E/9.htm

revolutionary constitution embedded Islamic principles and institutionalised Islamic values within its context. According to Ali Akbar Alikhani, the Islamic principles that stem from the Quran, the Prophet Mohammad's way of life (*sunnah*), and narrated traditions (*ahadith*) deemed authentic by the Shia served as the basis of the Islamic Republic's constitution.⁹⁸ The Islamic Republic's constitution emphasises the necessity of supporting the rights of all Muslims and directing Iran's foreign policy towards promoting friendship amongst Muslim countries.⁹⁹ The Quran contains a number of verses that clearly recommend Muslims to unite and act in harmony to support their fellow Muslims and protect the 'oppressed'.¹⁰⁰ To that end, Ayatollah Khomeini's vision of *mustazafan* versus *mustakberan* (oppressed versus oppressor) created a central structure for revolutionary Iran's foreign policy. According to Adib-Moghaddam, the ideal of the millenarian conflict between oppressed and oppressor was a fundamental part of Iran's presentation of its revolutionary creed and the new character of it as an Islamic state.¹⁰¹ From a comparable point of view, Asghar Eftekhary argues that the

⁹⁸ Ali Akbar Alikhani, "Iran's Religious Fundamentals and Principles in Interaction with the International System", in Ehteshami & Molavi (eds), *Iran and the International System*, pp 3- 4.

⁹⁹ Article 152 of Iran's constitution states that "[t]he foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based upon the rejection of all forms of domination, both the exertion of it and submission to it, the preservation of the independence of the country in all respects and its territorial integrity, the defence of the rights of all Muslims, non-alignment with respect to the hegemonic superpowers, and the maintenance of mutually peaceful relations with all non-belligerent States." Article 11 demonstrates that In accordance with the sacred verse of the Qur'an ("This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" [21:92]), all Muslims form a single nation, and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has the duty of formulating its general policies with a view to cultivating the friendship and unity of all Muslim peoples, and it must constantly strive to bring about the political, economic, and cultural unity of the Islamic world. See <http://www.iranonline.com/iran/iran-info/Government/constitution.html>

¹⁰⁰ Chapter 4 verse 75 of the Quran states: "what is [the matter] with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and [for] the oppressed among men, women, and children who say, "Our Lord, take us out of this city of oppressive people and appoint for us from Yourself a protector and appoint for us from yourself a helper?" Chapter 49 verse 10 states that: "[t]he believers are but brothers, so make settlement between your brothers. And fear God that you may receive mercy". See <http://quran.com>

¹⁰¹ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics: The Question of the Islamic Republic*, London: Hurst Publishers, 2005, p. 56. Moreover, from Suzanne Maloney's point of view, Ali Shariati depicted a worldwide between the oppressed and the oppressor and argued that the true Islam was vested in the struggle of the oppressed. See Maloney, Suzanne, "Identity and Change in Iran's Foreign Policy", p. 99.

Islamic revolution - in accordance with Khomeini's Islamic theory – was to act as the supporter of the oppressed, and rise up against all world oppressors.¹⁰²

We are permitted to ask what the status of Palestine is in Iran's Islamic and revolutionary rhetoric. It is clear that Palestine occupies an especially lofty status in the Islamic world, given that its land contains Islam's Muslim's first *Qibla* (direction of prayer), the Mosque of al-Aqsa, and that it has been 'occupied' by the Zionist state of Israel. Certainly, this is the view held by Iran, with Ahmed El-Dajani observing that "Iran and the Arab nation fall within the Islamic dominion; Israel invaded Palestine which occupies an important place in the Islamic dominion".¹⁰³ For the Islamic revolution, Palestine represented the 'oppressed' of the world. Ayatollah Khomeini lent a special significance to the Palestinian question in his speeches and revolutionary rhetoric since the beginning of his movement. In a statement in December 1978, Khomeini said that

we have always spoken of Israel and the fact that it is a usurper. Our intention has always been to stand by our Palestinian brothers, and whenever we gain power, we will join them in defending their rights like brothers standing as equals in the same line of battle as them. Beit ul-Moqaddas must be returned to the Muslims, the Israelis are usurpers.¹⁰⁴

According to Khomeini, Israel had occupied the distinctly Muslim land of Palestine, and the Shah had acted in ways which threatened the Islamic identity of Iran – notably by recognising the occupation of Palestine, and supporting the Zionist

¹⁰² Asghar Eftekhary, "Peace and Security in the International System", in Ehteshami & Molavi (eds.), *Iran and the International System*, p. 79.

¹⁰³ Ahmad Sudki El-Dajani, "The Palestine Question in Arab-Iranian Relations", in Hasseb (ed), *Arab-Iranian Relations*, p. 352.

¹⁰⁴ Rouhollah Khomeini, *Filistin az didgaheh Imam Khomeini*, pp. 109-110.

regime.¹⁰⁵ There is a consensus amongst the leaders of various factions of the Islamic revolution that Iran's support of Palestine cannot be compromised due to its importance to the Islamic world, and its synonymy with the identity of the Islamic revolution.¹⁰⁶ After the triumph of the revolution, Iran's leaders desired to represent their state as the *Umm al-Qura* (The Mother of the Cities in Islamic Terms),¹⁰⁷ and this ideological tendency demanded that Iran focus its attention on the most vital challenge facing the Muslim world: the question of Palestine.

One tends to agree with Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp's point of view that "[n]o cause has greater symbolic appeal in the Islamic world than the plight of the Palestinians. Iranian leaders see it as an Islamic issue, giving them the right to be involved".¹⁰⁸ In fact, support for Palestine has become a primary source of legitimacy for Iran's Islamic revolutionary state. Iran's revolutionary leaders had championed the Palestinian cause in their rhetoric prior to the Iranian revolution, and continue to emphasise its importance up until the present day. According to Chubin and Tripp, the Islamic Republic deems it a duty to pursue a pro-Palestinian policy because

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p 41. Ayatollah Khomeini stated in May 1979 that "[b]ecause Israel has occupied an Islamic land and committed crimes, the Shah's policy of having relations with Israel and supporting its regime was against Islamic interests and therefore the interests of all Muslims."

¹⁰⁶ Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Revolution, stated that "[r]esisting against the occupiers of the Land of Palestine is not a responsibility of the Palestinians alone but all the Islamic and Arabic states". Ayatollah Khamenei, quoted in Yusuf Mohammad Bajouq, *Īrān-Lubnān: 'arḍ tawthīqī li-abraz al-mawāqif al-īrānīyah ḥiyāl Lubnān min 'ām 1977-1993* [The presentation of documentary evidence of Iran's most prominent positions about Lebanon 1977-1993], Beirut, 1995 p.55. Hashemi Rafsanjani in a statement urged both Shia and Sunnis to unite and struggle against the enemy of Islam, the Israeli state (Ibid, p. 86). Mehdi Karubi, in a similar statement, congratulated the Lebanese people for their struggle against Israel and declared that he hope that one day all would be free to pray at the scene of the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Palestine (Ibid, pp 118-119).

¹⁰⁷ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini, Iran Under His Successors*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.134. According to the theory of the 'Mother of the Cities', the defence of the Islamic Umma as a unified community is essentially engrained in the prestige of the Mother of the Cities.

¹⁰⁸ Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations and Regional Order*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 57.

Iran as the Islamic republic claiming to be a role-model, could scarcely be indifferent to Islamic issues. Recognition of Israel, for example, was unthinkable. The Islamic republic would have to change its name if it wanted to do such a thing. It cannot be a Muslim community and concede such an injustice.¹⁰⁹

According to Adib-Moghaddam, the Islamic Republic set a foundation for future foreign policy given that most ideological elements of the Islamic revolution could agree upon its core principles. Moreover, Adib-Moghaddam argues that

Pro-Palestinian sentiments, anti-Zionism and anti-Imperialism, Islamic communitariansim, third-worldism, and cultural and political independence [all] functioned as the ideational point of fixation reconstituting the Iranian self during the revolutionary process of the 1960s and 1970s and are not easy to discard, even in the early years of twenty first century.¹¹⁰

According to Hossein Salimi, support for Islamic movements and opposing the illegitimacy of Israel are both common elements of the Islamic Republic's foreign policy.¹¹¹ It is true to argue, as Adib-Moghaddam does, that there is a connecting junction of "Iran's foreign policy culture" where different factions within the Islamic revolution could reach consensus due to their shared interests and values.¹¹² From my

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 48. Ayatollah Jannati is a prominent conservative Shia cleric and a key figure in the Guardian Council of the Islamic Republic.

¹¹⁰ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics*, pp. 71-72.

¹¹¹ Hossein Salimi, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction", in Ehteshami & Molavi (eds.), *Iran and the International System*, p. 147.

¹¹² Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics*, p. 72. Adib-Moghaddam clarifies that there are seven institutions involved in processing Iran's foreign policy, including: the Foreign Ministry, the Office of the Supreme Leader, the Head of the Expediency Council, the Presidential Office, Parliament, the Strategic Council for Foreign Relations, and the Supreme National Security Council. The aforementioned institutions follow different agenda. However, there is a culturally constituted consensus about the country's role in global affairs that functions as the protector of identity, stands for a net of shared ideas, norms and institutions that arranges a framework for the foreign policy elites to conduct their policies.

point of view, Palestine has been at the heart of Iran's grand strategic preferences because it has a special place within the revolutionary Islamic identity.

b) Material Factors:

To argue that the Islamic identity of revolutionary Iran is the primary force behind Iran's support of Palestinian movements is not an attempt to deny the importance of material factors and the Islamic Republic's national interests in influencing its support of the Palestinians. The Islamic Republic likely views its pro-Palestinian approach also as a useful tool serving its regional interests, allowing it to play a key role in the Islamic world. As such, support for Sunni-Arab Palestine could provide the Islamic Republic with an entry point to gain influence in the Islamic world, and within Sunni-Arab neighbouring countries in particular.

The Islamic Republic is currently the only predominantly Shia state with Islamic-universalist aspirations, and hence it does not wish to be isolated within a majority Sunni-Arab states. In order to avoid potential isolation, Iran needs to appeal to the broader Islamic world as a way of serving its Islamic-universalist objectives, as advocated throughout the revolution by the country's leaders. It was logical for the Islamic Republic to explicitly define itself as the supporter of the *mostazafan* in order to carry its voice to the rest of the Islamic world, particularly to its neighbours. According to Mahmood Sarioalghalam, "by warmly embracing the Palestinian cause in its domestic and foreign policy, Iran wanted to demonstrate its readiness for cooperation with the surrounding Arab states".¹¹³ Chubin and Tripp agree that the Islamic Republic "did not want to limit its potential constituency to the Shi'i world, a minority in Islam, instead, it

¹¹³ Mahmood Sarioalghalam, "Conceptual Sources of Post-Revolutionary Iranian Behaviour toward the Arab World", in Hooshang Amirahmadi and Nader Entessar (eds.), *Iran and the Arab World*, London: the Macmillan Press Ltd., 1993, p. 23.

pursued its revolutionary objective of Islamic universalism, pitting a populist Islam of the oppressed against the oppressor”.¹¹⁴

Chubin and Tripp make a valid point that the Islamic revolutionary rhetoric of “carrying the banner of Islam, supporting oppressed against oppressors, anti-imperialist tendency and its desire to be a leading country in the Islamic world” was seen as a pellucid challenge by Iran’s neighbouring Arab Sunni states, and particularly Saudi Arabia, who sees its own authority deriving from its role as the ‘protector’ of the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina.¹¹⁵ As such, Tehran has entered a competition for regional influence that requires it to expand its influence to the wider Islamic world. In accordance with its Islamic identity and grand strategic ideology, it has been in the Islamic Republic’s regional interest to lead an ‘Islamic campaign’ against imperialism, Zionism, and hegemonic powers. As Manouchehr Mohammadi argues:

Under the title of its anti-imperialist campaign and support for the oppressed inspired by the teaching of Islam and as it is stipulated within its constitution, the Islamic republic of Iran has the potential and actually has in its possession the required mechanism to lead such a campaign against the present hegemonic system.¹¹⁶

According to Suzanne Maloney, “Iran believes it has the historical, cultural, even moral weight to powerfully shape the region”.¹¹⁷ In other words, Iran’s aspirations of leading its ideological campaign required Tehran to expand its influence beyond its borders and confront pro-Western regional rivals such as Saudi Arabia by reaching out to the Sunni-Arab majority of the region. The Islamic Republic’s

¹¹⁴ Chubin and Tripp, *Iran-Saudi Arabia*, 1996, p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p.4.

¹¹⁶ Manouchehr Mohammadi, “Peace and Security in the International System”, in Ehteshami & Molavi (eds.), *Iran and the International System*, p. 82.

¹¹⁷ Maloney, “Identity and Change in Iran’s Foreign Policy”, p. 97.

leadership had been aware of the significance of the Palestinian issue since its beginning, and have always been staunch believers that championing the Palestinian cause could facilitate the spread of Iranian revolutionary influence across the region, paving the way for its “spiritual hegemony” over Muslim populations. Consequently, Iran’s position on Palestine could send a message to the Sunni world that Iran’s revolutionary agenda was not confined to Shiacomunities. The Islamic Republic’s leadership has therefore realised that it could foster its version of “Islamic universalism” in the Arab and Sunni worlds by maintaining a pro-Palestinian stance. This stance would allow Tehran to Islamise the Palestinian cause and transform it from being an Arab issue to one that was Muslim, and therefore of immediate concern to Iran. Having confronted the Pan-Arab Baathist regime in Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq war on the one hand, and Yasser Arafat’s pro-Saddam and pro-Western position on the other, the Iranian leadership had realised that supporting explicitly Islamic movements (such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad) in Palestine could both prevent Saddam from using the Palestinian cause as a means to mobilise the Arab street against Iran, and weaken Arafat’s pro-Western position.

Iran’s pro-Palestinian stance can also help illuminate the salience of its pan-Islamic outlook domestically, and how the state uses this stance to enhance the legitimacy of its revolutionary status among the local population, particularly amongst the rather more politically radical strata of society. Moreover, oppositional factions within the Islamic Republic have realised that by emphasising their pro-Palestinian credentials, they are better able to represent themselves as the “supporters of the revolutionary principles” domestically, and therefore gain more support amongst clerics and members of the Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) for their political campaigns. As Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Mahjoob Zweiri argue, “Ahmadinejad’s followers are

more religious, traditional and idealistic in terms of the lofty goals of the Islamic revolution.”¹¹⁸ Therefore it is not difficult to realise that Ahmadinejad’s continued reference to Palestine was part of his government strategy to build “on his populist rhetoric to advance his neoconservative-inspired hard line at home and abroad”.¹¹⁹ In regard to advancing neoconservative –inspired hardline policy abroad, Ehteshami and Zweiri clarify that

Ahmadinejad’s support for the Palestinian cause places Iran in the Arab heartland, an area Iran had not fully accessed in the past. In a region that requires leadership and a solution to the conflict in Palestine Ahmadinejad, through his invocations of justice and connections with Palestinian groups, was creating a role for himself though at the expense of other Arab leaders who had failed to address The Palestine issue.¹²⁰

In sum, one could argue that the Islamic Republic’s support for Sunni Arab Palestine could counter potential criticism amongst the Arab Sunni states that the Islamic Republic is pursuing only “Shia-Persian” interests, and underline its self-professed status as the champion of Islamic universalism.

A number of scholars argue that Iran’s position towards the Palestinian issue stem from its ideological tendencies, and do not conflict with the “pragmatic interests of the state”.¹²¹ To this end, my perception is that Iran’s pro-Palestinian position stem from its Islamic identity while going hand in hand with the Islamic Republic’s national interests. Thus, Revolutionary Iran has been keen to develop and institutionalise its relations with Palestinian factions. Despite factional differences in Iranian politics, we

¹¹⁸ Anoushiravan Ehteshami & Mahjoob Zweiri, *Iran and the rise of its Neoconservatives: The Politics of Tehran’s Silent Revolution*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2007, p. 65.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p.105.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.108.

¹²¹ Efraim Karsh and P.R Kummaraswamy, *Islamic Attitude to Israel*, London: Routledge, 2008, p. 111.

can discern a common stance on the Palestinian issue, and patterns of facilitating close relations with Palestinian factions that have closer ideological positions to the Islamic Republic.

An Overview of Chapters

This study offers a discursive interpretation of Iranian solidarity towards the Palestinian cause in post-revolutionary era. Two key questions about Iranian-Palestinian relations are explored in detail throughout my thesis. First, what are the roots of Iranian-Palestinian relations, and how is the Palestinian question viewed by the Iranian authorities post-1979? Second, how were Iranian-Palestinian relations institutionalised and developed after the triumph of the 1979 revolution? The questions posed here form the backbone of this study and the key to understanding Iran's approach towards the Arab world. In my quest for the answers, I looked into the Iranian governmental publications, Farsi and Arabic sources, and I also conducted interviews with officials and delegates of Palestinian groups such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas in Tehran. These interviews are translated by me from Arabic and Farsi into English for the purpose of this thesis.

This study begins with a chapter contextualising pre-revolutionary Iranian activists' solidarity with the Palestinians. Chapter 2 examines the institutionalisation of Iran's pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionism and *ummah*-centric ideas during the post-revolutionary era, exploring Iran's relation with PLO before and after the Iran-Iraq war. Chapter 3 explores the impact of the Islamic revolution on the Palestinian streets, focusing on Fathi Shiqaqi, the founder of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Chapter 4 explores the Islamic Republic's relations with Hamas since its establishment by Sheikh Ahmad Yassin. Chapter 5 follows the same path, but offers a discussion of changes and continuities in the post-Arab Spring era. This final chapter explores the impact of the

Syrian crisis on Iran's relations with Hamas, and traces Iran's reactions towards 2012 and 2014 Wars in Gaza strip as litmus tests for the Islamic Republic's commitment towards the Palestinian cause. Chapter 6 concludes the study.

Chapter One

Iran's Pre-Revolutionary Opposition and the Palestine Cause

At this stage it is essential to provide context for how Iranian opposition groups in the pre-revolutionary era engaged with the Palestinian cause. This chapter does not provide an exhaustive overview of secondary literatures examining the role of left-wing forces in Iran from the early 1960s up until the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran, nor their differences and strategies in toppling the Shah's regime. Instead, this chapter focuses on the attitudes of Iranian dissidents towards Palestine up until the 1979 Islamic revolution. As this chapter comprises the first narrative of the historical development of relations between Iranian opposition groups and the Palestinian cause, it may appear more descriptive than analytical. However, my discovery, selection, translation and evaluation of dispersed sources, and the presentation of this data within a relevant framework alongside a comprehensive assessment, in itself presents a major analytical challenge to understand the Iranian-Palestinian dialectic.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks into historical relations between left-wing Iranian guerrilla forces – such as the People's Mojahedin of Iran (MKO), the Iranian People's Faday'an, and the Palestine Group, as well as organised student opposition to the Shah such as the Confederation of Iranian Students National Union (CISNU) – and Palestine. The second section analyses the attitude of some of the most prominent revolutionary and distinguished Muslim figures, such as Ayatollah Kashani, Navab Safavi, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani, Mustafa Chamran, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Mortaza Mottahari, and others towards the Palestinian question. In order to better understand the origin of relations between pre-revolutionary Iranians and the Palestinian cause, it is necessary to gain an

understanding of these figures' political ideas and activities. I conclude the chapter with an assessment of this history, and emphasise that Iran's pre-revolutionary oppositions' socio-political tendencies – which included stances of anti-imperialism, anti-monarchy, anti-Zionism and, with regard to Islamic figures, pro-Muslim preferences – guided their attitudes towards the Palestinian cause. In this account, I assess that material factors played a secondary role in determining the relationship between these groups and the Palestinian cause.

The Iranian pre-revolutionary “left wing “guerrilla movements and Palestine

After the overthrow of Iran's democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq in the 1953 coup, and the reinstatement of the Shah's absolute monarchy not least due to American and British intelligence support, Iranian dissidents began to face suppression and systematic coercion. Due to coercion and political closeness, the period between 1953 and 1963 can be characterised as an era in which opposition groups such as the Tudeh party and the Mossadeqist National Front pursued less confrontational policies against the dictatorship of the Shah.¹²² Some historians and academics agree that the 1963 popular uprising under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini was a turning point, becoming a catalyst for emerging 'left-wing' guerrilla movements in Iran. From Abrahamian's point of view, the roots of the guerrilla movements date back to the summer of 1963, when the Shah's regime fiercely dealt with peaceful protests organised by the opposition.¹²³ The brutal suppression during 1963 coincided with

¹²² For more information on the CIA-MI6-led coup of 1953 against Prime Minister Mossadeq and its aftermath, see Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of the Revolution*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003, chapters 6 and 7.

¹²³ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977", *Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)*, No. 86, The Left Forces in Iran (Mar–Apr 1980), pp. 3–15.

increasing activities by revolutionary and guerrilla movements in Third World countries, notably in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam and Palestine. Influenced and inspired by guerrilla movements in other Third World countries, it was natural that younger members of traditional oppositional organizations such as the Tudeh and the National Front came to a conclusion that peaceful actions against the Shah's regime was a dead end, and that guerrilla conflict represented a better alternative. Of the emerging guerrilla groups, Abrahamian categorises them into two groups as being more active and organised: the Sazman-i Cherik-ha-yi Feda-i Khalq-i Iran (The Guerrilla Freedom Fighters of the Iranian People), known as the Marxist Faday'an; and the Sazman-i Mujahidin-i Khalq-i Iran (The Organisation of the Freedom Fighters of the Iranian People), generally referred to as the "Islamic Mujahedin".¹²⁴

Post 1963, younger members of the Tudeh party and the Marxist contingent of the National Front were left frustrated by the perceived failure of the Tudeh party to confront the Pahlavi regime. Many were inspired by anti-imperialist movements across the Third World and – critical of pro-Soviet Tudeh policies – began to organise independent groups. The Fadayi, according to Abrahamian, adopted its name in 1971, and came into existence through the merging of three politically active groups. The first group was founded from 1963-1964 by Ali Akbar Safa-i Farahani, Mohammad Ashtiyani, Abbas Sourki and Bezhan Jazani; all of whom active members of the Tudeh Party's Youth Organisation.¹²⁵ The second group was led by Masoud Ahmadzadeh, who bore religious and pro-Marxist socio-political tendencies. The third group was led by Ashraf Dehqani.¹²⁶ Safa-i Farahani wrote a handbook titled *Ancheh Yek Inqelabi*

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 4.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 6.

Bayad Bedanad (What a Revolutionary Must Know),¹²⁷ in which he drew up the ideological composition of the Faday'an. In his handbook, Safa-i Farahani castigated the Shah's regime for being dependent on "global imperialism", criticising the Pahlavi regime's pro-American foreign policy and particularly its "collaboration" with Israel against Arab neighbours such as Egypt, which was causing other political conflicts in South Yemen, Iraq and Syria. His handbook highlighted the importance of supporting international anti-imperialist movements as a vital part of the Faday'an's ideological struggle against the Shah's pro-western regime.¹²⁸

According to Sepehr Zabih, the Faday'an was ideologically influenced by Marxism-Leninism, and pursued it as their official ideology. In particular, Latin American revolutionary writings became attractive to the Faday'an, and its members were inspired heavily by the Cuban Revolution and "anti-Imperialism guerrilla movements" throughout the Third World.¹²⁹ The Cuban Revolution, the Tupamaros in Uruguay, and growth of guerrilla warfare in Palestine and Vietnam greatly influenced their leadership.¹³⁰ In 1967, a few years after the foundation of Jazani's group, most of its leadership were arrested by SAVAK. Two prominent members Safa-i Farahani and Ashtiyani escaped to Lebanon, joining their Palestinian counterparts in Fatah and receiving guerrilla training for two years. Upon their return to Iran in 1969, they continued their struggle alongside their fellow guerrillas.¹³¹ Safa-i Farahani and Ashtiyani managed to cross the border into Iraq by using forged documents. Although

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ See Safa-i Farahani, *Ancheh Yek Inqelabi Bayad Bedanad* [What a Revolutionary Must Know], available at http://www.adabestanekave.com/book/Anche_yek_enghelabi_bayad_bedanad.pdf [Accessed 16 April 2013]

¹²⁹ Sepehr Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran: Ideology, Organisation and the Soviet Connection*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1986, pp. 113–114.

¹³⁰ Ibid, p, 116

¹³¹ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977", p. 6, and Zabih, *Constructivism in International Relations*, p. 115.

SAVAK deported two Iraqi Marxist dissidents to Baghdad as a good-will gesture,¹³² the Iranian foreign office failed to persuade its Iraqi counterparts to extradite the Faday'an.

Safa-i Farahani and Ashtiyani requested permission from the Iraqi authorities to cross the border in order to join up with their fellow freedom fighters in Palestine. After spending a month in Iraqi jails, they were allowed to cross into Syria. Initially interrogated in Damascus, they were subsequently allowed to cross the border into Jordan so long as they managed to convince the Syrians that they would fight alongside Palestinian guerrillas. After meeting and engaging in an ideological discourse with Fatah delegates on the Jordanian border, they were accepted and sent to Palestinian camps in Jordan. Safa-i Farahani received the nickname Abu-Abbas from his Palestinian comrades, and became one of the commanders of the Palestinian camp, while Ashtiyani was appointed as the key-holder of the camp's warehouse. Both received support and training until they decided to return to Iran in winter 1969 in an effort to continue their anti-Imperialist struggle at home.¹³³ Upon their return, the military training of these two proved invaluable in improving the guerrilla warfare capabilities of the Faday'an. Meanwhile, a group of their fellow fighters gathered in northern Iran preparing for an armed struggle against the monarchy. This culminated in an open battle on the 8th of February 1971, known as the Siyahkal insurgency, under the command of Safa-i Farahani. Most of the Faday'an fighters were either killed in the Siyahkal battle, or arrested and subsequently executed.¹³⁴

¹³² Mahmood Naderi, *Cherikhay-e Fadayee Khal, Az Nokhostin Koneshha ta Bahman 1357* [The Organisation of Iranian People's Fedayeen Guerrillas, from Early Action to February 1979], Tehran: Moaseseh-e Motaleaat va Pajoooheshay-e Siyasi [the Institutes for Political Research and Studies], 1387 [2008], pp. 134.

According to Naderi, Iran's Home Secretary expatriated two Iraqi Marxists named Seyed Idris al-Jobouri and Kamal al-Kamali (whom had escaped from al-Hellah prison and took refuge in Iran) to Baghdad in order to convince the Iraqi counterpart to deport Saf-i Farahani to Iran.

¹³³ Ibid, pp, 132-136

¹³⁴ For more information on the Siyahkal insurgency, see Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran*, chapter 5.

According to Abrahamian, Safa-i Farahani was captured and tortured to death. He died after refusing to reveal information about other members of the Faday'an.¹³⁵ After the failed Siyahkal insurgency, the Pahlavi state mounted a massive propaganda war against the guerrillas, accusing them of being "tools of the PLO", Baghdad, and Arab imperialism.¹³⁶

The connection between the Faday'an guerrillas and Palestinian fighters was not monopolized by the Faday'an's leadership however. Iraj Sepehri, a sympathizer and later low ranking member of the Faday'an travelled across the Iran- Iraq border alone in order to join up with Ahmad Jibril's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command in autumn 1971. In a memoir written by Sepehri, published by the Faday'an in 1977, he described his fascination and attraction to the Palestinian cause, arguing that the Palestinians were in fact fighting the same enemy as he was: 'global Zionism' and international imperialism. He strongly believed that there was a close link between the Shah's regime and the state of Israel's oppression of the people of Palestine. According to the memoir, Sepehri fought alongside the Palestinians during a number of guerrilla insurgencies in the Golan Heights, alongside Ahmad Jibril's group in 1972. During his time in the Golan, Sepehri used the name Mohammad Abdul-Qader, and was later nicknamed Abu-Saeed Irani by his Palestinian comrades.¹³⁷

Abrahamian clarifies that although the Faday'an suffered setbacks after Siyahkal, its new members continued carrying out a number of armed operations

¹³⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977", p. 8.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹³⁷ For more information on Iraj Sepehri's journey to Palestine, see: Iraj Sepehri, *Az Jebhe Nabard-e Felestin, Khatera'at Iraj Sepehri* [From the Battlefield of Palestine, the Memoir of Comrade Iraj Sepehri], 1977, Sazman Cherikhay-e Fedayeen Khalq. Also available at http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/cherikha_ta_1357-felestin_sepehri.pdf [Accessed 18 April 2013]. Iraj Sepehri was ambushed and killed in an open battle with the Iranian border forces upon his return from Palestine in 1974.

mainly targeting the Iran-American Society, embassies of United Kingdom, Oman, and the United States, and Iranian police headquarters in Tehran.¹³⁸ In examining the Faday'an's pamphlets and handbooks such as the ones mentioned here, one can discern that the group had been eager to underline their connections with the Palestinian fighters, as well as their sympathies with the third-world guerrilla movements throughout their armed struggle against the Shah's regime. In all, according to Houshang Chehabi, about 30 Faday'ian were trained at camps in Jordan (until 1970), Lebanon and Syria.¹³⁹

Another leftist guerrilla movement that emerged during the 1960s to early 1970s was the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MKO), who proclaimed to be both anti-monarchy and anti-Imperialist. Abrahamian and Zabih agree that the roots of the Mojahedin can be traced back to the religious wing of the National Front, and particularly the *Nehzat-i Azadi Iran* (The Liberation Movement of Iran).¹⁴⁰ The Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI) was established in 1961 by Mehdi Bazargan and Ayatollah Taleqani, two loyal supporters of Mossadeq. The movement was well-known for its radical anti-imperialist stance.¹⁴¹ According to Abrahamian, the 1963 uprising, together with the revolutions in Algeria, Cuba and Vietnam, had radicalised a group of younger members of the LMI.

¹³⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977", p. 8.

¹³⁹ H.E. Chehabi (ed.), *Distant Relations. Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 years*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2006, p. 188

¹⁴⁰ Ervand Abrahamian, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran, 1963–1977", pp. 8-9 and Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran*, pp. 71-73.

¹⁴¹ Zabih, *The Left in Contemporary Iran*, pp. 70-74. According to Zabih, the National Front (NF) was the major pro-Mossadeq political force. After the 1953 Coup against the democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadeq, its members were imprisoned or retired. The NF was recreated in 1954 under the name *Nehzate Moghavemate Melli* (National Resistance Movement), and included leftists, nationalists and Islamist activists. The split in the leadership of the movement resulted in the formation of a number of political groups including the Liberation Movement of Iran. Due to its relatively more radical positions and more vigorous anti-imperialistic and anti-monarchical stance, the LMI attracted highly motivated younger people to its ranks.

This prompted them to form a small discussion group that became the nucleus of the Mojahedin.¹⁴²

In the late 1960s, the Mojahedin's study group set up a central committee and an ideological team, and tasked them with producing the organisation's theological pamphlets.¹⁴³ In the early days, the Mojahedin focused its efforts mainly at targeted 'imperialism', and especially what it regarded as American imperialism, and viewed the Shah's monarchical regime as being complicit. In condemning US imperialism and its 'global collaborators', the Mojahedin publicly began to denounce the Pahlavi's regime for allying with the West, Israel, and other reactionary regimes such as those of South Africa and South Vietnam. For the Mojahedin, these regimes had allied themselves against the Third World, including Arab nations and the Vietnamese liberation movement.¹⁴⁴ According to Abrahamian, the ideology of the Mojahedin combined Islam with Marxism.¹⁴⁵ The group's leadership attempted to avoid being directly associated with Marxism, and instead painted itself as being more religiously inclined. Yet the Mojahedin's main aim was to highlight commonalities between Islam and Marxism through the shared language of anti-imperialism. Indeed, the Mojahedin were certainly aware that denying the validity or importance of religion in a society where the masses were religious would send the message that the group was out of touch, and

¹⁴² Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 85-86

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 89. According to Abrahamian, the central ideological committee included: Mohammad Hanifnezhad, Said Mohsen, Ali-Asghar Badizadegan, Mahmud Asgarizadeh, Abdel-Rasul Meshkinfam, Ahmad Rezai, Ali Mihandust, Naser Sadeq, Ali Bakeri, Mohammad and Bahman Bazargani, and Masoud Rajavi. The majority of its leadership cadre were the sons of traditional and religious-minded bazaar middle-classes. For more information on the composition of the committee, see Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, chapter 3.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 92.

subsequently make it more difficult for them to mobilise them against the pro-Western Shah's regime.¹⁴⁶

As the Mojahedin began its guerrilla war against the Shah's regime, its leadership established contacts with the PLO, and particularly Fatah, which in addition to being militarily capable was closer ideologically to the Mojahedin.¹⁴⁷ The leadership of the Mojahedin were already familiar with Fatah's ideological tendencies through listening to their radio channel, al-Asefah. In autumn 1969, the MKO decided to establish formal contacts with Fatah by sending Hussein Ruhani to their office in Paris. Ruhani's meetings with Fatah's official, Mahmud Al-Hamshari, ended with no tangible results. The MKO central committee made another attempt at establishing relations with Fatah by sending some of its prominent members, including Rasoul Meshkinfam and Torab Haqshenas, to Qatar and Dubai in March 1970.¹⁴⁸ There they managed to meet with Fatah officials and hold ideological discussions. After clarifying their anti-Zionist stance and ideological beliefs, Fatah agreed to hold more discussions with Iranian activists in Beirut and Amman. Mojahedin delegates arrived in Jordan from Beirut in spring 1970 and held a number of meetings with Fatah official Abu-Hassan. Both sides came to an agreement, and arranged for Fatah to provide guerrilla training for members of the Mojahedin.

Following their meetings, members of the central committee of the Mojahedin travelled to Jordan and Fatah training camps in Lebanon and Syria following 'Black

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 101.

¹⁴⁷ The Society of Editors of The Institute of Political Studies and Research, *Sazeman-e Mojahedin Khalq; Peydayee ta Farjam 1344-1384* [The Organisation of the People's Mojahedin; Emergence to the End, 1965-2005], Tehran: Moaseseh Motaleaat va Pajooheshhay-e Siyasi [The Institute of Political Studies and Research], 1389 [2010], p. 395

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 397

September'.¹⁴⁹ While the first group of the Mojahedin attended Fatah training camps in Beirut and Amman, another group of six people – including Musa Khiabani – were sent to Dubai with forged documents in order to join their fellow fighters. As the group attempted to purchase necessary items for their journey to Beirut, they were detained on suspicion of travelling with false documents by a British officer tasked with training Dubai's local police. After spending a few months in custody, they were due to be extradited to Iran.¹⁵⁰ The Mojahedin leadership sent Meshkinfam, Ruhani and Sadat-Darbandi to Dubai with a mission to investigate the situation, and upon their arrival they received moral support from Yasser Arafat. They subsequently obtained intelligence through a Palestinian judge that happened to be a PLO sympathiser in Dubai. Using this intelligence, they boarded the same flight as the extradited members of the Mojahedin and hijacked the plane, flying it to Iraq.

In Baghdad, the group of nine Mojahedin were imprisoned and tortured by the Iraqi authorities on suspicion of being SAVAK agents. It was not until Fatah officials in Iraq intervened and convinced the Iraqis to release and permit them to join Fatah camps in Syria and Lebanon.¹⁵¹ Meanwhile Morteza Haqshenas, a prominent member of the Mojahedin, travelled to Iraq and requested that Ayatollah Khomeini, who was in exile in Iraq, intervene on their behalf. However, Ayatollah Khomeini refused to intervene

¹⁴⁹ H.E. Chehabi (ed.), *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, p 185. According to Chehabi, the Mojahedin were sent to Syria and Lebanon by Fatah when the Jordanian army put a bloody end to the Palestinian military presence in Jordan in September 1970.

¹⁵⁰ The Society of Editors of The Institute of Political Studies and Research, *Sazeman-e Mojahedin Khalq; Peydayee ta Farjam 1344-1384* [The Organisation of the People's Mojahedin; Emergence to the End, 1965-2005], First edition, Tehran: Moaseseh Motaleaat va Pajooreshhay-e Siyasi [The Institute of Political Studies and Research], 1389 (2010) p. 400. According to the document, after searching their accommodation, the Dubai police recovered a number of revolutionary pamphlets about Palestine and guerrilla movements in Venezuela, and a number of false travel documents. While in custody, the Mujahedin managed to send a letter to their fellow members in Iran via an Iranian prisoner and inform their central committee in Beirut about their arrests in Dubai.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 403. In an interview in 1980, Hussein Ruhani admitted that upon their arrival in Baghdad, the group of nine Mujahedin were subjected to torture and systematic interrogation until Fatah intervened.

knowing that the Iraqi regime would request his collaboration in return, which he wanted to avoid.¹⁵² While the group spent a week recuperating in a Baghdad hospital, they refused to accept Iraqi offers to remain in Baghdad and continue their anti-Shah's activities. According to Ruhani's interview, the Mojahedin wanted to leave Iraq because they were aware that SAVAK would use their presence there in its anti-Mojahedin propaganda.¹⁵³ The Mojahedin were trained in Fatah's Hassan-Sallameh camp in Jordan, and then transferred to Tartus in Syria and Sheikh Zenad in Lebanon after Black September.¹⁵⁴

According to Chehabi, Mojahedin trainees at the Palestinian camps were provided with Fatah identity documents and enjoyed a certain amount of immunity and freedom of movement in Lebanon.¹⁵⁵ Having improved their military capabilities in the Palestinian camps, the Mojahedin planned to return and organize guerrilla activities in Iran. However, most of its leadership and active membership were rounded up and arrested by SAVAK in August 1971.¹⁵⁶ The captured members of the Mojahedin were tried by military tribunals, all charged with hijacking the plane from Dubai, arms smuggling, and being agents of the PLO. The Shah's regime also accused them of being Marxist-Islamist saboteurs.¹⁵⁷ Those members that were not in the dock, Ruhani and Haqshenas, travelled extensively in order to maintain and fortify the Mojahedin's connection with the PLO, the governments of Libya and the People's Democratic

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 404-406.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p. 404.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 407. According to the document, the Mujahedin's Organisation claimed that the Camp of Hassan-Sallameh was named after Meshkinfam's nickname.

¹⁵⁵ H.E. Chehabi (ed.), *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, pp. 186-187.

¹⁵⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 128. According to Abrahamian, the Mojahedin had planned to sabotage celebrations of the anniversary of 2,500 years of monarchy. However, SAVAK infiltrated the group and arrested thirty members of the Mojahedin a few days before the scheduled bombing.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 128-129.

Republic of Yemen, and other Iranian dissidents in exile.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Mohsen Nejathoseini remained in Lebanon and acted as the Mojahedin's delegate in the Sabra refugee camp, publishing the Mojaedin's statements and maintaining its international networks.¹⁵⁹

From August 1971 the Mojahedin began to publish pamphlets which highlighted its connection with Palestinian fighters. In a statement published by the MKO in winter 1972 entitled *The Defence Statement of Martyr Said Mohsen in the Military Tribunal*, the Mojahedin explicitly stated their anti-imperialist and pro-Palestinian stance. In Said Mohsen's words,

[w]e have started our uprising to build a world where there is no exploitation. This goal does not recognize geographical borders; it can be in Iran, Palestine, Vietnam or Africa. For us, martyrdom alongside the Palestinian freedom fighters or Vietnamese guerrillas has one meaning. To do so, we have been confronting American imperialism and the Shah's pro-capitalist puppet regime. To obtain our goal, we continue our armed struggle and are ready to sacrifice our lives.¹⁶⁰

Mohammad Hanifnezhad's statement during his trial and SAVAK interrogations were also publicised. During interrogations, he clarified the influence of the Palestinian cause on the Mojahedin's ideology, stating

[w]e were mainly concentrating on studying Quran and religious books until 1967 when Israeli aggression and occupation of the Palestinian lands intensified. Hearing that how the oppressed people of Palestine became victims of international imperialism and the

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁵⁹ H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, pp. 186-187.

¹⁶⁰ Said Mohsen, *Matn-e Defaayie Mojahed-e Shahid Said Mohsen dar dadgah-e Nezami* [The Defense Statement of Martyr Said Mohsen in the Military Tribunal], The Mojahedin's Publication, Winter 1972. Also available at http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/mojahedine_khalgh--defaiiate_said_mohsen.pdf [Accessed 26 April 2013]

fact that the Shah's regime had close relations with Israel, the main enemy of the Muslims, prompted us to intensify our struggle. We decided to fight against the enemies of Islam and follow the fatwa of Islamic clerics including Ayatollah Khomeini and send our fighters to Palestine.¹⁶¹

In an effort to refute the state's accusation that the Mojahedin were disguising Marxist ideology in religious garb, the group's propaganda wing attempted to underline the organisation's anti-Zionist stance as the main unifying factor between Islam and Marxism. In 1975, the Mojahedin published a hand-out entitled *Pasokh be Etehamate Akhir-e Regime* [Answer to the Regime's Latest Insults]:

The regime is trying hard to place a wedge between Marxism and Muslims. In our view, there is only one major enemy: imperialism and its local collaborators. Of course Islam and Marxism are not identical. Nevertheless Islam is definitely closer to Marxism than to Pahlavism. Islam and Marxism teach the same lesson, for they both fight against injustice. Islam and Marxism contain the same message, for they both inspire martyrdom, struggle and self-sacrifice. Who is closer to Islam; the Vietnamese who fight American imperialism or the Shah who collaborates with Zionism and imperialism?¹⁶²

As mentioned earlier, the Mojahedin during its early stages were influenced and inspired by Third World revolutions and organisations, including the Algerian revolution and particularly the Palestinian liberation movement. The Mojahedin believed that the Palestinians were fighting at the heart of the Islamic world and in an area where most of the regimes were conservative and pro-American. The Palestinian movement also served as an inspiration to the Mojahedin because it continued to

¹⁶¹ The Society of Editors of The Institute of Political Studies and Research, *Sazeman-e Mojahedin Khalq; Peydayee ta Farjam 1344-1384* [The Organisation of the People's Mojahedin; Emergence to the End, 1965-2005], First edition, Tehran; Moaseseh Motaleaat va Pajooheshay-e Siyasi [The Institute of Political Studies and Research], 1389 (2010) p. 667. For the full statement, see pp. 665-677.

¹⁶² Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin*, p. 102

operate despite a series of political and military setbacks, such as 1967 Arab- Israeli war and Black September. The Mojahedin were aware that the Iranian public sympathised with the Palestinian cause, and consequently pushed the view that the fate of the Shah's regime was inextricably tied to that of Zionism.¹⁶³ The Mojahedin's political cadres translated some of al-Asifah's radio programs into Farsi, and published transcripts in their pamphlets.

Two years after being re-established in 1961, following the June 1963 popular uprisings, the Mossdeqist National Front (NF) terminated its political activities inside Iran. Nevertheless, in the late 1960s some of its more radical cadres moved to Beirut and established close relations with Palestinian activists.¹⁶⁴ Members of the NF in Beirut declared the establishment of *Sazemanha-ye Jebhe-ye Melli-e Iran dar Khavar-e Miyaneh* (Organizations of the National Front of Iran in the Middle East).¹⁶⁵ From 1971, NF members published a Farsi newspaper called *Bakhtar-e Emruz* as well as an Arabic language version titled *Iran al-Thawra*.¹⁶⁶ *Bakhtar-e Emruz* had been printed in the Palestinian printing houses in Lebanon during the 1970s in Lebanon. The main activities of these newspapers and pamphlets were to publicize relations between the Iranian opposition with other revolutionary movements, particularly Palestinian activists. The organizers of *Bakhtar-e Emruz* mainly conducted interviews with Palestinian activists, published joint statements, and publicized Ayatollah Khomeini's pronouncements on the Palestinian issue. The primary printed slogan of these newspapers was *Pirooz baad Khalq-e Felestin, Pishqaravol-e Enqelab-e mardom-e*

¹⁶³ The Society of Editors of The Institute of Political Studies and Research, *Sazeman-e Mojahedin Khalq; Peydayee ta Farjam 1344-1384* [The Organisation of the People's Mojahedin; Emergence to the End, 1965-2005], First edition, Tehran; Moaseseh Motaleaat va Pajooheshay-e Siyasi [The Institute of Political Studies and Research], 1389 (2010), pp. 373-377

¹⁶⁴ H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, p. 189.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Khavar-e Miyaneh (“victory for the people of Palestine, the vanguards of the Middle Eastern peoples’ revolution”).¹⁶⁷

Further highlighting the methods of *Bakhtar-e Emruz* in publicizing the connection between Iran’s pre-revolutionary dissidents with the Palestinian question are some of its short statements and interviews. In an interview with *Bakhtar-e Emruz*, published in February 1976, Ahmad Jibril, secretary of the PFLP-GC, praised the solid desire of the Iranian revolutionaries in resisting imperialism and highlighted the strong historical ties between the Arabs and the Iranians:

[t]he Iranian regime, the reactionary Arab states, the Zionists and the Imperialism from any type that they might be, create one unified unit. This unified unit is our natural enemy. The relations of the Arab home-land with Iran is not just about neighbouring state to state relations. But our relations have historical, economical, cultural and even a national basis. Therefore, we can neither exclude Iran from the Arab home-land nor the Arab home-land from Iran. In Iran, there are the Arab minorities and in Iraq and the (Persian) Gulf states, there are the Persian minorities. The ethnic Kurds also create a common cultural ground between Iran and Iraq. We have a similar historical background. I mean the Islamic common history. The Iranian and the Arab people have more than ten centuries of common history.¹⁶⁸

In a similar interview with *Bakhtar-e Emruz*, George Habash, general secretary of the PFLP, stated that

[a]ny victory obtained by the Iranian revolutionary movements is the triumph for all the anti-imperialistic revolutionary movements in the region. In fact, such organic relations

¹⁶⁷ The various editions of *Bakhtar-e Emruz* can be found at <http://www.peykarandeesh.org/Niruhaye-Digar/bakhtare-emrooz.html> [Accessed 3 May 2013]

¹⁶⁸ *Bakhtar-e Emruz*, February 1976 edition, also available at: <http://peykarandeesh.org/Niruhaye-Digar/bakhtare-emrooz/bakhtare-emrooz-70.pdf> [Accessed 3 May 2013]

between the revolutionary movements have mutual and positive reflections on one another. Hence, when the Iranian masses manage to shake the pillars of imperialism in that part of the region, the pillars of imperialism will be shaken in this part of the region.¹⁶⁹

In October 1971, in response to the Black September and conflict between the Jordanian military forces and the Palestinian fighters, the NF issued a public statement in *Bakhtar-e Emruz*:

[o]nce again, King Hussein, the puppet of imperialism and the collaborator of Zionism has attacked the freedom fighters of Palestine. The National Front of Iran conveys the Iranian people's deep sorrow on the killing of the Palestinian fighters. We strongly believe that the weapons of those martyrs will not remain on the ground as our people will not rest until the imperialism and Zionism are removed from our region.¹⁷⁰

Bakhtar-e Emruz also played a crucial role as a communication channel between Palestinian activists, Iranian revolutionaries and the Iranian public. In October 1973, a public statement from Ayatollah Khomeini calling on the people of the region to support the Palestinian cause was published:

The leaders of Islamic states should understand that this germinal source of corruption (Israel) that is implanted within the heart of the Islamic land, is not just for suppressing the Arab, but a hazard for all the people of the region. The purpose of Zionism is to dominate the rich natural resources of the Islamic countries. The only way to remove this imperialistic nightmare is through unity between the Islamic countries.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ *Bakhtar-e Emruz*, October 1971 edition, also available at: <http://peykarandesh.org/Niruhaye-Digar/bakhtare-emrooz/bakhtare-emrooz-17.pdf> [Accessed 4 May 2013]

¹⁷¹ *Bakhtar-e Emruz*, October 1973 edition, also available at: <http://peykarandesh.org/Niruhaye-Digar/bakhtare-emrooz/bakhtare-emrooz-46.pdf> [Accessed 5 May 2013]

The NF described the reasons and the roots of Iranian dissidents' strong moral connection to the Palestinian cause by stating that,

Today, the validity of our old idea of the necessity to form strong ties between the revolutionary movements of the region is proven. The global revolutions view the Middle East as a unified organic unit. The path to the salvation of the nations within the region is through unity and not discord. The revolutionary struggle of the people of Palestine, Iran, Turkey and the (Persian) Gulf states are the prime pillars of this revolutionary union. The tie that has been formed between the revolutionary movements within the region during these years, itself proves the validity of our ideas.¹⁷²

Another major activity of *Bakhtar-e Emruz* was to translate articles produced by members of other Third World revolutionary movements – particularly from Palestinian groups – and publish informative articles about these movements.

Subscribing to the ideas of anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism, and holding a pro-Palestinian stance, was by no means limited to larger left-wing organizations. A smaller leftist circle calling itself *Grouh-e Felestin* (the Palestine Group) received public attention particularly when its members led by Shokrollah Paknezhad were arrested in December 1970 as they attempted to cross the border into Iraq in order to join the fight alongside guerrillas in Palestine.¹⁷³ After being arrested by SAVAK, the commander of the Palestine Group made no secret of his support for the Palestinian people and of the inspiration that the Palestinian struggle provided for the militants in

¹⁷² *Bakhtar-e Emruz*, February 1976 edition, also available at:
<http://peykarandesh.org/Niruhaye-Digar/bakhtare-emrooz/bakhtare-emrooz-70.pdf> [Accessed 5 May 2013]

¹⁷³ Ali Gheissari, *Iranian Intellectuals in the 20th Century*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998, p. 192.

Iran.¹⁷⁴ Shokrollah Paknezhad, in his defence statement titled *Akharin Defa'e Grouh-e Felestin* (The Last Defence Testimony of the Palestine Group), stated

It is vital to clarify that most people being arrested and tried in this court have no fault other than being sympathizers with the Palestinian cause. By putting us on trial, the Iranian ruling regime is denouncing the solidarity of the Iranian nation with the people of Palestine and that the whole world with the Palestinian people, a unity for emancipation of the Palestinian land from the oppression of imperialism and Zionism. Of course our solidarity with the Palestinian people is not separated from our anti-imperialistic ideas. In fact, our anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist belief has been a motivational force in our struggle against the (Shah's) regime. Imperialism has chained not only the people of Palestine but the Iranian people and the people of the whole world. Israel is a tool in the hands of imperialism, exploiting and enslaving the people of the region. We are being tried by the Shah's regime because this (Shah's) regime is a puppet of American imperialism.¹⁷⁵

As well as the leftist guerrilla movements, a number of Iranian student organisations were notably anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian. In 1962, Iranian student organisations in Europe and the United States joined together and established the Confederation of Iranian Students National Union (CISNU). According to Afshin Matin-Asgari, the CISNU created an organisational framework for cooperation between communists, socialists, secular nationalists and pro-Islamic activists that shared common ideas of anti-imperialism, anti-monarchy and anti-

¹⁷⁴ Fred Haliday, *Arabia without Sultans*, London: Saqi Books, 2002, p. 488.

¹⁷⁵ For full context of Shokrollah Paknezhad's last testimony, see Shokrollah Paknezhad, *Akharin Defa'e Grouh-e Felestin dar Dadgah-e Nezami* [the Last Defence Testimony of the Palestine Group in the Military Tribunal], available at: http://www.iran-archive.com/sites/default/files/sanad/defaiiate_taregol.pdf [Accessed 6 May 2013].

Zionism.¹⁷⁶ Iranian students in the US, even before merging with their fellow students in Europe, began to criticize the Shah's pro-western foreign policy, calling on the regime to improve relations with Third World countries and respect the sentiments of Arab and Muslim nations.¹⁷⁷ The CISNU supported various Third World causes, and advocated numerous students' anti-imperialist and national liberation movements in the Third World, particularly the Palestinian Student movement. CISNU messages and declarations conveyed strong pro-Palestinian and anti-Zionist sentiments to the Iranian public, including Iranian oppositional groups and members of the clergy.¹⁷⁸

From the early stages of 1963 religious uprising onwards, Ayatollah Khomeini focused on anti-Israel themes in his speeches and strongly castigated the Shah's pro-western foreign policy. On the other hand, the CISNU intensified its anti-monarchical and anti-imperialistic activities. In 1968, the CISNU held its seventh congress in Frankfurt where it formulated and publicised its "Policy Guideline", announcing the Confederation's disposition and anti-imperialistic goals:

Unpatriotic and puppet governments, such as the present Iranian regime, cannot truly respond to the Iranian students' demands, which are directly linked with those of the masses. Therefore the student strata, as part of the people, along with the toiling masses, is in conflict with the regime and has created a movement that is democratic, anti-imperialist, and popular. Students participating in this movement face the principal contradiction of society which is the one between the toiling masses of Iran and

¹⁷⁶ Afshin Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, California: Mazda Publishers, 2002, p. 163.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 132. The CISNU had conveyed a special message addressed to Ayatollah Khomeini, highlighting its supports for the struggle of Iran's clergy against Zionism, colonialism and internal repression.

imperialism. Our organization proceeds from an anti-imperialist position and takes a part in the popular struggle aiming to resolve the above mentioned principal contradiction.¹⁷⁹

Having declared the CISNU as an organized anti-imperialist student circle, its members published a number of pamphlets entitled *Shanzdahom-e Azar* which publicised its international activities abroad. In August 1969, CISNU secretaries Mahmud Rafi and Majid Zarbakhsh travelled to Jordan to participate in the congress of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS). Subsequently, they visited Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf to clarify the CISNU's anti-imperialistic and anti-Zionist positions. In their meeting, it was agreed that the CISNU would consider publishing more about the Islamic aspects of the struggle in Iran.¹⁸⁰

The CISNU established a close connection with GUPS and held regular joint meetings. The Confederation publicised the defence statements of the captured members of the *Grouh-e Felestin* in Iran, denouncing the military trial and lobbying for their release. The Confederation members held a number of hunger strikes throughout Europe and communicated with a number of organizations including Amnesty International. After meeting with the Austrian Chancellor, Bruno Kreisky, he agreed to send a letter to the Shah requesting that Shokrollah Paknezhad's life be spared. Following CISNU activities and international pressure, representatives from the International Federation of Human Rights and journalists were given permission to attend Paknezhad's trial.¹⁸¹

In January 1972, over 1,000 CISNU members attended the organisation's 13th conference in Frankfurt which publicised the Confederation's resolution. The resolution

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 110-111.

¹⁸¹ For more detail on this see, Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, pp. 120-123.

strongly denounced the role of the Shah's regime as the "gendarme of imperialism" in the region. The intervention of the Shah's regime against Palestinian and Omani revolutionary movements, alongside its anti-Arab propaganda, were also denounced and rebuked.¹⁸² CISNU solidarity with Palestinian activists was put into practice and received global attention in March 1972 during the Munich Olympics, at which Israeli athletes were taken hostage by the Black September Organisation.¹⁸³ After this event, the German authorities declared that Palestinian organisations including GUPS were illegal, and arrested their associate members for deportation to Jordan and Israel. The CISNU announced that it would defend its fellow Palestinian students and consider any attack on GUPS as an assault on the CISNU itself. Among the actions it took, the Confederation rescued Palestinian students taking refuge in the embassy of the Arab League in Bonn. To do so, CISNU activists secretly helped the Palestinians leave the embassy and go into hiding. The Iranian students took enormous risks during the mission, swapped their clothes with the Palestinians after entering the embassy, who would then depart without being recognized by the German police. Meanwhile, a number of Iranian and German students went on hunger strikes in Bonn, and others joined them in London, demanding the release of all Palestinians arrested in Germany.¹⁸⁴

Iranian left-wing activists had reached an unwritten consensus that Iran's socio-political problems (under the Pahlavi's regime) were the results of larger international dynamics – namely, imperialism and Zionism. Based on these ideas, the destruction of the Pahlavi's regime demanded a more vigorous and strong international revolutionary

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 123. According to Matin-Asgari, the CISNU resolution also denounced the Iraqi regime's attempts to expell Iranians and claim that Khuzestan and the Persian Gulf were Arab.

¹⁸³ Ibid., p. 135.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 135-136.

movement, and it was this reason which led left-wing activists towards supporting Palestine. One may however argue that the left-wing activists' pro-Palestinian rhetoric was primarily due to the fact that they recognized the need to obtain the use of PLO training facilities. Yet the fact that Iranian left-wing activists would so heavily criticise Zionism, and glorify Third World movements and – more importantly – pro-Palestinian ideas, demonstrates the importance of Palestine and Third Worldism to left wing forces as well as the Iranian public. Iranian left-wing activists no doubt aimed to gain some benefit from PLO training camps, but this could be interpreted as merely a material factor guided by anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist ideas, and therefore of secondary in significance. It is vital to mention that anti-imperialism, anti-monarchism and anti-Zionism credentials were crucial elements that leftwing activists tried to adhere to (at least in spirit) in order to qualify as anti-Shah opposition forces. To understand and recognise the importance of the Palestinian cause within the Iranian public, particularly within the revolutionary strata, I will analyse and discuss the attitude of some of prominent Islamic figures in Iran towards the Palestine question during the pre-revolutionary period.

Iran's pre-revolutionary Islamists and the Palestinian cause

Before investigating relations between pre-revolutionary Islamic figures and the question of Palestine, I intend to show how some of the Islamic revolutionaries interpreted and navigated the Palestinian cause within their discourse. Shortly after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Ayatollah Kashani, a popular religious figure who was well-known for his opposition to British colonialism, denounced it and

emphasised his support for the Palestinians.¹⁸⁵ In the winter of 1947, Ayatollah Kashani issued his first statement in relation to the Palestinian question:

The foundation of the Zionist regime will be the source of corruption for Muslims in the Middle East and the whole world. The damage won't be limited to the Palestinian Arabs only, hence, this is a duty for all Muslims to do what they can to stop such tyranny against the Palestinian Muslims.¹⁸⁶

Ayatollah Kashani subsequently called for popular demonstrations in support of the Palestinians. In spring 1948, responding to Ayatollah Kashani's calls, around thirty thousand Iranians gathered in Sultani Mosque in Tehran (later renamed the Imam Khomeini Mosque) and protested against the establishment of the state of Israel. Ayatollah Kashani continuously called on the Iranian public to financially support the Palestinian fighters in their struggle against the state of Israel.¹⁸⁷ Shortly after the Iranian government recognized Israel as a de-facto state in March 1950 and opened a consulate in Jerusalem, Ayatollah Kashani denounced the decision: "[t]he Israeli government is supported by American, German and French Jews. Fighting the Jews is compulsory. We Iranians will rebel even though the government recognized Israel and we have created an organization to fight Israeli Jews."¹⁸⁸ The protests led and organised

¹⁸⁵ Khair el-Din Hasseb, *Arab-Iranian Relations*, p. 351.

¹⁸⁶ Seyed Abbas Razavi, *Ulamay-e Shiie va Hemayat-e Feqhi va Siyasi az Filistin* [The Shia Clergy and the Islamic Jurisprudent and Political Support for Palestine], *Paygah-e Etelaa Resaani-e Hawzah*, Azaar-e 1381 (Autum 2002), Tehran, Vol. 78. Also available at: <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/0/0/23462?SearchText=%d8%b4%d9%8a%d8%b9%d9%87+%d9%88+%d9%81%d9%84%d8%b3%d8%b7%d9%8a%d9%86> [Accessed 8 July 2013]

¹⁸⁷ M. Rajabi and Derangi Hassan, *Mojahadat-hay-e Ayatollah Seyed Abul-Qassem Kashani* [A View of Ayatollah Kashani's Struggle], The Islamic Revolution Document Centre, 29/09/1387 (Summer 2008). Also available at <http://www.irdc.ir/fa/content/5878/default.aspx> [Accessed 16 July 2013]

¹⁸⁸ Dehghani, "Iran's Role in Opposition to the Partition of Palestine", p. 71.

by Ayatollah Kashani ended with the revocation of the recognition of Israel by Mossadeq in 1951.¹⁸⁹

Having encouraged the Mossadeq government to renounce Iran's recognition of the Israeli state, Ayatollah Kashani began to send sympathizing messages to the Arab world. In a meeting with delegates of the Syrian Islamic Affairs Assembly, Ayatollah Kashani stated

We have reversed the decision to recognize Israel. The previous cabinet recognized Israel, because it was a puppet of British colonialism. Now, all the Muslim and Arab states should coordinate their efforts to ensure that the land of Palestine is returned to its lawful and legitimate owners, the Palestinian people.¹⁹⁰

Ayatollah Kashani continued his support for anti-colonial movements across the region, such as Jamal Abdul-Nasser's attempts to nationalize the Suez Canal, and the Tunisian struggle against France. Kashani saw this as part of his Islamic duty, and he tried to convey sympathetic messages to the Islamic and the Arab world while confronting the Shah's repression at home.¹⁹¹

While Ayatollah Kashani helped draw Iran's attention to the Palestinian cause, a group of young Iranians established the *Jamiyaat Fadaeeyan-i Islam*, or the Society of Devotees of Islam. This association was a Shia militant group active between 1945 and 1955. The foundation of this association was announced in 1945 with a document entitled "Religion and Revenge", written by the group's founder Navaab Safavi, which argued that Islam had come under attack and required followers to "avenge" the

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, pp. 71-72. With the fall of Mossadeq's Cabinet in 1953, the Shah's regime resumed its relations with Israel and sent a new representative there in 1957.

¹⁹⁰ Rajabi and Hassan, *Mojahadat-hay-e Ayatollah Seyed Abul-Qassem Kashani*.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

faith.¹⁹² The Fadaeeyan-i Islam considered the issue of supporting the Palestinian cause amongst their socio-political activities. Protesting against the government's 'pro-western' policies, the Fadaeeyan-i-Islam advocated enrolling volunteers to fight in Palestine. Ali Rahnema provides a brief biography of Navab Safavi. According to him, Navab Safavi (1924-1956) was born in Tehran, he briefly attended at the British managed Iranian Oil Company before going to Najaf in Iraq in 1943 to pursue his religious studies at the seminary school.¹⁹³ On his return, Navab Safavi founded an organisation of Fadaeeyan-i Islam [Devotees of Islam]. His organisation was committed to the application of the Shari'a, the restoration of an Islamic Government and the cleaning of evil-doers and enemies of Islam.¹⁹⁴ According to Rahnema, from 1945 to 1951 Navab Safavi threw the full weight of his organisation behind Ayatollah Kashani's political objectives. Navab Safavi's organisation accepted the responsibility for the assassination of a number of the Shah's governmental officials including Prime Minister Razmara (March 1951) and in November 1956, Navab Safavi and seven of his followers were arrested and were sentenced to death and executed.¹⁹⁵

According to Taghavi, the only comprehensive ideological treatise for Fadaeeyan-i Islam was a book written by Navab-Safavi, entitled *Ettelaitti az Barnameh Enqelabi-i Fadaeeyan-i Islam (Rahnamai-i Haqaeq)* (An Announcement of the Revolutionary Programme of Fadaeeyan-i Islam). In this book, Navab-Safavi called on Muslims to "rethink their religion and their surrounding world."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Seyed Mohammad Ali Taghavi, "Fadaeeyan-i Islam: The Prototype of Islamic Hard-Liners in Iran", *Middle East Studies*, Vol.40, No1 (January 2004), p. 153.

¹⁹³ Ali Rahnema, "Behind the 1953 Coup in Iran: Thugs, Turncoats, Soldiers, and Spooks", Cambridge University Press, 2015, p.307

¹⁹⁴ Ibid

¹⁹⁵ Ibid

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p.156.

For Navab-Safavi, Muslim unity could not be compromised. He suggested that there should be an organisation consisting of delegates from Muslim states designed to settle their disagreements and to support their economic prosperity and military development.¹⁹⁷ On a visit to Egypt, Navab-Safavi advocated Islamic unity and recommended abandoning pan-Arabism, which he regarded as a part of an enemy plot against Muslims.¹⁹⁸ Taghavi argues that the Fadaeeyan-i Islam viewed the domination of westerners over Muslim societies as the main factor influencing the 'decline of Muslims'. From the Fadaeeyan-i Islam's point of view, following the Muslim triumph during the Crusades, Jewish and Christian freemasonry conspired to deny Muslims of their superiority.¹⁹⁹ It was therefore not difficult for the Fadaeeyani-i Islam and their zealous followers to have a sense of sympathy with Palestinian Muslims and view the Palestinian question as matter that the Muslim world simply could not compromise over.

Navab-Safavi, in coordination with Ayatollah Kashani, organized popular protests supporting the Palestinians. In spring 1948 he orchestrated the enrolment of 5,000 volunteers in Tehran to fight for the cause of Palestine. In this regard, Fadaeeyan-i Islam issued a statement:

The bloods of brave devotees of Islam boil in support of the Palestinian brothers. Five thousand sympathizers of *Fadaeeyan-i Islam* are ready to join their Palestinian brothers to liberate Palestine and to this end, we demand the government to immediately give us permission to move towards Palestine.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., p.156.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p.159.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 159.

²⁰⁰ Razavi, *Ulamay-e Shiie va Hemayat-e Feqhi va Siyasi az Filistin*, p, 4. The Iranian Government did not approve Fadaeeyan-i Islam's demand for going to Palestine and joining the Palestinian fighters. Also available

Navab-Safavi visited Lebanon and attended the Islamic Conference in Egypt in 1948, publicly stressing the importance of supporting the Palestinians in their struggle for freedom. Navab-Safavi travelled to Jerusalem in 1953 and attended the Islamic conference of Beit al-Moqaddas for six days. While attending the conference in Jerusalem, Navab-Safavi advocated that the only practical method of liberating Palestine was through martyrdom, given that its occupiers were unwilling to tolerate peaceful means. For Navab-Safavi, the Palestinian cause was a concern for all Muslims, and Muslims bore a duty to support them by any means necessary.²⁰¹ Navab-Safavi held talks with King Hussein of Jordan during his visits in Lebanon and Egypt. He also met with Yasser Arafat, who was a young student at the time, and encouraged him to take up arms for the liberation of the Islamic land of Palestine.²⁰² Years later, Yasser Arafat revealed during his visit in Tehran in 1979 that he was motivated and inspired by Navab-Safavi.²⁰³ During his visits to Egypt, Navab-Safavi advocated close spiritual relations with the Muslim Brotherhood, and voiced his admiration for their activities against imperialism and regional puppets.²⁰⁴ After being arrested, prosecuted and executed by the Shah's regime in 1955, many younger members of Fadaeeyan-i Islam later joined Heyat-hai Moetalefe-h Islami (the Coalition of Islamic group), which is considered to be the core hard-line religious group in post-revolutionary Iran.²⁰⁵

at:

<http://www.hawzah.net/fa/magazine/magart/0/0/23462?SearchText=%d8%b4%d9%8a%d8%b9%d9%87+%d9%88+%d9%81%d9%84%d8%b3%d8%b7%d9%8a%d9%86> [Accessed 25 July 2013]

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ See Ayatollah Taleqani, *Yārān-e Imām beh Revāyat-e Asnād-e Sāvāk* [Ayatollah Taleqani, Imam Khomeini's Companions according to the documents of SAVAK], Tehran: Markaz-e Barresi-e Asnād-e Tārikhī-e Vezārat-e Eṭṭelāāt, Vol. 29, Part 2, 1382 [2003], p. 362.

²⁰⁴ Seyed Mohammad Ali Taghavi, "Fadaeeyan-i Islam: The Prototype of Islamic Hard-Liners in Iran", p. 162.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 151.

Ayatollah Taleqani was another well-known revolutionary cleric. His anti-imperialist rhetoric, socio-political concerns and active role in mobilizing the Iranian public during the Islamic revolution brought him to prominence. Ayatollah Taleqani believed that in Islam, *Jihad fi sabil Allah* – struggle in the way of God – represents a divine commandment, and can even be considered a form of *Ibadat* (worship). If one dies while trying to serve God, they may be considered a martyr, and their acts of defending land or prosperity deemed Islamically legitimate.²⁰⁶ From his point of view,

the people of the world are divided into two types: the ones who believe and therefore strive in the direction of God, and those who disbelieve and strive in the way of *taghut*, there is just one way beside the way of God that is the way of *taghut*.²⁰⁷

Ayatollah Taleqani defines *taghut*, which is repeated in the Quran almost eight times, as “the one who overflows from his rightful social limits. He tramples social limits under his feet”.²⁰⁸ He furthermore argues that war is a consequence of human instincts, and that Islam recognizes this fact. According to Ayatollah Taleqani,

This instinct is within you; but do not use it for murdering, theft, lustful purposes, or military expansionism. Use it in its proper way. Defend your rights. Defend your dignity. Defend your religion. Defend human rights. By and by you have to channel this instinct into this proper path.²⁰⁹

Clarifying the concepts of *jihad* and *taghut*, and arguing that it was necessary to defend dignity, land and religion in Islam, Ayatollah Taleqani criticized the Pahlavi regime for its linkage with global-Zionism. When referring to the government, he states,

²⁰⁶ Gary Legenhausen and Mehdi Abedi (eds.), *Jihad and Shahadat, Struggle and Martyrdom in Islam*, USA; The Institute for Research and Islamic Studies, 1986, pp. 50-51.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 51.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 53.

On one side they push Muslim masses into the desserts and rape the boundaries of Islam; and on the other hand, they take Muslim properties by different means... If a government opens an embassy (referring to the Israeli representative office in Tehran) for them without naming it as such, what is the duty of the people towards such a government? Let me tell you, today Zionism is the second cover of Colonialism. Colonialism is the hide of Zionism. Zionism has crept into the hide of Israel”.²¹⁰

One can observe a linkage between *taghut* and Zionism in Ayatollah Taleqani’s reading of the Quran: with those that establish relations with Zionism considered guilty of *taghut*, and those who resist it considered as striving *fī sabil Allah*. To elaborate on this in depth, I will now examine the history of Ayatollah Taleqani’s spiritual support for the Palestinian cause.

Ayatollah Taleqani participated in a number of conferences, including the Islamic Conferences during 1940s and 1950s. He subsequently visited Egypt and held discussions with the clerics of al-Azhar University in Cairo. Regarding his participation in an Islamic Conference held in Jordan, and his visits to Egypt, Ayatollah Taleqani states

In 1949 when we attended the Islamic conference in Palestine, we met with a number of representatives from various Islamic countries. Many of them were just talking and pretending to be supportive, they were not proposing any tangible solutions to the question of Palestine. During our trip from *Beit-el-Moqaddas* to *el-Khalil*, we could see the Palestinian refugees behind barbed wire, waving hands and communicating with their friends and relatives on the other side of the barriers, under severe security measures implemented by the Zionist guards. We hope that one day the land of Palestine will be liberated by the people of Palestine and the al-Aqsa Mosque will return to its rightful and

²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 59.

legitimate people. The legitimate owners of the al-Aqsa Mosque are the indigenous people of Palestine, including Muslims, Jews and Christians and not the Zionist regime that claims the Jerusalem. Today we are not allowed holding a single meeting to voice our moral support for Palestine in Iran, here; we can freely have a joint voice with the Palestinian people for a common goal. We hope our youth study more about the cause of Palestine that itself is a great historical lesson in our century. We hope that our youth improve their relations with Palestine and make their efforts so God willingly and with the support of the other nations, we can accomplish this revolution that has occurred in two sensitive areas of the world (Iran and Palestine) victoriously.²¹¹

Due to his revolutionary activities, Ayatollah Taleqani remained under SAVAK surveillance in 1950s and 1960s, facing the threat of imprisonment up to the triumph of the 1979 revolution. Ayatollah Taleqani's temporary release in 1967 coincided with the Arab-Israeli war in which the Arab states were handed a frustrating military failure. According to SAVAK documents, Ayatollah Taleqani increasingly focused his attention on the Palestinian cause, voicing his support in both public and private. For instance, during the religious festival of Eid al-Fitr in 1967, Ayatollah Taleqani delivered an emotional speech in the Hedayat Mosque in Tehran in support of the Palestinian people. In a symbolic gesture at the end of his *khutbah*, he took some money out of his pocket and, addressing the crowd, stated "I pay my *Zakat* (the Islamic tax) to the people of Palestine".²¹² This gesture inspired and galvanized the Iranian crowd to follow suit and donate their own Islamic taxes to the Palestinian cause.

It is fair to say that Ayatollah Taleqani had aimed to clarify the importance of Palestine in the contemporary Islamic context. He wanted to emphasise Palestine as

²¹¹ See Ayatollah Taleqani, *Yārān-e Imām beh Revāyat-e Asnād-e Sāvāk*, p.10.

²¹² Ibid., p. 19. Ayatollah Taleqani collected the Iranians' Zakaat and channeled them to the PLO through Egyptian consulate in Tehran.

being a primarily Muslim issue, and that therefore Muslims had a duty to support it by any possible means, including paying religious taxes and speaking out against Zionism. SAVAK documents point to Ayatollah Taleqani's enthusiasm for supporting the Palestinian people, and their concern that he was making the Iranian public aware of their struggle. One classified report indicated that Ayatollah Taleqani delivered an inspiring speech in the Hedayat Mosque in autumn 1969 that urged Muslims to go beyond simply cursing Israel and praying for the wellbeing of Palestinians, and instead unite and find a solution for this vital issue.²¹³ In a private meeting with other clerics and anti-Shah activists in 1969, he stated that

While I was attending the World Muslim Congress in Jordan in 1959, I was asked by *Akram Zaeetar*, the delegate of Palestine and Jordan, why is Iran maintaining close relations with the Israelis? To which I responded, the people of Iran and their desire are separate from the regime, I am representing the people of Iran whom are supporting Palestine.²¹⁴

The SAVAK documents indicate that the Iranian public – particularly among the more revolutionary strata – had sympathy for the Palestinians. Furthermore, alms were frequently collected at mosques in support for the Palestinians, particularly during Muslim festivals. In 1970, Ayatollah Taleqani delivered a speech in front of almost 2,000 worshippers at the Hedayat Mosque in Tehran in which he recommended that religious taxes should be paid to those fighting and sacrificing themselves for the sake of Islam. 1970 coincided with a natural disaster in Pakistan, and after Ayatollah Taleqani had asked worshippers to pay their Zakat to either the Muslim people of Pakistan or Palestine by choosing two separate designated boxes, many chose the box

²¹³ Ibid., p. 615.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 612.

for Palestine. According to SAVAK reports, many Iranians even questioned and castigated that “why Ayatollah Taleqani recommends Palestine beside Pakistan? The world helps Pakistan and he should have just called for supporting helpless Palestinians”.²¹⁵ On the night, 16,500 Tomans were collected for the Palestinians, but only 1,600 Toman for the affected people of Pakistan. The collected sum for Palestine was sent to the Egyptian embassy and handed to Yahya Raafat to be sent to Palestine.²¹⁶

The Iranian public’s sympathy for Palestine and particularly Ayatollah Taleqani’s endeavour of supporting the Palestinian cause were well-received in Palestine, and this was reflected in Palestinian pamphlets. SAVAK reports show that a biography of Ayatollah Taleqani was published by al-Thawra magazine (the political publication of the PLO) in January 1978. The article was entitled “A biography of a great imprisoned revolutionary Ayatollah Taleqani”, and was published in the 25th edition of the magazine, translated into Farsi and distributed in Iran. The article provided a brief biography of Ayatollah Taleqani, praising him for his support for the struggle against imperialism. It stated that he was imprisoned by the Shah’s regime because of his unwavering defence of Islam, and his fight against imperialism, and his support for the Palestinians.²¹⁷ The article painted Ayatollah Taleqani as one of the first clerics to support the Palestinian cause, and detailed that the cleric maintained close relations with Palestinian representatives when attending the World Muslim Conference in Jerusalem. The article concludes that from the Palestinian point of view, the “bourgeois regime of the Shah did not manage to silence Ayatollah Taleqani and his followers because they struggle for the sake of the oppressed people and for the sake of

²¹⁵ See Ayatollah Taleqani, *Yārān-e Imām beh Revāyat-e Asnād-e Sāvāk*, pp. 67-68.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 592-594.

their revolutionary ideas”.²¹⁸ Shortly before the triumph of the Islamic revolution in 1978, Ayatollah Taleqani commented on the Palestinian question, stating “[t]he people of Iran have never neglected the cause of Palestine. My purpose of attending the Islamic Conferences in Karachi, Cairo and Jerusalem was in fact for the sake of defending the Palestinians, because the enemy of the Palestinians is not just their enemy but the enemy of the whole Islamic world.”²¹⁹

Ayatollah Taleqani’s pro-Palestinian ideas diffused to other revolutionary clerics and Muslim figures. Ayatollah Murteza Mutahhari,²²⁰ an eminent scholar of Islam and key theorist of the Islamic revolution, also situated the Palestinian cause within an Islamic context, and presented the issue to the Iranian public as such. According to Mohammad Legenhausen and Mehdi Abedi, Ayatollah Mutahhari linked his Islamic conceptualisation of peace, jihad and ‘duty’ to a broader moral obligation for the Iranian public to support the Palestinian cause.²²¹ According to Ayatollah Mutahhari’s reading and analysis of the Quran, “Islam never gives permission to be humiliated, while at the same time strongly advocates peace”.²²² In clarifying the conditions for Jihad and peace, Ayatollah Mutahhari again refers to the Quran and argues that one of the conditions for Jihad was that “the adversary must be in the state of aggression.”²²³ Ayatollah Mutahhari clarifies what is meant by aggression and injustice, particularly in the context of Muslim suffering, and considers it incumbent on all Muslims to act and support the oppressed:

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 594.

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 594.

²²⁰ For more on Ayatollah Mutahhari, see Davari T. Mahmood, *The Political Thought of Ayatollah Mutahhari: An Iranian Theoretician of the Islamic State*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2005. Mutahhari was a prominent *Mujtahid* (Jurist) and known as one of the ‘theoretician of Islamic rule’ in Iran, and one of its main architects.

²²¹ Legenhausen and Abedi (eds.), *Jihad and Shahadat*, p. 96.

²²² Ibid., p. 94.

²²³ Ibid., p. 96.

We may be in a situation whereby a party has not transgressed against us but has committed injustice against a group from another people, who may or may not be Muslims. If they are Muslims as in today's plight of the Palestinians who have been exiled from their homes, whose wealth has been seized, and who have been subjected to all kinds of transgression whereas for the moment the transgressor has no intention against us, it is permissible for us to give assistance to those oppressed Muslims and deliver them. This is not only permissible, but obligatory, because they are Muslims.²²⁴

According to Ayatollah Mutahhari, the moral obligation on the Iranian people to render aid to oppressed peoples – particularly the people of Palestine – was unconditional, and did not require a plea for help from the oppressed to be incumbent.²²⁵ In clarifying the concept of Jihad in Islam, Ayatollah Mutahhari clarifies that defence is the essence of Jihad ultimately a duty for all people whose land, property, wealth and religion were assaulted by another nation.²²⁶ He links the defence of land and religion with the concept of martyrdom, stating “Islam says, whoever is killed for his property or principles is a martyr.”²²⁷ In his view, “the value of fighting in defence lies not in defending one's self, but in defending the right”²²⁸, and he elaborates further that the most sacred form of Jihad or defence is “neither one's personal freedom nor that of the one's country, but freedom in another corner of the world”²²⁹. In order to earn the respect of other nations, one had to demonstrate his or her strong conviction to defend the rights of oppressed people around the world rather than merely his or her individual rights, or the rights of fellow citizens. Ayatollah Mutahhari summarizes this debate by

²²⁴ In *ibid.*, p. 96

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

stating that “if they were ever to transcend the use of the tongue, the pen, letter, and lectures, and actually go to the battlefield and fight, for the Palestinians for example, then the world would consider them to be even more sacred.”²³⁰ Ayatollah Mutahhari’s arguments communicated three things to the Iranian public: First, defending the Palestinians was the concern of all Muslims. Second, one could defend the Palestinian cause using a multitude of methods, including voicing verbal and spiritual support through the delivery of lectures and statements, giving financial support, and fighting on the battlefield. Third, defending the cause of Palestine is sacred even beyond the Islamic context and it demonstrates the free spirit of the defender.

Ayatollah Mutahhari did not limit his pro-Palestinian sentiment to his theoretical lectures however, and instead endeavoured to put his ideas into practice via his political activities. Ayatollah Mutahhari collected monetary aid of the Palestinians, organized public gatherings, and confronted the coercion of the Shah’s regime head-on. In 1970, Ayatollah Mutahhari was summoned by SAVAK because he had made statements in coordination with Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai and Ayatollah Asadollah Bayat Zanjani that urged the Iranian public to provide financial aid for Palestinian refugees. According to SAVAK documents dated 2nd May 1970, Ayatollah Mutahhari delivered an inspirational speech in the mosque of Husseini-eh-Ershad stating that

Europe talks about human rights and peace but is not willing to act accordingly. We Muslims on the other hand talk about Islam but we are not real Muslims too, sitting in silence and doing nothing. Isn’t it true that the Palestinians are Muslims? So why are we

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 105.

sympathizing with them but not acting accordingly?”²³¹ SAVAK subsequently reported that a number of pamphlets were distributed within the Tehran Bazaar and the University of Tehran, indicating that Ayatollah Mutahhari, Ayatollah Tabatabai²³² and Ayatollah Zanjani had opened three Bank accounts at the Meli Bank, the Bank of Saderat and the Bank of Bazargani-Markaz, the Bazaar branch, in order for the public to render financial aid to the Palestinians. The distributed pamphlets were titled with a quotation from the Prophet Mohammed saying, “If a Muslim hears a plea for help from other Muslims and does not respond, he is not a Muslim”.²³³

The local SAVAK coordinator in the Shemiranat region had reported that due to the high level of local sympathy towards the Palestinian cause, and the fact that there were a large numbers of pamphlets and adverts throughout the city in regard to support for the Palestinians, his local office had hesitated to confront Ayatollah Mutahhari and his followers.²³⁴

Consequently, in November 1970, Ayatollah Mutahhari was summoned by SAVAK and his phone line and home were both put under surveillance. Ayatollah Mutahhari reportedly had refused to stop collecting financial aid for the Palestinians, and rejected SAVAK’s proposal that it receive all funds first and then hand them over to the Iranian Red Sun and Lion Society – rather than the Palestinian Red Crescent – to

²³¹ See *Alem-e Javidan, Ostad-e Shahid Murteza Mutahhari, Yārān-e Imām bih Revāyat-e Asnād-e Sāvāk* [The Martyr Mutahhari, Imam Khomeini’s Companion According to the Documents of SAVAK], Tehran; Markaz-e Barresi-e Asnād-e Tārīkhī-e Vezārat-e Eṭṭilāāt, 1382 [2003], p. 219.

²³² Ibid., p. 221. Ayatollah Tabatabai – also known as Alameh [Erudite] Tabatabai – was a prominent Shia cleric and Muslim thinker. He was born in 1902 in Tabriz, studied in Najaf in Iraq and in the city of Qom. He had lectured a number of prominent Islamic revolutionary figures, including Ayatollah Mutahhari, Ayatollah Beheshti, Dr. Mofatteh and Ayatollah Javadi-Amoli. Ayatollah Tabatabai’s books and theses were well-known, including his *Tafsir-al-Mizan, Principles of Philosophy and Realism*, and *Haashiy-eh bar Kifayat-al-Osuul*.

²³³ Ibid., p. 221; p. 234. According to the SAVAK reports, the three sets of bank account details for supporting the PLO and the Palestinian refugees were: a) Meli Bank, account number: 77388; b) Bank of Bazargani-e Markaz, account number: 45600; and c) Bank of Saderat, Bazaar branch, account number: 9595.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 224.

be used inside of Iran. In a written statement while in SAVAK custody dated 24 November 1970, Ayatollah Mutahhari expressed the following,

When I went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, I had a meeting with the Palestinian Red Crescent Association in Menna and expressed that we in Iran are willing to publicly render financial aid for Palestinian refugees. Hence, they recommended that we send our financial aid to the Association of Supporters of Palestinian Refugees in Mecca. Therefore I was in touch with the ambassador of Saudi Arabia in Tehran and expressed our willingness to send our financial aid through the Saudi embassy. We have explained to the Iranian people that their collected financial help is due to be sent to the Palestinians as they desire and we are due to provide the Iranian public with the receipt from the Palestinian Red Crescent. Hence, we cannot act against what we have promised to the Iranian public, thus we cannot accept the SAVAK proposals.²³⁵

Ayatollah Mutahhari underlined that it was his religious duty to channel the collected financial support to the Palestinians. He argued that he had only managed to mobilize financial aid because the Iranian people held a strong desire to do so, and that if he were to accept SAVAK's coercive suggestion he would have betrayed both the country and his own Muslim duties and morality.²³⁶

For Ayatollah Mutahhari, the differences between Sunni and Shi'ite communities were limited to the minor religious principles. To this end, he had emphasized that supporting Palestine should not be overshadowed by sectarian debates because it was the unity of Muslims which helped the Palestinian cause. There are reports from SAVAK reinforcing this fact. For instance, a classified report from SAVAK dated 19 July 1972 highlights that in one public lecture, Ayatollah Mutahhari

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 290 and p. 304.

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

– in response to rumours that Palestinians did not share the Shi'i view of Imam Ali's succession to Prophet Mohammed – stated that “The Jews are the enemies of Imam Ali bin Abi-Talib, the first Imam of the Shi'ites not the Sunnis. The only difference between the Shi'ite and Sunnis is that the Sunnis recognise Imam Ali as the forth Caliph but they do respect and have faith in Ali.”²³⁷ Thus, for Ayatollah Mutahhari, the Palestinian cause was far more important than the Shi'i-Sunni debate over the succession to the Prophet.

In the eyes of Iran's revolutionaries, the Palestinian cause overshadowed all other issues in the region and the Islamic world. In another recorded report by SAVAK, during a meeting entitled as the Heiaat-i Ansar el-Hussein, organized by Ayatollah Mutahhari on the 14th May 1970, one of the companions proposed that some financial aid be collected for the people in need in Algeria. This had been requested by the Algerian president, Houari Boumedienne, and the ambassador of Algeria in Tehran, Ahmed Towfiq el-Maddani, was set to receive financial support in the form of charitable donations. In response, Seyed Ali Khamenei²³⁸ had emphasized that the Palestinian cause represented the foremost priority in the Muslim world, and that financial support should be channelled for the Palestinians in that regard.²³⁹ Ayatollah Mutahhari continued to confront SAVAK, and his public activities were under close surveillance. Nevertheless, his outspoken desire to publicly endorse the Palestinian cause remained as such until his assassination in May 1979, and his influence on his

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 397. Ayatollah Mutahhari had delivered a speech in defence of unity between Sunnis and Shi'ite against the Jews at the El-Jawaad Mosque in Tehran on July 1972.

²³⁸ Ibid., pp. 231-232. Seyed Ali Khamenei was one the companions of Ayatollah Khomeini, and was close to Ayatollah Mutahhari. Khamenei was born in 1939 in the city of Mashhad, and began engaging in political activities after 1963 when Ayatollah Khomeini intensified his anti-Shah and anti-imperialist activities. He actively participated in the revolutionary government and, after being elected as an MP for Tehran, as the President of the Islamic Republic. He was pronounced as the Supreme Leader of the Revolution after Khomeini died.

²³⁹ Ibid., pp. 104-105.

followers and students became evident in the post-revolutionary era, which will be discussed and analyzed in the following chapters.

It was not only the clerics that opposed imperialism and Zionism among those that were religiously inclined in Iran. Non-clerical religious and revolutionary figures like Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e-Ahmad strongly shared such revolutionary commitments. Ali Shariati is best known as an advocate of the Third World movements in their battle against imperialism.²⁴⁰ He was one of the most influential intellectuals of the Islamic Revolution. His teachings continued to be felt throughout Iranian society. Focusing on the Islamic concept of *Amr-e beh ma'ruf va nahy-ye az monkar* as a social responsibility, commanding people to do good and forbid evil, Shariati equated Zionism with evil.²⁴¹ In a similar vein, Shariati maintained that the struggle against international imperialism, dictatorship and colonialism were all manifestations of the Islamic command to forbid evil.²⁴² In his reading of modern history, particularly in identifying the problems of the Third World, Shariati argues that information on liberation or nationalist movements in Europe was blemished by the vested interests of the proponents of "Zionism alongside Capitalism, Fascism and Communism".²⁴³ Hence, according to Ali Rahnema, Shariati believed that the struggle of people in the Third World remained unknown in the rest of the world.²⁴⁴

According to Mahdi Ahouie, one of Shariati's first commentaries on the Palestinian question dates back to July 1967, a few weeks after the Six Day War. In response to an article

²⁴⁰ Brad Hanson, "The Westoxication of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad, and Shariati", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Feb 1983), p. 14.

²⁴¹ Ali Rahnema, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1997, p. 306.

²⁴² Ibid., p. 306.

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 112.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 112.

written by Daryoush Ashouri in in the monthly *Ferdowsi*²⁴⁵ in which he had revealed his support for Israel, Shariati strongly castigated some Iranian intellectuals for not condemning the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians:

Whoever feels sympathetic for the Palestinian refugees who have been expelled from their home cities and houses and lands into the burning deserts of Jordan ...their sympathy derives from the bourgeois!..Whoever feels hatred and revengeful for seeing that after all those [Muslims] glorious conquests in history, Jerusalem has now fallen to the hands of [Zionists] Jews and that the Muslims have become defenceless victims of a Jewish-Christian [alliance] and are being expelled from that sacred land in the most brutal way, has been affected by the lowest bourgeois feelings.²⁴⁶

According to Mahdi Ahouie, the reasons for Ali Shariati's hostility towards Zionism can be summarised as follows; (1) Israel is a Western creation in the Middle East; (2) Israel treats the Arab people unjustly and brutally; and finally (3) Palestine is an inseparable part of the Muslim world.²⁴⁷ On the combination of anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism in the Middle East, Ahouie highlights that Ali Shariati argued that such a combination was quite natural and understandable, because of the omnipresence of imperialism. Israel was seen as an extension of this oppressive world order.²⁴⁸ Shariati added that imperialism is always unmasked through a façade, a Trojan Horse so to say like the former [British] Oil Company in Iran, the East Indian Company, and Zionism in the Arab countries.²⁴⁹ From my perspective, it is crucial to note that Shariati believes there are strong ties between

²⁴⁵ For Ashouri's article see Daryush Ashouri, "Zedde Sahyunism va Zedde Amperialism dar Sgarq", *Ferdowsi*, Issue 820, 11 July 1967, 6-7.

²⁴⁶ Ahouie, Mahdi, "Ali Shariati on the Question of Palestine: Making a Sacred Symbol for Uprising against Injustice and Domination" In *Ali Shariati and the Future of Social Theory; Religion, Revolution, and the Role of the Intellectual*, edited by Dustin J. Byrd, Olivet College, and Seyed Javad Miri, Chapter 11, p.201, Koninklijke Brill, NV, Leiden, 2017.

²⁴⁷ Ibid

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p.202

²⁴⁹ ibid

colonialism, imperialism and Zionism and not least by using an emotive historical analogy, that is the example of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company which filled Iranians with bitter memories because of its role of the MI6 (and CIA) in the removal of the democratically elected Prime Minister Mossadeq in 1953. So Palestine was pasted into the wider narrative of anti-imperial resistance. The historical context that Shariati was embedded in lend itself to a new Third Worldism, with a socialist-Islamic colourings. This was the heydays of anti-colonial agitation all over the world.

Furthermore, Ali Shariati draws parallel lines between Zionism and racism, according to Ahouie, in his rereading of the Iranian Islamic identity, Shariati dedicated one part of his analysis to the discussion of nationalism. He argued that Western understandings of nationalism stemmed from a pervasive racism and anti-Semitism, which eventually led to the emergence of Zionism as a defensive reaction.²⁵⁰ Zionism he argued, instigated ethnic Arab nationalism in the Muslim societies.²⁵¹ In other words, Shariati perceives Zionism as a source for creating a Western notion of nationalism within the Islamic nations. Shariati believed Western imperialism and Zionism had formed a “united front” against Muslims:²⁵²

Our enemies in this time include imperialism, materialism and capitalism, the spirit of bourgeoisie, exploitation, machinism, class differences, fascism, Zionism, nihilism, greediness for welfare, madness of consumption, cultural colonialism, self-alienation, permissiveness, historical disintegration, cultural metamorphosis, decline of moral values, and rule of money.²⁵³

It is vital to note that Ali Shariati also regards “world Zionism”, “international imperialism”, “old and new colonialism,” together with “tyranny”, “racism” and

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p.204

²⁵¹ ibid

²⁵² Ibid, p.206

²⁵³ ibid

“Westoxication” as the biggest troubles of his time.²⁵⁴ Allow me to highlight Ahouie’s argument because it sheds light on the importance of the Palestinian cause within the Iranian revolutionary discourse. According to him throughout the 1960s and 1970s, many new concepts such as anti-imperialism were introduced into the Iranian religious discourse. After 1967, Iranian religious thinkers began to use a line of reasoning as reflected in Shariati’s discourse that held that Israel was the representative of Western colonialism and imperialism in the Middle East. A suitable ground was maintained for substantiating religious opposition to Israel on the basis of such modern concepts as “freedom-seeking” and in the context of a general global clash between “oppressors” and the “oppressed”. In the 1960s and 1970s, when several Third-World nations in Asia and Africa were struggling for independence from Western colonialism, such a delineation of the world as being split between the oppressors and the oppressed appealed to so many religious thinkers in Iran, who were opposed to the Shah’s foreign external and internal policies on the one hand and to the intervention of Western powers in Iran on the other.²⁵⁵

In this context, Ahouie argues that Palestinian resistance against Israel was taken by many Iranian Islamic revolutionaries as a sacred symbol and an example of the struggle against suppression both domestically and internationally. The question of Palestine was an issue over which leftists and Shia notions of justice-seeking and opposition to suppression impeccably matched.²⁵⁶ Shariati contributed to the Iranian political discourse on Zionism by linking the outlooks of the earlier anti-Israeli religious figures such as Ayatollah Kashani and those of the Iranian socialists such as Jalal Al-e Ahmad. By underlining a type of leftist

²⁵⁴ *ibid*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.210

²⁵⁶ *ibid*

translation of Islam, they adopted the idea of “Israel as the puppet of imperialism” from the left and the concept of “standing for justice” from the Shia perspective.²⁵⁷ Shariati’s emphasis on the Palestinian question can be epitomised in the following phrase of his own: “We are not hostile to the Jews, but we are hostile to Israel. And that is not because of its religion, but because it is fascist and because it is a basis for Western colonialism and imperialism”.²⁵⁸

Alongside Ali Shariati, Jalal Al-e Ahmad was a well known author and outspoken critic of imperialism. In *Gharbzadegi* (variously translated as ‘West-toxification’, ‘Westitis’, or ‘Weststruckness’) Jalal Al-e Ahmad harshly criticizes the economic and cultural dependency of the Third World in general and particularly Iran’s dependency on the West.²⁵⁹ In other words, *Gharbzadegi* represented a precursor to discussions of North-versus-South during the 1960s and 1970s. In developing his theory, Jalal Al-e Ahmad saw Islam as an integral non-Western and native component of Iranian identity, and a conceivable route to delivering Iran from the plight of *gharbzadegi*.²⁶⁰ According to Adib-Moghaddam, the anti-dependency theory of Jalal Al-e Ahmad (reflected in *Gharbzadegi*) and anti-imperialistic ideas of Ali Shariati (reflected in writings such as *Bazgasht beh-khish*) symbolized the deification of the ‘Third-Worldist’, socialist and revolutionary-Islamic zeitgeist in Iranian society during the 1970s.²⁶¹ Although there may not be considerable direct references to Palestine within the works of Ali Shariati and Jalal Al-e Ahmad, their anti-imperialist, anti-

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p.211

²⁵⁸ ibid

²⁵⁹ Brad Hanson, “The Westoxication of Iran: Depictions and Reactions of Behrangi, al-e Ahmad, and Shariati”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, (Feb 1983), p. 8.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 12. A few years before his death, Jalal Al-e Ahmad recognised Islam as a route to salvation. His well-known book, *Khasi dar Miqaat*, was written after his pilgrimage to Mecca in which demonstrates the significance of Islam from his point of view.

²⁶¹ Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, *Iran in World Politics*, p. 52.

Zionist and anti-colonialist ideas have created a comprehensive pro-Palestinian framework. In other words, having identified Ali Shariati with anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism and Jalal Al-e Ahmad with anti-colonialism and ‘third-worldism, it is easy to envision the Palestinian cause as representing a “cosmic” struggle of the oppressed against the oppressors. According to SAVAK documents, Musa Sadr²⁶² alongside representatives of Fatah and the delegate of the Grand Mufti of Syria participated in Ali Shariati’s burial ceremony in Damascus in 1977. In his speech at the burial ceremony, Musa Sadr highlighted the moral connection between Ali Shariati and the Palestinian cause by stating that “Shariati was always thinking of Palestine and the pains of Palestinians during his life, hence, God wanted him to be buried in this cemetery in Damascus, near Palestine”²⁶³ Nikki Keddie highlights this socio-political atmosphere of the pre-revolutionary era by arguing that the above survey of Iranian political thought since the late nineteenth century proposes the frequent reappearance of certain parallels often found in the writings of both religious and secular thinkers. One of the most crucial is anti-imperialism, accompanied by a determination to free Iran from Western economic and cultural dominance.²⁶⁴ Palestine became a major factor within that salient discourse, as indicated.

A discussion of the roots and development of support for the Palestinian cause in Iran during the pre-revolutionary era is incomplete without a focus on Ayatollah Khomeini. From Ervand Abrahamian’s point of view, Ayatollah Khomeini

²⁶² Musa Sadr, a well-known high-rank Shi’ite cleric, was born in 1928 in Cheharmardan, on the outskirts of Qom in Iran. He left Iran for Lebanon in 1959, and played a significant role in supporting the Shia community of south Lebanon until his mysterious disappearance in 1978. For more on Musa Sadr see Chehabi (ed.), *Distant Relations*, chapter 6.

²⁶³ *Shahid Ayatollah Dr. Mofatteh, Yārān-e Imām beh Revāyat-e Asnād-e Sāvāk* [The Martyr Doctor Ayatollah Mofatteh: Imam Khomeini’s Companions According to the Documents of SAVAK], Tehran; Markaz-e Barresi-e Asnād-e Tārikhī-e Vezārat-e Eṭṭilāāt, Part 6, 1382 [2003], p. 372.

²⁶⁴ Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution; An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*, Yale University Press 1981, p.229

began his political career in 1943 with the publication of *Kashf al-Asrar* [Unveiling of Secrets], which castigated the socio-political conditions of Iran.²⁶⁵ Ayatollah Khomeini rose to prominence in 1963 when he publicly denounced the Shah's regime. At the outset of his political career, Ayatollah Khomeini had placed great importance on the Palestinian cause and conspicuously addressed the matter within his public pronouncements. According to Abrahamian, while Ayatollah Khomeini had been developing his ideas in *Velayat-e Faqih: Hokumat-e Islami* (The Jurist Guardianship: Islamic Government), he had noticeably developed his socio-political castigations of the Shah's regime by denouncing it as an "unwitting tool of the imperialist-Jewish conspiracy" and for its "anti-Arab" and "anti-Palestinian" political stance.²⁶⁶

Before analyzing the origin of Ayatollah Khomeini's pro-Palestinian stance, it is necessary to gain an understanding of how he viewed the state of Israel. Hamid Algar argues that Ayatollah Khomeini's best known work focuses on three major points: the necessity of establishing Islamic political institutions, the doctrine of *Velayat-e Faqih*, and the duty of religious scholars to bring about an Islamic state and program of actions for the foundation of an Islamic government.²⁶⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini offered a number of arguments in support of an Islamic government. He had developed his argument while highlighting the significance of the Quran's verses that command believers to protect the Islamic domain from non-Muslim 'aggressors'. According to Algar, Ayatollah Khomeini's reference to the Quran's verse 8:60, "prepare against them whatever force you can muster and horses tethered", is an

²⁶⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *Khomeinism: Essays on the Islamic Republic*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1993, p. 21.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 21 and p. 24.

²⁶⁷ Hamid Algar (ed.), *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981, p. 25.

attempt to substantiate the indispensability of defending the territorial integrity of the Muslim nations.²⁶⁸ Pointing to the Quran, Ayatollah Khomeini states that:

If the Muslims had acted in accordance with this command and, after forming a government, made the necessary extensive preparation to be in a state of full readiness for war, a handful of Jews would never have dared to occupy our lands, and to burn and destroy the Masjid al-Aqsa.²⁶⁹

It is safe to argue that in Ayatollah Khomeini's reading of the Quran, there is a particular place designated to Palestine as the Muslim heartland. Khomeini's description of Palestine as 'our land' implies a strong socio-religious tie between the Palestinian question and Muslim Iran. In other words, there are moral obligations for Iranian Muslims to support and defend Palestine.

On one hand, Ayatollah Khomeini defines the state of Israel as an agent of the United States, Britain, and other foreign powers, and as a tool of imperialism used to penetrate the Islamic world and divide its nations into two groups (oppressed and oppressors). On the other hand, he castigates the rulers of Muslim nations for their lack of unity in resisting the agents of imperialism, and therefore being on the side of oppressors.²⁷⁰ For Ayatollah Khomeini, the Palestinian question transcends national borders, and is thus an issue with relevance to every individual Muslim as instructed by the Quran. On February 6 1971, in his first message to the Muslims of the world congregating on the occasion of the pilgrimage to Mecca, Ayatollah Khomeini highlighted the significance of the Palestinian question, stating:

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 46. Masjid al-Aqsa is the site in Jerusalem where the Prophet Mohammed is believed to have ascended to heaven (Quran 17:1), but also encompasses the complex of mosques and buildings erected on the site.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 47-49.

[t]urn your attention to the liberation of the Islamic land of Palestine from the grasp of Zionism, the enemy of Islam and humanity. Do not hesitate to assist and cooperate with those men who are struggling to liberate Palestine.²⁷¹

In his ideological critique of imperialism, Ayatollah Khomeini warns the Iranian public as well as the Muslim nations of “the expansionism of imperialism through Zionism”. He states

[o]ne must know that the purpose of the imperialist powers in establishing Israel is not just about occupying Palestine. However, if they find any opportunity, all the Arab states will face the same fate as Palestine (God forbid). Now that we see a group of freedom fighters who are struggling to liberate the occupied land of Palestine, we witness the puppets of imperialism in Jordan and elsewhere, are suppressing them.²⁷²

Defining the occupiers of Palestine as the “servants of imperialism”,²⁷³ Ayatollah Khomeini maintains that Muslims in Iran and Palestine struggle on a single frontline against common enemies: Zionism as the enemy of Islam, and its ‘collaborator’, the Shah’s regime.

Israel, the universally recognized enemy of Islam and the Muslims, has been at war with the Muslim people for years, with the assistance of the despicable government of Iran, penetrated all the economic, military, and political affairs of the country; it must be said that Iran has become a military base for Israel, which means, by extension, for America.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Ibid., pp. 195-196.

²⁷² *Felestin az Didgah-e Imam Khomeini*, p. 7.

²⁷³ Hamid Algar (ed.), *Islam and Revolution*, p. 196.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 197.

In emphasizing the necessity of resisting Zionism and American imperialism, Ayatollah Khomeini expands his harsh criticism to include the Communist bloc also, lambasting it as being guilty of left-wing imperialism. In his account, the creation of the state of Israel was a joint action by the oppressors of both East and West:

Israel was born out of the collusion and agreement of the imperialist states of the East and West. It was created in order to suppress and exploit Muslim people and it is being supported today by all the imperialists of Britain and the U.S.. They are strengthening Israel militarily and politically, supplying it with lethal weapons, encouraging Israel to undertake repeated aggression against the Arabs and the Muslims and to continue the occupation of Palestine and other Islamic lands. The Soviet Union, by preventing the Muslims from arming themselves adequately, by its conciliatory policy is guaranteeing the existence of Israel.²⁷⁵

Ayatollah Khomeini had expanded his criticism towards the Shah's regime in two dimensions, both internal and external. In appealing to Iranian Muslims, he attacked the Pahlavi authorities for maintaining relations with Israel and prohibiting people from voicing anti-Israeli and anti-imperialist opinions:

[i]n this current condition, Muslims are sacrificing for the sake of the liberation of Palestine. The Shah is suppressing, imprisoning and exiling a number of *ulama* and other scholars and dissidents. The [Shah] regime has begun to do this in order to divert our attention from the war between Muslim nations and Israel. This is because the Shah's regime is fearful of the solidarity between the Iranian people and the Arab world in their rightful struggle against Israel.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁵ "Message of Ayatollah Khomeini to the Muslim Students in North America, July 10, 1972", in *ibid.*, p. 210.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

In appealing to the wider Arab and Muslim world, Ayatollah Khomeini denounced the Shah's 'pro-Israeli' stance. In a statement in April 7 1964, he states,

I pronounce to all Islamic states and Muslim nations around the world that the dear Shia people abominates Israel, its agents and all governments that collaborate with that state [Israel]. This is not the Iranian nation that collaborates with Israel, the Iranian nation is blameless. There are the regimes that do not have the approval of the people. Submitting ourselves to holy Islamic laws, nothing is more important than defending Islam by sacrificing our possessions and even our lives. When we witness our Palestinian brothers and sisters being killed in the holy land of Palestine, and when we witness that our lands are occupied and our homes are destroyed by the Zionists. Hence, this is obligatory for all Muslims to support the Palestinians financially and morally.²⁷⁷

Having established that the Israeli state was an aggressor and oppressor, and with his declaration that financial and moral support for the Palestinians was an obligation according to Islamic teachings, Ayatollah Khomeini refers to Quranic verses 2:192 and 2:193 to further argue that there exists an obligation for Muslims to resist a common enemy.²⁷⁸ As such, he stated in November 7 1973 that

[t]he leaders of the Islamic world should understand that they [imperialist powers] have created this source of corruption [Israel] in the heart of the Islamic land, not only to suppress the Arab nations, but, to dominate the whole region. The only way to solve this

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷⁸ Quran 2:191 states: "And kill them wherever you overtake them and expel them from wherever they have expelled you, and *fitnah* is worse than killing. And do not fight them at *al-Masjid al- Haram* until they fight you there. But if they fight you, then kill them. Such is the recompense of the disbelievers." Quran 2:193 also states that: "Fight them until there is no [more] *fitnah* and [until] worship is [acknowledged to be] for Allah. But if they cease, then there is to be no aggression except against the oppressors."

nightmare is through unity within Muslim nations. If there was any regime that neglected such a vital obligation, it becomes a duty for other states to pressurize that regime.²⁷⁹

A large number of Islamic scholars, religious activists and associated groups shared Khomeini's strong commitment to the plight of Palestine. For instance, the Union of Islamic Students' Associations (UISA) in Europe, founded in 1964, was one major vocal association advocating the plight of Palestine in Europe and North America.²⁸⁰ Having a close connection with Ayatollah Khomeini in Najaf, UISA members designated their socio-political activities towards supporting the plight of Palestine. In 1967, the UISA began publishing *Eslam: maktab-e mobarez* quarterly which looked into current Islamic issues, particularly the Palestinian cause and Muslim affairs in Africa. Moreover, it aimed to maintain a communicating network with other Muslim students in Europe and North America. In its fifth general meeting in May 1969, the UISA announced the formation of the Committee of Palestine. Its aim was to coordinate financial and political aid for Palestinians abroad, and establish relations with Palestinian organizations in Europe.²⁸¹ UISA statements publicly denounced the state of Israel for occupying Palestine, and voiced solidarity with Palestinian activists.²⁸² The Committee of Palestine became the most active body of the UISA, and the blueprint of its activities were reported during its sixth meeting in May 1970 as follows:

²⁷⁹ *Felestin az Didgah-e Imam Khomeini*, pp. 57-59.

²⁸⁰ Matin-Asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah*, p. 73. The Union of Islamic Students' Associations in Europe began publishing *Eslam: Maktab-e Mobarez* in 1967, which later became the joint organ of the European and the North American Islamic Student Association. The latter organization was formed by Mustafa Chamran, and joined the Muslim Student Association (MSA) of the United States and Canada as its "Persian Speaking group". Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Beheshti, Sadeq Qotbzadeh and Abolhassan Banisadr were well-known figures who had advocated the formation of the Union of the Islamic Students in Europe and the United States.

²⁸¹ Mujtaba Baqernejad, *Tarikhch-e Mobarezaat-e Eslami Daneshjooyan-e Irani dar kharej az keshvar 1344-1360* [A History of Islamic Struggle of the Iranian Students Abroad 1965-1981], Tehran: Entesharat-e Etelaat, 1386 [2007], p. 133.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

- a) Establishing relations with the Central Committee of Palestinian Students Abroad.
- b) Forming a joint meeting with Palestinian students and organizing an archive of the articles related to the Palestinian question.
- c) Rendering financial and medical aid, including sending the most needed medicines to Palestinian refugees and rebels.
- d) Publishing a booklet entitled *Majmoo-e Kerameh*.²⁸³ This booklet was a collection of translated articles concerning the activities of the Palestinian organizations such as Fatah, the life of the Palestinian refugees, as well as pro-Palestinian writings specifically aimed at Iranian readers.²⁸⁴

In 1971, Mostafa Chamran, a key member of the Liberation Movement of Iran, travelled to Lebanon.²⁸⁵ Chamran's prime focus was to train the local Shia youth in guerrilla warfare. To this end, Chamran played a key role in supporting Musa Sadr to form *Harakat al-Mahroomin* (The Movement of the Deprived) in 1973, and *Afwaj al-Moqawamah al-Lobnaniyah* (also known as Amal).²⁸⁶ According to Chehabi, the relations between Chamran and the PLO were lukewarm. While a wholehearted supporter of the Palestinian struggle against Israel, he nevertheless criticised PLO tactics, such as its repeated raids into northern Israel which left the local people of

²⁸³ Ibid., pp.164-165 and p. 200

²⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 164-166.

²⁸⁵ H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, p. 184.

²⁸⁶ Mostafa Chamran, *Lobnan* [Lebanon], Tehran: Bonyaad-e Shahid Chamran, 1389 [2011], p. 91.

southern Lebanon vulnerable to Israeli retaliation in the form of harsh bombardments.²⁸⁷

Chamran elucidated his pro-Palestinian stance in his memoir *Lobnan*. From Chamran's point of view, since moving to Lebanon from Jordan in 1970,²⁸⁸ some Palestinian fighters became preoccupied with engaging in Lebanon's political scene. This deflected their attention away from the real cause of the struggle against Israel and the liberation of Palestine.²⁸⁹ Chamran was rather critical of the radical left-wing Marxist-Communist Palestinians who had penetrated the Palestinian frontline against Israel, particularly among the PLO. Chamran believed that Yasser Arafat was too weak to prevent Marxist elements from directing PLO's policy-making apparatus towards the strategic aims of the Soviet Union. In addition to his criticism of the pro-Soviet stance of Palestinian communists, Chamran criticises the absence of an Islamic ideology within the Palestinian factions in Lebanon.²⁹⁰ Nevertheless, according to Chamran, the Palestinian struggle represented a just cause. Quoting his Musa Sadr on the importance of the Palestinian cause, Chamran wrote that "Palestinian resistance is a sanctimonious flame that we will preserve with our souls and hearts"²⁹¹ In 1973, when the Lebanese Army decided to force the Palestinian fighters out of Lebanon, Musa Sadr and his followers intervened in order to defuse the situation and to protect the Palestinians. Musa Sadr made a public declaration stating "we do not allow you (the Lebanese

²⁸⁷ H.E.Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, pp. 184-185

²⁸⁸ The Palestinian fighters moved from Jordan after being militarily coerced by the Jordanian government in September 1970 – an episode known as "Black September".

²⁸⁹ Mostafa Chamran, *Lobnan* [Lebanon], pp. 115-116.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p, 122.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Army) to destroy the Palestinian resistance. We do not permit anyone to repeat another Black September".²⁹²

While residing in Lebanon in the 1970s, Chamran maintained close relations with Fatah. Chamran and his troops within the *Harakat al-Mahroomin* coordinated a number of joint operations with Fatah, resisting the Israeli army and its affiliated militias that were attacking the town of Bint Jbeil in February 1977, and Taiba and Rob-Thalatheen in south Lebanon in March 1977.²⁹³ For Chamran, the pro-Moscow political activities of left-wing members of Fatah and other Marxist Palestinian factions threatened the independence and unity of the anti-Zionist groups in Lebanon. However, in both Chamran's and Musa Sadr's views, supporting Fatah represented a means to an end of supporting the Palestinian cause.²⁹⁴ Chamran concludes his memoir with a supplication

O' Lord, you are aware that we adore Palestine, the birthplace of the prophets and we see the liberation of Palestine from the domination of Zionism as our sacrosanct cause. To this end, we have never neglected to support the Palestinian Liberation Organization and we shall always support the Palestinian cause wholeheartedly.²⁹⁵

Two other well-known Muslim activists that were active in supporting the Palestinians before the Revolution were Seyed Ali Akbar Mohtashamipur and Mohammad Muntazeri. Mohtashamipur was a student of Ayatollah Khomeini, and accompanied him in his exile in Najaf. According to Chehabi, Mohtashamipur also played an active

²⁹² Ibid., p. 125. After Musa Sadr had lent strong support for the Palestinians, the Lebanese President, Suleiman Faranji, ordered the Army to cease its military operations against Palestinian fighters.

²⁹³ Ibid., pp. 276 and p. 282. Bint Jbeil is the second largest town in the Nabatiyeh Governorate, which borders with Israel. Chamran, his followers and Amal, in coordination with Fatah, had managed to prevent Israeli troops entering Bint Jbeil. In his book, Chamran praises Amal and the Fatah fighters for their bravery.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 313.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 381.

role as Ayatollah Khomeini's delegate in Lebanon, tasked with providing information about the problems that Palestinian activists faced when confronting the Israelis.²⁹⁶ In July 1972, Mohtashamipur concluded that harsh criticism from some local Shia clerics in Lebanon towards the Palestinian militants, blaming them for Israeli retaliations, were damaging the Palestinian cause. Having briefed Ayatollah Khomeini, he issued a formal declaration that all Muslims, and particularly local residents of south Lebanon, back the Palestinian fighting against Israel, warning that 'agents of Colonialism' were attempting to divide the Muslim campaign against the Zionism.²⁹⁷ Mohammad Muntazeri, the son of Ayatollah Hussein-Ali Muntazeri,²⁹⁸ was a leading Muslim activist who had travelled to Lebanon, Pakistan and Iraq before the Revolution with an aim to form a unified Muslim front against imperialism. According to Chehabi, Mohammad Muntazeri maintained close relations with the PLO and attended Palestinian training camps.²⁹⁹ Mohammad Muntazeri's main goal went beyond toppling the Shah's regime, and instead extended to setting up an 'Islamist international'.³⁰⁰

Other prominent high rank Shia clerics amongst the *Marajii*³⁰¹ were particularly vocal in expressing their religiously motivated solidarity with the Palestinian cause. To further highlight the significance of the religious dimension of the supporting Palestine from the *Marajii*'s point of view, some religious statements during per-revolutionary period are quoted here:

²⁹⁶ H.E.Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, pp. 190-191.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 193. Ayatollah Muntazeri was one of the most prominent followers of Ayatollah Khomeini. Assigned as the deputy to the Supreme Leader in 1985, he was subsequently discharged from his position in 1989 due to his disapproval of some of the internal policies of the Islamic Republic.

²⁹⁹ H.E.Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years* p. 193.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

³⁰¹ The rank of marja' al-taqlid represents the highest religious authority in Shiism. In Arabic, the plural is Marajii.

Grand Ayatollah Seyed Abdullah Shirazi (1892-1984), in an open telegram to the Iranian Prime Minister Abbas Hoveyda,³⁰² dated 9th June 1967, stated

Dear Mr. Hoveyda, At this very moment that all Islamic states are in war against the occupiers of the holy-land of Palestine, This is a religious obligation for Iran which is a crucial part of the Islamic world and always has been in the frontline of Islamic affairs to support the Palestinians and sever its relations with the artificial state of Israel.³⁰³

Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Hussein Mar'ashi Najafi (1897-1990) also issued a number of statements in support of the Palestinian cause. In June 1967, Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi issued a public announcement stating

The Iranian clerics unanimously denounce the tyranny of Israel against our Muslim brothers. We pray to Lord to return their (The Israeli government) cruelty back to them and protect the Muslim nations. Our religious brothers are expected not to develop relations with the Jews and not to neglect supporting the Palestinian Muslims financially and morally.³⁰⁴

In November 1967, Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Hussain Mar'ashi Najafi acknowledged his thanked his followers for collecting charitable donations. The Ayatollah's office had purchased 2,600 blankets and passed them over to the Jordanian embassy, to be distributed among Palestinian refugees. The Jordanian ambassador in Tehran sent a reply to Grand Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi, confirming the receipt of money and stating "Your holiness Grand Ayatollah Mar'ashi Najafi, I confirm that the

³⁰² Amir Abbas Hoveyda, the Iranian Prime Minister (1965-1977).

³⁰³ *Asnād-e Inqilāb-e Islāmī* [Islamic Revolution Documents], 1st edition, Tehran: Markaz-e Asnād-e Inqilāb-e Islāmī [The Islamic Revolution Document Centre], 1374 [1995], p. 307.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-309.

Jordanian authorities have received your financial support for the Palestinian refugees in the West Bank. We are thankful to you and the people (of Iran) beyond words”.³⁰⁵

In June 1967, Grand Ayatollah Seyed Hadi Milani issued a *fatwa* stating:

All Muslims are expected to avoid having any financial or friendly relations with the Israelis and not to neglect providing financial supports for their Palestinian brothers. As prophet Mohammed said, if a Muslim does not pay attention to the affairs of other Muslim brothers, he is not a Muslim. Hence, it is recommended to pay special tribute to those Palestinians who sacrificed their lives and possessions in defending Masjid- al-Aqsa.³⁰⁶

Grand Ayatollah Seyed Mohammad Reza Golpayegani on June 19th 1967 issued a statement in relation to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war

We in Iran, *Marajii*, religious scholars and students and all our Iranian people publicly denounce the brutal activities of the Israeli regime, the enemy of God, against our Muslim Brothers. We do not neglect supporting the Palestinian people financially and morally. We pray to Lord to bless the spirit of those heroes that sacrificed their lives in defending their land.³⁰⁷

On August 24th 1969 after the al-Aqsa Mosque was set on fire, Grand Ayatollah Golpayegani issued another statement,

You will surely find the most intense of the people in animosity toward the believers [to be] the Jews and those who associate others with Allah (5:82). The community of Shia clerics and the *Hawzah* of Qom condemn the tragedy of burning the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and convey its condolences to the Islamic world. To this end there will be public gatherings

³⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 325.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 314.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 317.

and mourning ceremonies across Iran. We do invite the Iranian Muslims to attend these gatherings and denounce the crimes of the Zionist regime.³⁰⁸

It should be mentioned that shortly after the burning of the al-Aqsa Mosque, the Shah had publicly announced that “the Shah and the people like other Muslims are volunteering to repair the al-Aqsa Mosque and to this end, proudly pay for renovating the site of al-Aqsa”.³⁰⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini subsequently lambasted the Shah’s regime for issuing the statement, arguing that the Shah wanted to cover up the crimes of the ‘Zionists’ and neglect their anti-Muslim intentions. Ayatollah Khomeini recommended that “the burnt site of al-Aqsa should not be renovated so the world can see what the Zionists have been doing to the Muslim Palestinians”³¹⁰

Unanimously, other *Marajii* like the Grand Ayatollahs Seyed Kazim Shariatmadari³¹¹, Seyed Mohammed Sadeq Rowhani³¹² Seyed Abulqasem Khoei³¹³ and Seyed Mohsen Tabatabaei Hakim³¹⁴ all issued their own religious statements that denounced the Israeli aggression against the Palestinians, and called for Muslims – and particularly Iranian Muslims to – provide financial and moral support for the

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 334.

³⁰⁹ *Shahid Ayatollah Dr. Mofatteh, Yārān-e Imām beh Revāyat-e Asnād-e Sāvāk*, p. 241.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 242.

³¹¹ *Asnād-e inqilāb-e Islāmī* [Documents of the Islamic Revolution], Vol 5, Tehran: Markaz-e Asnād-e Inqilāb-e Islāmī [the Islamic Revolution Document Centre], 1374 [1995], pp. 126-127. Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari (1905-1986) issued a *fatwa* in June 1967 denouncing the Israeli regime and clarified that there existed an obligation for the Muslims to support the Palestinians financially and morally.

³¹² Ibid., p. 155. In October 1973, Grand Ayatollah Seyed Mohammed Sadeq Rowhani issued an open letter to President Sadat of Egypt, President Assad of Syria, and President Hassan al-Baker of Iraq, stating that Iranian Muslims supported their Arab-Muslim brothers wholeheartedly in their holy struggle against the Zionist regime and Western imperialism.

³¹³ *Asnād-e inqilāb-e Islāmī*: Vol. 1, p. 361. On October 9th 1973, Grand Ayatollah Abulqasem al-Khoei issued a statement regarding the Arab-Israeli War of that year. Ayatollah Khoei clarified that Iranian Muslims supported the Arabs in this conflict, and denounced Israeli aggression. He called on the Muslims to unite and defend the holy-land of Palestine.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p. 305. In June 1967, Grand Ayatollah Mohsen Tabatabaei Hakim (1889-1970) issued a *fatwa* stating that “[n]ow the *Jihad* against the Zionist regime has begun all Muslims must unite and coordinate in order to not allow the Zionists to kill the Palestinians and loot their possessions”.

Palestinians. Based on the statements issued by the *Marajii* previously listed, it is safe to say that their Islamic opinions were a reaction to Israeli aggression (such as the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the 1969 al-Aqsa fire, and the 1973 Ramadan war). Hence, they saw it as a religious duty to communicate to their followers across the country to support the Palestinian cause and donate financially.

This chapter has shown the roots and development of relations between pre-revolutionary Iranian opposition groups and figures, and the Palestinian cause. These included the left-wing as well as Islamic factions, and individuals including Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers that all played a considerable role in shaping Iran's post-revolutionary era. The pro-Palestinian ideas of Iranian-Islamic groups and prominent religious figures before the Revolution manifest the interrelationship of four concerns. First, they consider the state of Israel a pedestal of imperialism in the heart of the Muslim heartland. Second, Israel has occupied a crucial part of the Islamic realm that includes the al-Aqsa Mosque, and is systematically oppressing a Muslim people while in a state of aggression against other Muslim states. Given these circumstances, Muslims are obliged to defend their land and beliefs. Third, because the state of Israel had developed and maintained close relations with the Shah's regime, it was therefore also guilty of participating in the oppression of Muslims in Iran as well as Palestine. Fourth and finally, in the eyes of Iranian Muslims, the Palestine struggle represented a just cause. In the following chapter I will examine how these trends developed after the revolution of 1979.

Chapter Two

Iran's relations with Palestine during the first decade of the Islamic revolution

You have made glory and honour for the great Iranian people and the Islamic Nation together. We congratulate you. You have built the edifice of Islamic civilization which is stipulated by our Islamic religion [*dinuna al-islami*] [...] Your revolution is a great blow to American and Zionism and Imperialism and the lackey forces in the region, and confirms that this [Palestinian] Arab and Islamic nation will be totally victorious over all its racist, Zionist, and imperialist enemies.

A letter from Palestinians in Gaza, *Filastin al-Thawrah*, 25 February 1979 ³¹⁵

Delineating from the Islamic ideas of the Shia *Marajii* – Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Kashani, Ayatollah Taleqani – and to the Third-Worldism of Ali Shariati, and the anti-imperialism of Iranian leftists, a broad range of revolutionary Iranian activists have defined the revolution as the revolution of oppressed over the oppressors. Those who resisted the Shah's regime concluded that their predicament was an outcome of wider global phenomena, most notably Zionism and American imperialism. Hence, Iran's revolutionaries thought that the Islamic revolution would be concretely safeguarded by defeating the twin threats of Zionism and imperialism, particularly within the region. There was an unwritten consensus amongst the Iranian revolutionaries that their triumph would motivate other likeminded movements throughout the region. Iranian revolutionaries, particularly the zealous followers of

³¹⁵ Nels Johnson, *Islam and the Politics of Meaning in Palestinian Nationalism*, Oxford: Routledge, 2013, pp. 88-89.

Ayatollah Khomeini and Shia *Marajii*, were inspired by Islamic teachings that it was their duty to lead a resistance against the oppressors, particularly those in Muslim nations. It was therefore not surprising that the Palestinian cause became a focal point for revolutionary Iran. In the aftermath of the revolution in Iran, many Iranian activists believed that it was the time for the country's officials to set into play a new pro-Palestinian foreign policy.

This chapter will examine the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with PLO after 1979. Through its course, I will look at two episodes in particular: the Iranian hostage crisis, and the Iran-Iraq war. I suggest that during these episodes, certain ideological differences between Iran's Islamic leadership and the PLO surfaced. My intention is not to repeat the history of the aforementioned episodes as this is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, I offer a fresh analysis and argue that Iran's ideological differences with the PLO's leadership guided the relations between the two sides from a revolutionary engagement to an ideological estrangement. Nevertheless, revolutionary Iran maintained its strong support for the Palestinian cause because of an ideological lineage it shared with the activism of Iranians before the Revolution.

Iran's Relations with the PLO, 1979-1988: From Revolutionary Engagement to Ideological Estrangement

A few days after the triumph of the revolution in Iran, on 17 February 1979, Yasser Arafat became the first foreign leader to visit Tehran – unannounced.³¹⁶ According to Arafat's personal advisor Bassam Abu-Sharif, as soon as news of Ayatollah Khomeini's return reached Arafat, he asked his pilot to prepare his private jet to fly to Iran. Although, the Lebanese civil aviation officials informed him of Iran's

³¹⁶ Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider's Account*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 63.

airspace closure, Arafat ignored their warnings, stating impatiently that "I assume all responsibilities, let us take off immediately".³¹⁷ Upon entering Iranian airspace, Arafat's plane was surrounded by Iranian fighter jets warning the pilot to head back. Onboard, Arafat signalled to the Iranian fighter jet pilots from a window. As Abu-Sharif describes, Arafat took his iconic Palestinian black and white head dress and waived at the fighter jets' pilots, aiming to show them that his jet contained the leader of the PLO. After a while, as the pilots seemingly contacted Tehran, Arafat's plane was given permission to land and escorted to Tehran's Mehrabad Airport. After landing, Arafat announced:

When one comes to one's home, one does not need permission [...] The Iranian revolution was a major revolution and an important victory for Palestine [...] When I approached Mehrabad Airport, I felt as if I was landing in Jerusalem [...] The Iranian revolution proved that Islam and the Muslims will not bow to oppression and bullying [...] The Iranian revolution released the Palestinians from the barriers surrounding them.³¹⁸

Upon their arrival, the Palestinian delegates were received and warmly embraced by a number of high ranking revolutionaries, and the Palestinian convoy immediately moved towards Ayatollah Khomeini's temporary quarters. Holding the pictures of Ayatollah Khomeini, they chanted "today Iran, tomorrow Palestine".

The Palestinian delegation accompanying Arafat consisted of fifty-nine high ranking members. Importantly, all fifty-nine members of the delegation were from Fatah. According to Chris Ioannides, the leaders of the Democratic Front for the

³¹⁷ Ibid., p. 63.

³¹⁸ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat Arrival Statement", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 17 February 1979, R8-R9.*

Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Marxist and Christian PFLP, were not represented.³¹⁹ We may interpret this absence as a deliberate tactic on the part of Arafat to demonstrate the 'Islamic side' of his solidarity with Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's revolution. According to Abu Sharif, Arafat was warmly welcomed and spent an hour with Ayatollah Khomeini discussing the Palestinian cause.³²⁰ Shortly after visiting Ayatollah Khomeini, Arafat in a symbolic gesture, accompanied by a Palestinian woman who had lost three of her sons during the war with Israel, paid homage to the martyrs of the Iranian revolution by visiting Behesht-e Zahra cemetery. The Palestinian delegates were greeted by a large number of Iranians chanting pro-Palestinian slogans. Choking with tears, Arafat spoke with intensity about the need for Muslim solidarity.³²¹ Arafat and his delegate also met with members of the Provisional Government's cabinet. During his visit, Arafat was routinely accompanied by high-profile Iranian revolutionaries, most notably Hojjatoleslam Seyed Ahmad Khomeini (Ayatollah Khomeini's son), and Deputy Prime Minister of the provisional government, Ibrahim Yazdi. Having established good connections with other revolutionary figures prior to 1979, Arafat conducted private meetings with Ayatollah Taleqani and a number of left-wing revolutionaries, including the Mujaheddin and Fadayeen.³²²

Two days after first arriving in Tehran, Arafat alongside with Ahmad Khomeini and Yazdi, and a number of members of the Mujaheddin and Fadayeen arrived at the former Israeli consulate in Tehran, and accepted the premises as the official embassy of

³¹⁹ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p.74.

³²⁰ Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, pp. 62–63. According to Abu Sharif, Ayatollah Khomeini cherished Iran's ties with the Palestinians even while in exile in France. Though he had often refused to give press interviews, in 1978 he granted *Al-Hadaf* – the PFLP's magazine – a lengthy interview in which he outlined his plans for a revolution against the Shah.

³²¹ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Arafat Speaks at the Cemetery", 18 February 1979, R10.

³²² *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Arafat Visits Taleqani", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, R23.

the PLO in Iran. Arafat appointed Hani al-Hassan as ambassador of Palestine to Tehran. From the rooftop of the embassy, the chairman of PLO delivered a speech in front of a large crowd:

In these sensitive moments, in the name of revolutionaries and Palestinian fighters, I pledge myself that, under the leadership of the great Imam Khomeini, we will liberate the Palestinian homeland together. The path we have chosen is identical; we are moving forward on the same path; we are fighting the same struggle, the same revolution; our nation is one [...] we are all Muslims; we are all Islamic revolutionaries; all fighting for the establishment of one body of Islamic believers [...] we will continue our struggle against Zionism and move towards Palestine alongside Iranian Islamic revolutionaries.³²³

Accompanied by his PLO delegation, Arafat also held meetings at the Foreign Ministry of the provisional government, stating:

I tell you that I am with you [...] we are living in an era of the people's triumph against imperialism and Zionism [...] We promise to work with this revolution, with all its humane and civilised content, in order to build this new era together – an era which dawned to us in this area with launching of your revolution under Ayatollah Khomeini [...] We will proceed two revolutions in one and two people in one [...] Together we will proceed towards victory [...] In the name of Khomeini, we opened the PLO office today.³²⁴

Arafat also visited a number of Iran's larger cities that had become famous for their anti-Shah demonstrations, such as Mashhad, Tabriz, and Ahvaz. In Mashhad, Arafat was greeted by local *ulama*, and revolutionary fighters. Ayatollah Tifli, who commanded the revolutionary council in Mashhad, welcomed him and stated that

³²³ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat Opens PLO Office", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, R17.*

³²⁴ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat Press Conference", Voice of Palestine in Arabic to the Arab World, 20 February 1979, R29.*

revolutionary air-force personnel in Mashhad were in full support of their brothers in Palestine, ready to fight against the 'Zionist enemy'. Arafat thanked the people of Mashhad and chanted that "it is a revolution until victory"³²⁵. In Ahvaz, Arafat was welcomed by thousands of Iranians gathered at Ahvaz Sports Stadium. Addressing the crowd, Arafat said "[l]et Carter know that this link between the two revolutions will direct and move the convoys and armies to Palestine to liberate it from Zionist invaders".³²⁶

On 23 February 1979, at the end of his historic six-day visit to Iran, Arafat headed to Abu Dhabi to meet with the UAE's authorities. Before leaving Iran, Arafat presented a model of the Jerusalem Dome of the Rock as gift to Ayatollah Khomeini. Accompanied by Abu Mazin and Hani al-Hassan, Arafat met with the Islamic revolutionary Council and spoke to Iranian radio stations. Speaking about Iran's relations with Palestine, Arafat stated

Iranian-Palestinian relations started 18 years ago [...] several Iranian brothers fought among our ranks. The rest of the story about Iranian-Palestinian relations I will leave for the history to tell. While you (Iranian people) were struggling against the imperialist regime, you were also fighting with us [...] this revolution under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini, has changed the circumstances in the area. Kissinger will have to get a new computer because his old one did not predict the eruption of the glorious Iranian revolution.³²⁷

³²⁵ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat Holds Press Conference", Voice of Palestine in Arabic to the Arab World, 22 February 1979, R6.*

³²⁶ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat, Dr. Yazdi, Ahmad Khomeini Address Ahvaz Rally", Voice of Palestine in Arabic to the Arab World, 22 February 1979, R9.*

³²⁷ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat to Abu Dhabi with Message from Khomeini", Voice of Palestine in Arabic to the Arab World, 23 February 1979, R11.*

Shortly after Arafat's visit to Iran, people throughout the region – attracted to its pro-Palestinian stance – demonstrated in solidarity with Iran's revolution. In Bahrain, a large number of people carried portraits of Ayatollah Khomeini and Arafat, gathering around the Iranian embassy in support of Iran's revolution.³²⁸ Once in Abu Dhabi, Arafat in an interview spoke about the impressions he gained during his visit to Iran. In response to a question regarding Iran's stance on the Arab situation, Arafat stated:

The faithful Iranian Islamic revolution is linked to the Arab nation with the deepest bond, God's almighty's holy Koran. This relation will be further consolidated as we proceed from our one creed, one faith and our common existence [...] Everything I saw in Iran was above my material expectations and within my spiritual expectations. The new regime in Iran has rectified relations with the PLO.³²⁹

There was almost excessive coverage of Arafat, wearing his iconic Palestinian headscarf, embracing Ayatollah Khomeini, as well as his emotional statements in Iran's media. The Palestinian flag beside Iran's revolutionary's banner could be seen painted on the walls of the Palestinian embassy and Iranian governmental buildings. All these metaphorical momentary developments were not simply allegorical gestures, but rather represented the rapid invalidation and dismantling of Pahlavi's relations with Israel. It was a reversal of policies as new revolutionary and Islamic beliefs came to shape Iran's global image. To understand the foundation of Iran's relation with PLO, it is vital to address two fundamental questions. First, how did the Palestinians perceive the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran? Second, how did the leadership of the Islamic revolution envision the future of Iranian-Palestinian relations?

³²⁸ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "March in Bahrain", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 24 February 1979, R7.

³²⁹ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Arafat Chairs Meetings, Comments on Iran, Arab Situation", Abu Dhabi Emirates News Agency, 23 February 1979, A1.

The PLO's Perception of the Islamic revolution in Iran

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 marked a turning point in the contemporary history of the region. It had triumphed at a propitious time for the Palestinians, who were encountering an ostensibly unbeatable enemy in their battle against Israel. Egypt, the most populated and militarily powerful Arab state, who had engaged in direct military hostilities against Israel since 1948, was negotiating the Camp David peace accords with Israel. According to Ioannides, the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement was seen as a most serious blow to the Palestinian movement, for it detached Cairo from the line of resistance against Israel. At this time, the Iranian Revolution served to boost the morale of the Palestinians and compensated for the loss of Egypt.³³⁰ In regards to the loss of Egypt and triumph of the Iranian Revolution, Arafat stated:

[t]he [Iranian revolution] has reversed the strategic balance in the Middle East against Israel and the United States. The Camp David document will be merely ink on paper following the basic changes brought by the Iranian revolution, both in the region and our Islamic nation and in world strategy.³³¹

Yet the Palestinian perception of the Iranian Revolution is rooted in a history that goes back further than the Camp David accords and the subsequent loss of Egypt. The failure of the Arab states, who had adopted a pan-Arab ideology in confronting Israel, had sent a clear and bitter message for the Palestinian people that Arab nationalism had encountered a dead-end. For the Palestinians, the failure of the Arab states during the 1967 war and the brutal coercion of Palestinian guerrillas by the Royal Jordanian Army during Black September in 1970 became precedents for the humiliation and failure

³³⁰ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 74.

³³¹ Ibid.

caused by the Camp David peace accords between Israel and Egypt. In fact, one can argue that Palestinian movements became frustrated with the incompetence of Arab states in changing the strategic balance of power that had favoured Israel in the post-1967 era.

Adeed Dawisha argues that before the triumph of the Iranian Revolution, Arab nationalism met its Waterloo in June 1967, where it was put to the test and found wanting.³³² On one of the most crucial issues on the agenda for Arab nationalism – the rights of Palestinians – it could not deliver. To the mass Arab Muslim public, the victories of the Ayatollahs during 1979 and 1980 over the ‘enemies of Islam’, embodied by the West and its enfeebled lackeys in the Muslim world, represented the advent of a new heroic age of Islamic assertion and power.³³³ The Iranian Revolution, with its leadership's commitment to the Palestinian cause and their anti-Zionist ideological tendencies, were viewed positively by the Palestinian Liberation Movement as a valuable asset and a reliable power capable of enlarging the circle of hostility around Israel. As Barry Rubin argues, the triumph of the Iran's Islamic revolution provided motivation for the PLO: if Ayatollah Khomeini could rise from obscurity and exile to conquer a seemingly invincible foe allied to and installed by the United States, Arafat believed he could follow the same path. In a similar vein, simply handing the keys to the former Israeli embassy in Tehran to the PLO delegation handed a significant boost to Palestinian morale: "after more than two decades of struggle, this was the first piece of Israeli real estate Arafat had captured".³³⁴

³³² Adeed Dawisha, "Iran's Mullahs and the Arab Masses," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1983, pp. 162-168.

³³³ Ibid

³³⁴ Barry Rubin, *Yasir Arafat: a Political Biography*, London: Continuum, 2003, pp. 83-84

According to Babak Ganji, the PLO considered the Iranian Revolution as a major victory for the Palestinian cause, with Arafat hoping that revolutionary Iran would replace Egypt.³³⁵ This assessment is plausible given that the PLO leadership aimed to build a new anti-Israeli bloc centred on Syria-Iraq and Lebanon, with Iran acting as a 'strategic rear' for this coalition.³³⁶ Ganji adds that Arafat hoped the alliance would be empowered by the economic and political backing of Saudi Arabia. In other words, one can convincingly argue that Arafat aimed to draw a crescent consisting of conservative Arab states, pan-Arab regimes, and the Islamic Republic around the Jewish state in order for them to gain an upper-hand post-Camp David. In this regard, the PLO ambassador in Tehran, Hani al-Hassan, argued that the Iranian revolution had empowered the PLO to encircle Israel, and possibly to defeat it.³³⁷ The PLO leadership therefore shaped and constructed its relations with revolutionary Iran from the very beginning of the Islamic revolution.

The Perception of the Islamic revolution's Leadership of the Palestinian-cause

As noted and argued in the previous chapter, Iran's pre-revolutionary opposition established a historical connection to the Palestinian cause mainly based upon their anti-Zionist and anti-Imperialist ideologies. In the case of the country's religious leaders in general and Ayatollah Khomeini in particular, as noted, the Islamic teachings of supporting the Islamic *ummah* (Islamic community) and his opposition to the imperial powers became the foundation of his popular uprising, and ultimately his pro-Palestinian stance, not least because it solidified one of the main goals of the

³³⁵ Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 118.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

revolutionaries, that is to change the regional status quo and to establish Iran as a regional power. Throughout his years in exile, Ayatollah Khomeini was an active supporter of the Palestinian cause. At quite an early stage of the revolution, he explicitly authorised Shi'i religious taxes to be channelled towards supporting Palestinian fighters and refugees.³³⁸ In a statement, he announced that

[t]oday it is incumbent upon all Muslims in general and upon the Arab governments and administrations in particular to safeguard their own independence, to commit themselves to support and assist this valiant group. They should not spare any effort in arming, feeding, and supplying material for these fighters. It is also incumbent upon the valiant fighters [themselves] to trust in God, be bound by the teachings of the Quran, and with steadfastness and determination persist in their sacred objective.³³⁹

Hamid Dabashi is of the opinion that Ayatollah Khomeini, from the very inception of his struggle against the Shah's regime, explicitly focused on the Palestinian cause. While advising his student followers to rally around the banner of Islam as the only banner of unity, what rekindled Ayatollah Khomeini's revolutionary zeal in 1970s were events related to the Palestinians in Lebanon, rather than in Iran.³⁴⁰ In order to understand how the leadership of the revolution in Iran aimed to construct Iran's relations with the PLO, one conversation in particular between Ayatollah Khomeini and Arafat merits being highlighted. During the first meeting between Ayatollah Khomeini and Arafat on 18 February 1979, both leaders highlighted their strong desire to strengthen relationship. Ayatollah Khomeini focused on advising the PLO leadership in order to guide its struggle according to Islamic values. Ayatollah Khomeini specifically

³³⁸ Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2006, p. 458.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 458

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 472-473.

highlights the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian cause as the most influential vehicle for the liberation of Palestinian land. He stated:

I ask of God the Blessed and Exalted that our brethren nation of Palestine will overcome their difficulties. We are their brothers. From this movement's inception more than fifteen years ago, I have always, in my writings and speeches, spoken of Palestine and called attention to the crimes that Israel has perpetrated there. God willing, after we are freed from these fetters then to the same degree that we stood with you at that time and are now standing with you, I hope that we will confront the problems together like brothers. I beseech God the Blessed and Exalted to exalt Islam and the Muslims and to return Quds [Jerusalem] to our brothers.³⁴¹

Arafat, addressing Khomeini, expressed that:

[a]n earthquake is now in the offing and may have even arrived. "When thou threwest a spear, it was not thy act but God's." (Qur'an 8:17). In reply to Dayan and Begin, I told them they could go and choose a patron and rely on America, but I too could find support and indeed have done so: I rely on the Iranian nation under the leadership of His Holiness the Grand Āyatullāh Mūsawī al-Khomeini.³⁴²

Ayatollah Khomeini responded by emphasising and recommending Arafat to reinforce the Islamic faith within his liberation movement 's strategy:

[t]he Shah too relied on America, Britain, China, Israel and the others, but these refuges are powerless. That refuge which is not powerless, but powerful, is God. God is our refuge. I advise you, my own people and your people, to always turn to God, not to these powers. Do not rely on material things but on the spiritual. The power of God is greater than all these powers, thus it was that we saw a nation which was weak and empty-

³⁴¹ *Felestine az didgah-e Imam*, pp. 117-123.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

handed prevail over all the powers, and, God willing, will continue to do so. When we are with God, we are not afraid of anything, for if we are slain in the way of God, we are blessed, and if we stay in the way of God, we are also blessed.... We place our hopes in God and do not despair of Him. God willing, we will overcome our problems, but we don't believe we will overcome them through material means, victory is attained through spiritual means. As long as our people put their trust in God the Blessed and Exalted, they will progress, and if, God forbid, there is any deviation, then it will be the end for us all.³⁴³

Elsewhere, in a statement aimed at Muslim nations on 25 November 1979, Khomeini expressed the following:

Oh Muslims of the world! Oh you Muslims who have risen up! Oh endless sea of humanity! Rise up and defend your national and Islamic existence. Israel has taken Bayt al-Muqaddas from the Muslims and has met only tolerance from the (Muslim) governments. Apparently America and its corrupt appendage Israel now intend to seize the holy mosque and the mosque of the Prophet. Still the Muslims sit back, indifferent onlookers. Rise up and defend Islam and the centre of revelation. Do not be afraid of this ballyhoo, for today Islam needs you and you are responsible before God Almighty. Trust in God Almighty and march forth united.³⁴⁴

A textual analysis of Ayatollah Khomeini's discourse highlights his own Islamic sentiments, and ultimately an emphasis on the religious dimension of the Palestinian cause. He was a cleric sitting on top of a partially theocratic state, after all. This material interest was closely married to the ideational context that I have set out, in that Palestine was both a mission these revolutionaries believed in and a convenient vehicle

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 131-132.

to claim Iranian suzerainty in the Muslim world. The ideological strategy is clear here: Khomeini's focus on the Shah's reliance on the United States, and other major powers as being the root cause for his failures served as a vehicle for castigating Arafat himself for having taken sides during the cold war era. By stating "I advise you and my people and your people not to rely on other powers but God", Khomeini clearly voiced his ideological-religious motivations, revealing how they had shaped his expectations of the PLO leadership. In other words, Khomeini highlighted the religious significance of the Palestinian cause, and its proximity at the heart of the Islamic world. Furthermore, he urged Arafat to follow the 'Islamic route', and in the process underline the Islamic character of the Palestinian struggle rather than its pan-Arab dimensions. This was convenient for the new leader of a self-proclaimed Islamic state. Additional speeches of Khomeini on the Palestinian cause will be examined throughout this chapter in order to develop my argument further. In what follows, I investigate how the Islamic Republic of Iran began to implement its commitment to the Palestinian cause from the very beginning of the Revolution.

Implementing Pro-Palestinian Slogans as Policy: Institutionalising Iran's Relations with Palestine from the Early Stages of the Islamic revolution

One of the major tasks of the revolution was to reverse the foreign policies of the previous regime, and in the process implement the interests of the state. In October 1979, Ibrahim Yazdi, the foreign minister of Iran's revolutionary government, took the opportunity to clarify revolutionary Iran's policies at one of the most important international stages: the United Nations. This was the first time the new government had communicated their aims and new policies on a world stage. In his statement to the General Assembly, Yazdi described the Shah's regime as a "puppet of imperialism and

Zionism", and voiced Iran's solidarity with liberation movements throughout the world.³⁴⁵ According to Yazdi, the Shah's delegation at the UN had sided with 'American imperialism', racism and Zionism.³⁴⁶ Criticising Zionism and expressing strong support for the Palestinians, Yazdi described the former as "one of the most vicious forms of racism in recorded history",³⁴⁷ and sharply rebuked Western states for turning a blind eye on Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. Yazdi expressed Iran's revolutionary opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stating:

When Israeli bombers killed impoverished Palestinians and Lebanese, their Western media apologists described this genocide aggression as defensive aerial attack on Palestinian military bases. When the Palestinians blew up a bus in occupied Jerusalem or assassinated an Israeli secret agent, they were described as 'terrorists'.³⁴⁸

The process of institutionalising anti-Zionism began with immediate effect at the outset of the Islamic revolution. On both international and regional levels, the Pahlavi attachment to Israel was entirely dismantled by the revolutionaries. According to R.K. Ramazani, Iran's relations with no other state in the world – including the United States – were so rapidly and radically subverted as its relations with Israel. In addition to Israel, Iran had severed relations with Egypt primarily due to Cairo's signing of the Camp David Accords.³⁴⁹ The PLO was officially recognised and endorsed by the revolutionary government in Iran. Its delegation in Tehran was recognised as the ambassadorial representation of Palestine in Iran. A combination of Iran severing its

³⁴⁵ Quoted in Anoushiravan Ehteshami and Manshour Varasteh (eds.), *Iran and the International Community*, London: Routledge, 1991, p. 10

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 11

³⁴⁹ R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 151.

ties with Egypt, and cutting off oil supplies to Israel, are estimated to have cost Iran approximately \$700 million in annual revenue.³⁵⁰ From an economic point of view, forfeiting such an amount in annual trade with Israel and Egypt at the early stage of the revolution meant that Iran would suffer severe economic setbacks; a choice that thus could not be explained with reference to purely cost-benefit or material analyses. Episodes such as this therefore highlight the importance of beliefs and ideas in the foundation of Iran's anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian stance.

As noted in the previous chapter, the process of institutionalising a pro-Palestinian stance began even before the triumph of the Islamic revolution through non-governmental and religious channels. In this regard, religious ceremonies were a factor in mobilising support for the Palestinian cause. We have seen previously that Khomeini and other Shia *Marajii*, and religious scholars like Ayatollah Kashani, Muttahari and Taleqani, designated religious taxes for supporting Palestinian activists. After 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini and his followers gained an opportunity to incorporate their position on Palestine into state agencies such as the Foreign Ministry, and by severing relations with Israel and recognising the PLO. Nevertheless, the revolutionary leadership continued to combine its new access to state apparatuses with its traditional approach of mobilising support using religious channels. Khomeini's most vital strategy was to transform the Palestinian struggle into an Islamic cause and internationalise the Palestinian question even beyond the Arab territories, a strategy that was also pursued by earlier Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood established in Egypt in 1928. On 7 August 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini declared the last Friday of the Islamic

³⁵⁰Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 75.

holy month of Ramadan as the international day of Jerusalem (Quds): *Yom al-Quds*. In his announcement, Ayatollah Khomeini stated

I ask all the Muslims of the world and the Muslim governments to join together to sever the hand of this usurper [Israel] and its supporters. I call on all the Muslims of the world to select as Quds Day the last Friday in the holy month of Ramadan which is itself a determining period and can also be the determiner of the Palestinian people's fate and through a ceremony demonstrating the solidarity of Muslims world-wide, announce their support for the legitimate rights of the Muslim people.³⁵¹

In order to outline the global implications and ideological reasoning of him announcing Quds day, Ayatollah Khomeini designated it as "the day for the weak and oppressed" to confront their oppressors, and stated:

Quds Day is an international day, it is not a day devoted to Quds alone. It is the day for the weak and oppressed to confront the arrogant powers, the day for those nations suffering under the pressure of American oppression and oppression by other powers to confront the superpowers... Quds Day is the day when the fate of the oppressed nations should be determined. The oppressed nations should announce their existence against the oppressors and just as Iran rose up and rubbed the noses of the oppressors in the dirt, and will continue to do so, so too all the nations should rise up and throw these germs of corruption into the rubbish bin. Quds Day is the day when the superpowers should be warned to stay at home and leave the oppressed alone. Israel, the enemy of mankind, the enemy of humanity, which is creating disturbances every day and is attacking our brothers in south Lebanon, must realise that its masters are no longer accepted in the world and must retreat. They must give up their ambitious designs on Iran, their hands must be severed from all the Islamic countries and their agents in these countries must step down. Quds Day is the day for announcing such things, for announcing such things

³⁵¹ *Felestine az didgah-e Imam Khomeini*, pp. 156-157.

to the satans who want to push the Islamic nations aside and bring the superpowers into the arena. Quds Day is the day to dash their hopes and warn them that those days are gone.³⁵²

The leadership of the Islamic revolution was therefore very determined to put its pro-Palestinian ideas, tailored mainly based on religious solidarity during the pre-revolutionary period, into practice. This was the beginning of a new chapter in Iran's relations with the Palestinians. In what follows and throughout the next chapter, the ideological importance of declaring the Quds day, and Palestine's place in Iran's foreign policy, will be examined further.

Before continuing to discuss the importance of ideology in revolutionary Iran's pro-Palestinian policies, our attention should return briefly to the history of Iran's relations with the PLO. At the beginning of the Islamic revolution in Iran, all indications pointed to a promising relationship between the new government and the PLO. On the surface it seemed that Iran had compensated Arafat for the loss of Egypt, and that the future of relations between Iran and the PLO was bright. However, the blue skies of Iranian-PLO relations became clouded shortly after the triumph of the Islamic revolution. In the light of this study, I suggest that two periods in particular – the Iranian Hostage Crisis, and the Iran-Iraq war –acted as catalysts in widening the ideological gap between the Islamic revolution and PLO. However, the confines of this study do not allow me to examine the impact of these events on Iran's relations with the PLO in all its facets.

³⁵² Ibid., pp. 157-160.

The Takeover of the American Embassy in Tehran, and PLO's

Attempt at Mediation

On 4th of November 1979, a group of Iranian students calling themselves the 'Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line' occupied the American embassy in Tehran, holding 52 embassy staff hostage. This takeover triggered an international crisis that lasted for 444 days. The militant students, morally equipped with anti-imperialist ideas, demanded that the Shah be extradited to Iran immediately, and that Washington cease interfering in Iran's domestic policies. The seizure of American diplomats became a great concern for the White House. In desperation, the Carter administration sent a special envoy to Tehran to meet with Ayatollah Khomeini and to negotiate the release of hostages. According to Russell Leigh Moses, the Oval Office-nominated former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, and former Foreign Service Officer William Miller, staff director of the Senate Intelligent Committee, were dispatched to conduct meetings with Iranian officials and resolve the hostage crisis.³⁵³

Having received messages that Ayatollah Khomeini and the students refused any negotiations with American officials, the aircraft carrying Clark and Miller landed in Istanbul. These nominated American delegates attempted to contact Iranian officials from Istanbul. However, given the political dangers in Iran associated with communicating in even a minor fashion with US officials, this dialogue was limited to third parties and did not yield tangible results. As Leigh Moses noted, it became evident to American officials that any plans that would rely on a direct channel of communication between the White House and Ayatollah Khomeini would be doomed

³⁵³ Russell Leigh Moses, *Freeing the Hostages: Re-examining U. S.-Iranian Negotiations and Soviet Policy, 1979-1981*, Pitt Series in Policy and Institutional Studies, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996, p. 43.

to failure.³⁵⁴ Director of the US Iran Desk Henry Precht concluded that "the Iranians were simply not going to knuckle under to that old American pressure"³⁵⁵. In fact, Clark and Miller's mission from its very beginning failed to materialise its objective of negotiating the release of the hostages.

At this critical moment for the Carter administration, the PLO leadership contacted U.S. officials expressing their desire to mediate between Tehran and Washington in order to help free the hostages. In fact, before Clark and Miller began to prepare for their mission, PLO representatives had already communicated with members of the American congress expressing the PLO's willingness to intervene as a mediator. According to Leigh Moses, after receiving a green light from Washington, a three-man high level PLO delegation arrived in Tehran to discuss the hostage crisis with Iranian officials including Bani-Sadr and Sadegh Ghotbzadeh – both high profile members of the revolutionary government.³⁵⁶ Babak Ganji elaborates that on the same day of the embassy takeover, the PLO contacted the White House and PLO mediation began promptly after the hostages were seized.³⁵⁷ It is vital to mention that the PLO had close ties with the Mojahedin of the Islamic revolution (MIR), who played an instrumental role in the Iranian Revolution and formed the backbone of the Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the most crucial armed force after 1979. Through MIR, which were close to the leaders of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁵⁵ Quoted in Ibid., p. 45.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 45.

³⁵⁷ Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, pp. 157- 159.

Line – including Mohsen Mirdamadi, Abbas Abdi, Ibrahim Asgharzadeh and Ma'sumeh Ebtekar – the PLO aimed to facilitate the release of American hostages.³⁵⁸

In clarifying the ideological reasons for the embassy takeover, the hostage-takers highlighted their anti-Zionist and anti-Imperialist beliefs as the main motivations for their action. As Ramazani notes, the student leaders emphasised repeatedly that their action aimed at "forestalling the return of both Israel and the U.S. to Iran through the back door".³⁵⁹ In other words, Israel was perceived by the Iranian revolutionaries as the illegitimate progeny of American imperialism. Ramazani argues that from the very moment of the embassy takeover, the Iranian revolutionaries concluded that under no circumstances could Iran compromise with Israel, and that it was hence necessary to stand against any state backing Israel. The most often repeated rationale was that "Israel will never make any concessions to the Arabs".³⁶⁰

After the seizure of the U.S. Embassy, the student hostage-takers published a number of documents recovered from the embassy in a series of booklets named *Documents from the U.S. Espionage Den*. Some of these documents are especially revealing, and demonstrate the anti-Zionist motives of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line. Booklet no. 19, entitled *Israel, Foreign Intelligence and Security Services*, specifically focuses on the links between the Shah's government and Tel-Aviv. Booklet no. 42, entitled *U.S. Intervention in the Islamic Countries, Palestine* concentrates on the activities of the U.S. embassy in spying on Palestinian activists throughout the region. In the introduction of this particular booklet, the students state that:

³⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 153-154.

³⁵⁹ R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 153.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

A lot has been told about Palestine, and the Palestinians. The story of oppression on this nation is an old and distressing one. Palestinian refugees, usurped lands, Deir Yasin, Kafr-Ghassem, Sabra and Shatila Massacres, Palestinians imprisoned in Zionist camps and all the oppression borne on this heroic and resistant nation, are all countless crimes committed by Zionists and their Imperialist supporters. Our Muslim nation is aware of Palestine problem, having declared our support for this homeless nation, before and after the Islamic revolution. Our nation has firmly decided to take revenge on Zionist enemies in the occupied lands. This nation's most fundamental and strategic goal is to liberate Quds...The Palestinian nation can liberate Quds only under the banner of Islam [...] Nationalism and other schools of thought will not solve the problems of Palestine [...] The Palestinian nation will hopefully be able to liberate Quds, and the Muslim Iranian nation will keep being on their side.³⁶¹

According to the documents seized from the U.S. Embassy, the American government monitored with great concern Palestinian connections to the Iranian revolutionary state. According to classified documents, the Qatari Foreign Minister Ahmed bin Seif al-Thani raised his concern that although PLO was heavily dependent on the financial support from the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, financial support from revolutionary Iran could sway the PLO's leadership. Their concern was that revolutionary Iran's enthusiasm for liberation of the Mosque of al-Aqsa could influence Palestinian activists, and therefore reduce the influence of Arab states over the PLO.³⁶²

Other documents also showed that during a discussion between American diplomats

³⁶¹ *U.S. intervention in the Islamic Countries: Palestine*, Documents from the U.S. Espionage Den, Vol. 42, Tehran: Enteshaaraat-e chapkhaneh Vezarat-e Ershad Eslami, 1979, Introduction.

Also available online:

<https://archive.org/stream/DocumentsFromTheUSEspionageDen/Documents%20from%20the%20U.S.%20Espionage%20Den%20v42#page/n1/mode/2up> [Accessed 24 Nov 2013], and

http://basij.aut.ac.ir/usemb/english2/v42_text.pdf [Accessed 24 Nov 2013].

³⁶² Ibid.

and Ibrahim Yazdi, he clarified the religious dimension of Iran's pro-Palestinian stance.

They state that the

Iranians wanted the PLO to inject greater use of Islamic solidarity in its appeal. If the PLO continued its secular approach, victory was not assured. If the PLO created a Palestinian state on purely secular lines, the Marxists and radical-left Palestinians would move quickly to take over.³⁶³

The document concludes that Yazdi made Iran's commitment to the Palestinian cause quite clear, as he stated "[w]e have helped them and we will help them in the future"³⁶⁴

In another classified paper titled *Palestinian Activity in Iran*, the U.S. Embassy reports that efforts by the Palestinian Fadayeen to obtain influence in revolutionary Iran reflected the rivalry between more moderate elements led by Arafat and other radical groups led by the PFLP under the command of George Habash. The report concludes that Arafat's PLO seemingly had succeeded in having Fatah dominate Palestinian activities in Iran. On the other hand, the documents also conclude that the PFLP held strong ties with left-wing Iranian revolutionaries, particularly the Mujahedin and dissidents in Khuzestan province.³⁶⁵

The discovery of such specific documents from the U.S. Embassy which showed the close observation of Iranian connections to the Palestinian cause by American officials in Iran had a profound moral impact on the students that had seized the embassy. As noted in the introduction of the pamphlets, the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's line perceived the American actions as animosity of a "united front of imperialism-Zionism" against the Islamic revolution and the Palestinian cause. For the

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

student activists as well as revolutionary Iranians, these documents confirmed the strong link between the fate of the Islamic revolution and the Palestinian cause. This issue further tempered their anti-Zionist tendencies. What is crucial to note is that the PLO's offer to mediate between the revolutionary Iranians and the White House happened at a time where anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist sentiments were at their highest on the streets of Iran.

In her memoirs, Ma'sumeh Ebtekar – one of the leading figures of the Muslim Student Followers of the Imam's Line – mentions the PLO attempts for mediation: "[n]ext in line (after Clark-Miller mission) was a delegation from the PLO. That prospect presented us with a much more serious dilemma".³⁶⁶ According to her, from the earliest days of the hostage crisis, the Palestinians in Tehran had contacted Iranian officials in the hope of mediating. They then decided to send a senior delegation in an attempt to solve the issue.³⁶⁷ Despite the visit by senior PLO members, including Abu Jihad, to the U.S. Embassy in Tehran, they were not allowed to enter the premises as mediators. Ebtekar expresses the gravity of the situation and disappointment amongst the revolutionary Iranians, stating

[a]t the time the PLO had a reputable image [...] The issue of Palestine and the liberation of Quds [Jerusalem] was a vital issue for Iranians, and had become one of the unwavering positions of the Islamic revolution. We saw the Palestinian cause as a sister revolution to our own. Some people even hoped that the PLO could put pressure on the U.S. They were to be disappointed.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Massoumeh Ebtekar, *Takeover in Tehran: the Inside Story of the 1979 U.S. Embassy Capture*, Vancouver [B.C.]: Talonbooks, 2000, p. 121.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 122.

After the failure of the PLO's leadership efforts to mediate between Iranian officials and the White House, PLO officials promptly denied that there had been any efforts to mediate. Hani al-Hassan, the director of the PLO bureau in Tehran, in a speech in Beirut stated:

The PLO is not an intermediary between Iran and America, Palestinians are on the same side as the Iranian revolution [...] The Palestinian revolution and the Iranian revolution are in the same position, that is, both revolutions have attempted equally to fight imperialism [...] The Palestinian revolution position is clear. This position is uncompromising. We are one side of the issue, not an intermediary. Any victory by the Iranian nation over the influence of American imperialism in the region should be considered a victory for the PLO.³⁶⁹

Nevertheless, Bassam Abu Sharif, senior advisor to Arafat, describes the PLO as the closest political party to the Iranian Revolution (at the time of hostage crisis), and clarifies the PLO's strategy to mediate during the hostage crisis:

[n]o one had made a move to contact the PLO, however, until a few representative of the European countries unofficially asked president Arafat to test the waters of negotiation with Khomeini. Arafat agreed. This was an excellent opportunity for him. If the PLO was successful in getting the hostages released, it would improve the PLO's status as a strong power in the Middle East, especially after Menachem Begin had rejected the participation of PLO in the peace talks at Camp David that eventually led to a signed peace treaty between Egypt and Israel on September 1978.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁹ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "PLO's al-Hassan Remarks", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 9 November 1979, R6.

³⁷⁰ Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*, p. 65

According to Ioannides, Khomeini refused to receive the PLO's special delegate Abu-Walid, and the militant students denounced the PLO's mediation attempts.³⁷¹ Both Khomeini and the militant students were incensed, the more so when Hani al-Hassan claimed credit for the 17 November release of black and female hostages.³⁷² Ayatollah Khomeini promptly castigated the PLO for "telling lies in order to get close to the United States."³⁷³ To this end, Khomeini's office issued a strong rebuke to Hani al-Hassan for claiming credit for this decision:

[i]f a representative of any organisation other than the PLO has said such things, we would not have been surprised, but it is highly questionable that the representative of an organisation that fights against Israel and knows that it is the U.S. that has forced Israel on dear Palestine and other Arab countries, should tell these lies in order to get closer to the United States. Mr Hani al-Hassan knows very well that the Imam did not receive Mr Abu-Walid, Mr. Arafat's envoy, solely because he had pro-American proposals; this office strongly denies the reports in the newspapers [...] and asks the Palestinian brothers, relying on the exalted God to stand against the United States to achieve the victory. They should be assured that only reliance on God can achieve victory.³⁷⁴

Almost as soon as the PLO's efforts at mediation begun, they backfired. Ioannides elaborates that Arafat's mediation attempts not only angered the Iranians, but also caused disagreements within the PLO. A number of PLO's internal bodies – including the PFLP, the Sai'qa, the DFLP, and even Arafat's own Fatah – announced

³⁷¹ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 84.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Khomeini Statement on PLO", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 19 November 1979, R31.

solidarity with Iran and backed the embassy's takeover.³⁷⁵ Arafat appeared to the Iranians as acting on behalf of the American government against the interests of Khomeini, and ultimately a revolution that undermined US and Israeli interests in the region. Ioannides describes Arafat's mediation attempt as counterproductive, arguing that in the eyes of revolutionary Iranians and anti-imperialist Palestinians, Arafat appeared willing and ready to aid the Americans in recovering from Khomeini's humiliating blow by seeking the release of hostages.³⁷⁶ Fearing the loss of his anti-imperialist image, Arafat not only denied that PLO had made attempts to mediate, but also offered his unconditional support for Khomeini's stance. On 7 December 1979, Arafat in Beirut announced: "[t]ell our great Imam to give the order and we will all obey and move to strike imperialism at any time and in any place. The day will come when we will all say along with Imam Khomeini: join the *jihad* to liberate Jerusalem".³⁷⁷

After the failure of Arafat to convince the leadership of the Islamic revolution to release the hostages, the PLO's leadership abandoned its pursuit of acting as a mediator. According to Barry Rubin, although Arafat exaggerated his role, he undoubtedly did – unsuccessfully – discuss freeing the American hostages with the Iranian officials, and passed on information to Washington about developments on the ground during the crisis.³⁷⁸ Rubin also argues that Arafat was eager to please the Iranians, as he believed the Revolution offered him the opportunity to coordinate a regional alliance of Soviet-

³⁷⁵ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 84.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 85.

³⁷⁸ Rubin, *Yasir Arafat*, p. 84.

backed Arabs and Iran to confront Israel and the United States.³⁷⁹ Yet, as Babak Ganji has shown, the Soviets were instrumental in changing Arafat's position. Ganji argues that the Soviet Foreign Minister Andre Gromyko strongly discouraged Arafat from pursuing mediation efforts, expressing that Moscow did not wish to protect American interests. Shortly afterwards, Arafat changed his position.³⁸⁰ Ironically, a few years later in 1986, in an exclusive interview with the journal of Palestine Studies, Arafat confirmed that he attempted to help release the hostages

I received an official request from high-level, official American sources asking me to help them, and I agreed. I sent a high level delegation to Iran that succeeded, on the first day, in releasing the first thirteen hostages. Later we engaged in mediation...I was going to continue my efforts but too many people had gotten involved, and I told the American government that too many cooks spoil the broth, but no one listened. We did receive official thanks for what we did in Iran for them [Americans] in Iran.³⁸¹

Khomeini, always also the Machiavellian politician, was aware of Arafat's manoeuvring. Arafat returned to Tehran on 11 February 1980 to attend the celebrations of the first anniversary of the Revolution, visiting Ayatollah Khomeini in hospital as he recovered from a mild heart ailment. This time Arafat's presence received little attention from Iran's state media.³⁸² There was a tension at the heart of the PLO's priorities. On the one hand, its leadership endeavoured to gain recognition from the Americans and alter its image among US allies – especially Western European states. If

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Babak Ganji, *Politics of Confrontation: The Foreign Policy of the USA and Revolutionary Iran*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005, p. 163.

³⁸¹ Yasir Arafat & Zahid Mahmood, "Interview 2, Yasir Arafat: The U.S., the PLO and the Three Formulas", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Summer 1986), p. 18.

³⁸² Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 85.

successful, this would enable Arafat to play a role within any possible future developments and negotiations orchestrated by the White House, such as the Camp David accord between Egypt and Israel. On the other hand, it was vital for the PLO to maintain its alliance with Iran: a vital, energetic non-Arab and revolutionary Islamic state that could compensate the loss of Egypt and play a major role in the anti-Israeli front. The PLO's approach to the Tehran hostage crisis showed that its leadership failed to consider the significance of the role of religious and revolutionary ideologies as a driving force behind Iran's pro-Palestinian stance. Equally, the leadership of the Islamic revolution seemed unwilling to digest the rationale behind Arafat's mediation attempts. In other words, regardless of the nature of reasoning behind the PLO's mediation efforts, an ideological gap between the two sides became apparent during this episode. As noted previously, Iran's perception of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the people of Palestine was shattered during the PLO's attempts at mediating between Iran and the 'American empire'. Nevertheless, the Islamic revolution did not publicly denounce the PLO, and continued its strong support until a second regional development – the Iran-Iraq war – widened the ideological gap between the two sides even further.

The Iran-Iraq War and its Implications for Iran-PLO Relations

Iraqi armed forces, under the command of its Baathist leadership, conducted a full-scale invasion of Iran in late September 1980. The war would last for eight years. Almost immediately identifying the potentially devastating impact of the Iran-Iraq war on the 'anti-Israeli front', and the possible relegation of the Palestinian cause to second place in the region, Arafat rushed to mediate between the two sides. According to Ali Akbar Velayati, the Iran-Iraq war was perceived by the PLO leadership as a spoiler for

the Palestinian cause for the following reasons:³⁸³ First, the war between two Muslim nations would divert attention away from Palestine, and consequently pave the way for Israeli aggression (as Tel-Aviv did by invading southern Lebanon in the summer of 1982). Second, the economic and military powers of these two nations were likewise being diverted away from defending Palestine towards a war waged by Saddam Hussein against Iran. Third, the war between Iran and Iraq threatened unity amongst the anti-Israeli camp of Arab states. The Arab states were divided to two lines: Syria, Libya and South Yemen backed Iran, and the other 'conservative' Arab states supported Iraq.³⁸⁴

Arafat audaciously began his intense mediation efforts as soon as the war erupted between Iran and Iraq. From the early stages of the conflict, Arafat attempted to remain impartial. On the day of the Iraqi invasion, Arafat cut short his visit to Bulgaria and sent a cable to the Iranian president Bani-Sadr and Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein expressing his concerns,

[w]ith good intentions everything can be solved, and with will and faith we can find a solution for everything. Jerusalem is calling you, Palestine needs you and our nation wants your safety and its own. From my committed position, I appeal to you through your principled and responsible stands, filled with hope that this appeal which comes from my conscience, heart and faith will mend the rift, stem the deterioration and stop the tragedy.³⁸⁵

³⁸³ Ali Akbar Velayati was Iran's Foreign Minister from 1981-1997, and then an advisor on foreign affairs to Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei – a post he occupies today.

³⁸⁴ Velayati, *Jumhuri Eslami Iran va Tahavvolla-e Felestin 1357-1385* [Islamic Republic of Iran and Palestine Development 1979-2006], pp. 41-42.

³⁸⁵ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Arafat Message", Voice of Palestine in Arabic to the Arab World, 23 September 1980, A1.*

On 24 September 1980, Arafat left Beirut to Baghdad and Tehran to meet with leaders of both states involved in the war. Accompanied by Hani al-Hassan and Abu Mayzar – the latter in charge of Fatah’s foreign relations – Arafat arrived in the northern Iranian city of Rasht from Baghdad by way of Baku in the Soviet Union. The PLO delegation had talked earlier with Saddam Hussein and was due to meet Iranian officials in an attempt to end the war.³⁸⁶ Arafat conducted separate meetings with Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, speaker of the Islamic Consultative Assembly,³⁸⁷ Bani-Sadr, and Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Raja’i to discuss the Iraqi invasion of Iran and related developments.³⁸⁸ According to Bani-Sadr, Saddam Hussein assured Arafat of the outcome of his war against Iran and peremptorily informed him;

[d]o not concern yourself about that, it will last only a few days; it will be a simple exercise. The Palestinians will be the first to benefit from this war because a victory this quick will frighten the Israelis.³⁸⁹

According to Velayati, the PLO proposed a roadmap in which the Iraqi regime was required to withdraw its armed forces from occupied Iranian territories immediately and postpone its land dispute with Iran. In return, Iran was required to accept bilateral negotiations with Iraq to resolve their disputes. Moreover, the proposed bilateral negotiations were to be conducted in a neutral country.³⁹⁰ Despite intensive discussions, Arafat – unable to persuade Iranians to agree to an immediate ceasefire – left Tehran empty-handed. On the one hand, the ill-fated mediation efforts of Arafat caused the

³⁸⁶ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, “Arafat Arrival”, Paris AFP in English, 27 September 1980, I, 16.*

³⁸⁷ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, “Arafat, Rafsanjani Meeting”, Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 28 September 1980, I, 17.*

³⁸⁸ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service, “Arafat, Bani-Sadr, Raja’i Meeting”, Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 28 September 1980, I, 16.*

³⁸⁹ Abol Hassan Banisadr, *My Turn to Speak: Iran, the Revolution & Secret Deals with the U.S.*, Washington: Brassey’s, 1991, p. 70.

³⁹⁰ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jumhuri Eslami Iran va Tahavollaat-e Felestin 1357-1385*, p. 42.

PLO to shift its policies away from favouring Iran and tilt more towards the Baathist regime. On the other hand, following Arafat's mediation efforts, the Islamic Republic's leadership lost even greater confidence in the intentions of the PLO.

It is necessary to take into consideration two factors before proceeding to conclusions: the main roots of the PLO's shift from favouring Iran to favouring Iraq, and the reasons that the Islamic Republic rejected mediation efforts and the proposed 'ceasefire'. I suggest that ideology was pivotal in Iran's denunciation of mediation attempts. Equally, Arafat's pivot away from Iran towards Baathist Iraq had its roots in pan-Arabism. To this end, some related announcements and speeches of the leadership of the Islamic revolution are worthy of attention. From the very beginning of his first tour visiting Iran since the start of Iran-Iraq war, Arafat was confronted with Iran's uncompromising and ideologically driven position. On 29 September 1980 Ayatollah Khomeini's son, Seyed Ahmad Khomeini in a joint public interview with Arafat, elaborated Iran's position by announcing

[t]he main issue we are facing now is the issue of war. We are determined to continue this war [...] Of course, we are not fighting with Iraq; in fact we are fighting with America[...] What matters to us is to say 'no' to the superpowers, saying 'no' to force and oppression [...] Our position against Israel and the issue of occupied Palestine comes first. Twenty years ago, when there was not much mention of Israel's danger and even the heads of the Islamic countries were almost all quiet, the Imam talked about this danger. Secondly, Iran after the victory of the revolution cut all its relations with Israel, cut the oil, and recognised the PLO as the sole representative of the nation of Palestine and changed the equation throughout the world in the interest of the nation of Palestine. What

country has changed its position like this after its victory? Thirdly, the issue of Palestine is a holy issue in Iran and Palestine is as important to Iranians as Iran is.³⁹¹

Seyed Ahmad Khomeini explicitly clarified Iran's expectation from the PLO's leadership on the issue of the Iran-Iraq war

I told brother Yasser Arafat; What I expect you is that you clearly define your stance in regard to the issue of Iran-Iraq without any political confrontation, because our people and we acted in the same way in our relationship with you. In no way is it in your interest to talk about negotiation and other things that I am sure you will not. I hope you are successful. To sum up in a word, be certain that we will not make the slightest change in our direction because what is important to us is the essence of Islam.³⁹²

Arafat continued his restless efforts to mediate a conclusive ceasefire between Iran and Iraq by actively working with the Islamic Conference Organisation (ICO). The ICO formed a special committee on 26 September 1981, and two days later, Arafat alongside Pakistan's president Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq and Habib Chatty (the General Secretary of ICO) visited Baghdad and Tehran.³⁹³ On 21 October 1981, Arafat and other members of the ICO committee visited Ayatollah Khomeini to discuss the peace initiative with the Iraqi regime. Ayatollah Khomeini invited the heads of ICO member states to conduct investigations on the Iran-Iraq conflict, and denounce the 'aggressor'.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*. "Ahmad Khomeini on Talks with Arafat", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, I, 17-I, 18.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

³⁹³ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Tārīkh-e Siyāsī-I Jang-I Tahmīlī-e 'Irāq 'alayhi Jumhūrī-e Islāmī-I Īrān* [The Political History of the Iraqi Imposed War Against Iran], Tehran: Daftar-i Nashr-e Farhang-i-e Islāmī, 1376 [1997], p. 80.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

As the ICO's 'Peace Committee' expanded its membership, Arafat remained among the highest-levelled and active participants. The ICO committee continued its efforts, conducting a number of visits to the capitals of states involved in the mediation efforts throughout the 1980s. Working hard to accomplish a ceasefire, Arafat expanded his efforts beyond the ICO and worked through the channels of the Non-Aligned Movements (NAM). In the winter of 1980, NAM formed a committee consisting of delegates from Cuba, Yugoslavia, India, Algeria, Pakistan, and the PLO, and established an operative office in New York in December 1980.³⁹⁵ To this end, Arafat played a diligent role in political networking, and conducted meetings within the members of the ICO and NAM to put political pressure on Iran's leadership to accept the proposed ceasefire and enter into bilateral negotiations with Baghdad. Still, Arafat's intensive mediation efforts failed to yield fruit. The war between Iran and Iraq became a bitter dilemma for the PLO's chairmanship. Iran's position remained firm and truculent, and they unanimously expected Arafat to explicitly denounce Iraq's aggression and stand beside the Islamic revolution in its campaign against the invader.³⁹⁶

Following Iran's refusal of a ceasefire with the Baathist regime, the PLO's relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran entered a downward spiral and subsequently cooled. Shireen Hunter argues that given the imperatives of the Arab nationalist ethos, Arafat and the PLO could not condemn Iraq. Moreover, material factors, such as the PLO's financial dependency on the pro-Iraqi Arab sheikhdoms of the Persian Gulf, were a catalyst in PLO choosing the Baathist regime of Iraq as its regional ally.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

³⁹⁶ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 87.

³⁹⁷According to Ioannides, Arafat could not go so far as to denounce a brother Arab nation at war with a non-Arab country.³⁹⁸ He adds that the other factor that influenced the PLO's pro-Iraqi position related to a new Arab alignment, formed around Jordan-Iraq and Saudi Arabia against the Islamic revolution of Iran. The new Arab alignment was based on the common idea that the Islamic revolution undermined the legitimacy of their ruling elite, and therefore must be stopped. Arafat could not ignore this new axis, which had strong support amongst the majority of Arab regimes with the exception of Syria.³⁹⁹

As the war between Iran and Iraq continued, Arafat explicitly sided with Baathist Iraq. Arafat conducted regular meetings with Iraqi officials in Baghdad to the war and inter-Arab issues. In 1984, Saddam Hussein supported Arafat visit's to Egypt, which had been isolated since the Camp David accords. In fact, Baghdad backed Arafat's efforts to bring Egypt back into the 'new Arab-alignment'.⁴⁰⁰ Egypt was received by Jordan and Iraq as a vital part of the pan-Arab alliance against revolutionary Iran. Revolutionary Iranian officials perceived Arafat's political closeness to 'pro-American' King Hussein of Jordan and Egyptian government as being incompatible with its anti-imperialist rhetoric and ideology. In October 1982, Mir Hussein-Musavi, Iran's prime minister, expressed regret saying "[i]n recent months, certain moves by the PLO

³⁹⁷ Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 127.

³⁹⁸ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 87.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁴⁰⁰ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Saddam Hussein Discusses Arafat Cairo Visit", Baghdad Voice of Masses in Arabic, 7 January 1984, E2.

leadership, which have been observed, are not congruent with the course of an all-encompassing, revolutionary and ideological organisation".⁴⁰¹

In April 1984, Arafat publically stressed the PLO's support for Iraq in its "just" struggle to "defend" its land and sovereignty, and achieve a "just peace".⁴⁰² Moreover, Baghdad provided the PLO with facilities to run a broadcasting station inside Iraq called the *Voice of Palestine Radio*.⁴⁰³ In November 1984, addressing Palestinian National Conference held in Amman, Arafat clarified his perception of the Palestinian struggle as ideologically Pan-Arab, and publically announced his pro-Jordanian and pro-Iraqi positions:

When we demand independent national Palestinian decision making, we do not mean to be regional [...] we say this because of our Pan-Arab position in all its dimensions, ramifications and roots [...] this revolution is Palestinian in character, Arab at heart [...] I thank His Majesty King Hussein, his government, his army and all those worked with us to make this session successful [...] I send my gratitude to my brother the knight, Saddam Hussein. I tell him that this war will end with the efforts of the Muslims and non-aligned states so that we will move together with the Iraqi army, God willing to Jerusalem. I thank him because when I went to him in Baghdad before coming to His Majesty King Hussein [...] he said: Baghdad, Iraq and the Iraqi people are the Palestinian people's brother. Do not ask me, decide and impose on us, on our people, brother Abu-Ammar.⁴⁰⁴

Meanwhile, PLO officials conducted meetings with the MKO, who by this point opposed the Islamic Republic and its revolutionary leadership. The PLO-MKO

⁴⁰¹ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Musavi on Economic Issues, Arafat-Hussein Talks", Tehran Domestic Service in Persian, 13 October 1982, 13.

⁴⁰² *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Saddam Hussein Receives Yasser Arafat", Baghdad INA in Arabic, 26 April 1984.

⁴⁰³ Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 348.

⁴⁰⁴ *Foreign Broadcast Information Service*, "Arafat Addresses Final Meeting", Amman Domestic Service in Arabic, 29 November 1984, A4.

meetings occurred at a time that Arafat conducted intensive mediation efforts between Tehran and Baghdad. In August 1981, Hani al-Hasan left Tehran and a month later in Paris he visited the leader of MKO, Masoud Rajavi, who began an open war against clerics that supported Ayatollah Khomeini. Although the PLO issued a statement expressing that the meeting between Hani al-Hassan and Masoud Rajavi was not authorised by the PLO's leadership, this meeting did not help Arafat in regaining Iran's trust.⁴⁰⁵ Another vital element that contributed to Iran's ideological estrangement with PLO was Arafat's willingness to accept a peace plan proposed by Saudi Crown Prince Fahd in August 1981. In this regard, Arafat's willingness to engage with pro-western Arab states was perceived by the Islamic Republic of Iran an indication that it had transitioned from a revolutionary movement to being a 'moderate' political force.

The Road to Jerusalem Passes through Karbala; Battling Baathists All the Way to Resist Against Zionism

The Iran-Iraq war was a yardstick for measuring Iran's ideological support of the Palestinian cause. There is a sizable literature concerning the Iran-Iraq war. However, little attention has been paid to the ideological impact of the Palestinian cause on Iran during the Iran-Iraq war.⁴⁰⁶ It is worth evaluating two questions here: First, how did the Islamic Republic continue to perceive the Palestinian question while engaged in an imposed war with an Arab state, and as it observed the PLO getting closer with Iraq? Second, what was the rationale for Iran to refuse mediation with the Baathist regime? Without constructing a narrative of the Iran-Iraq war, I argue briefly that the Islamic

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ For more analyses of the Iran-Iraq War, see Robert Johnson *The Iran-Iraq War*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; Farhang Rajaee, *Iranian Perspectives on the Iran-Iraq War*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997; Shahram Chubin and Charles Tripp, *Iran and Iraq at War*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1988; Velayati, *Tārīkh-e siyāsī-e Jang-e taḥmīlī-i 'Irāq 'alayhi Jumhūrī-i Islāmī-e Īrān*; Majid Khadduri, *The Gulf War: the Origins and Implications of the Iraq-Iran Conflict*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988.

revolution maintained its support for Palestine even as it was deeply engaged in war with Iraq. Moreover, the Islamic Republic's leadership refused to accept mediation and ceasefires because it misperceived its own abilities. Khomeini had to be persuaded by his generals that victory was impossible before he took the chalice of poison as he put it. At the same time, and indicative of this hubris was the attitude that the Khomeini seemed to truly believe that the liberation of Palestine was contingent on battling the Baathist regime of Iraq.

In their official propaganda, Iran's revolutionary leadership depicted the Baathist regime of Iraq as the collaborator with Zionism, and a tool in the hands of American imperialism in countering the Islamic revolution. Khomeini and his followers presentedp the war as the direct result of collusion between Zionism and the Baath party This was in the interest of the state and its desperate efforts to rally support in the Arab world for its regional vision. In his speeches, Khomeini explicitly elaborated Iran's ideological perspective of the Iran-Iraq war, and its connection to the Palestinian cause,

[w]hat we find most regretful about this imposed war is that the forces which should be used to put an end to Israel and save the great Beit-al Muqaddas, have, through the collusion of the great Satan and the international Zionism with the Iraqi Baath party, been continued to be used to attack the stubborn enemy of Israel and America.⁴⁰⁷

Khomeini described the Iran-Iraq war as an opportunity for Israel to weaken the Islamic revolution of Iran and to expand its domination of Palestine, stating

[w]hat is most regrettable is that the superpowers, America in particular, by deceiving Saddam into attack our country, have kept the powerful government of Iran busy with

⁴⁰⁷ *Felestine az didgah-e Imam Khomeini*, pp. 187-188.

defending its land in order to give the usurper and criminal Israel an opportunity to push forward its evil plan to create a greater Israel from Nile to the Euphrates.⁴⁰⁸

Hence, Arafat's urging of the Islamic Republic to accept the ceasefire and combine its forces with Iraq to combat Israel was dismissed by the Islamic Republic's leadership. In Ayatollah Khomeini's point of view, such proposals were attempted to seek a bribe from revolutionary Iran to fight against Israel. He expressed that

[t]hese people in the Iraqi government are using the issue of Israel as an excuse to escape the gripe of divine revenge and justice. They are using it as an excuse saying; if you want us to give permission to go and save us who are drawing, you must first overlook the crimes we have committed against you. The path Saddam wants to lay before us is one that (he hopes) will lead to him being saved, not one that will lead to Israel [...] if we accept then peace will be established and people like Saddam in this world will be saved and if we refuse, then, it will be clear that we do not really want to embark on a holy war...we accept but move aside and let the experts to come and asses that what you have done to this country. But for us to condone the crimes because we want to do something for you, this is one of the absurdities that will remain in the annals of history.⁴⁰⁹

The Islamic Republic's leadership explicitly disapproved of Arafat's efforts at communicating with conservative Arab states and the superpowers of the Western and Eastern blocs. In its arrogance, the revolutionary state expected the PLO to maintain a "revolutionary stance" and tilt more towards Islamic ideas in its campaign against Israel. As indicated, it can only be in the interest of a self-proclaimed Islamic state to "Islamicise" a conflict like this. Ayatollah Khomeini clarified his position on PLO policies since the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, and publically announced that

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 188.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 189-191.

I advise the Palestinian leaders to stop shuttling to and from, and with the reliance on God the exalted, the people of Palestine and their own weapons fight Israel to the death. For these comings and goings will cause the combatant nations to lose faith in you. Rest assured that neither the East will be of use to you nor the West.⁴¹⁰

In Khomeini's point of view, the war between Iraq and Iran was the result of a conspiracy of Zionists, imperialists and Baathists against the Islamic principles of the revolution in Iran. He truly believed in this and this belief was also transmuted into the strategic preference of the state. In his view, it was propagated that the Quran clearly urged Muslims to battle against the oppressors and support the oppressed. In his speeches during the war, he called on the 'oppressed' to rise up against the superpowers of East and West and their agents, and to view the Iranian people as the means for resisting and overthrowing the agents of the superpowers (e.g., the Shah's regime). He thus claimed leadership of a whole host of movements and events. From that rather self-indulging perspective, Islam had come under attack by the unified "Zionism-imperialist front", and the laws of the Quran were being ignored. Emphasising the Quran's verses (3:103) that state "hold fast all together to the rope which God stretches out for you, and be not divided amongst yourselves", and (8:46) that express "[f]all into no disputes, lest ye lose heart and your power departs", he interpreted such messages as progressive political decrees which – if acted upon – could bring the Muslims prosperity and global supremacy.⁴¹¹

In order to discredit Saddam Hussein, Khomeini represented Zionism and Baathism as two sides of the same coin: both were invaders against whom Muslims had a religious duty to fight. Ironically, it was not Saddam Hussein who received weapons

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 148-149.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., pp. 141-142.

from Israel during the war with Iran, but the Iranians which led to the so called Iran-Contra affair. Of course, Saddam Hussein also used the Palestinian cause for purposes of his state with all its disastrous pan-Arab ambitions. But Khomeini and his supporters were adamant to continue their propaganda. Perceiving the Baathists and Zionists as a united front against the Muslim nations, Ayatollah Khomeini stated

[w]e must rise up together. We are all duty bound to rise up for God, to rise up to protect the Islamic countries against these two cancerous tumours, one of which is the corrupt Baath party of Iraq, and the other Israel, and both of which issue from America.⁴¹²

In this propaganda, the final defeat of Baathist Iraq would pave the way for the final destruction of Zionism, and the victory of the Palestinians. In other words, he believed that the road to Jerusalem ran through Karbala.

While Iran was involved in an all-out war with Iraq, the leadership of the Islamic Republic continued to emphasise the importance of supporting the Palestinian cause. Khomeini viewed Saddam's regime as the enfeebler of Islamic fronts against Zionism.⁴¹³ On 14 April 1982, at a time when Iran began to gain an upper hand in its war against Iraq, he delivered a speech which re-emphasised his support for the Palestinian uprisings:

[t]he Quds problem is not a personal one, nor is it a problem peculiar to just one country or to Muslims of the world in the present age. Rather it is a matter which has concerned the monotheists of the world [...] and will continue to concern them in the future [...] Now that the revolutionary and brave Muslims of Palestine are, with great determination, roaring out from the place of ascension of the last messenger with the divine call to the Muslims to rise up and unite against global unbelief, what excuse does one have before

⁴¹² Ibid., p. 148.

⁴¹³ Ibid., p. 187.

God almighty and the aware human conscience for remaining indifference to this Islamic ordinance? [...] Blessing upon Quds and al-Aqsa mosque. Blessing upon the people who have risen up against Israel, blessed upon the Muslims and the oppressed of the worlds.⁴¹⁴

On the battlefield, Iran's armed forces conducted a series of offensive operations. One of the largest military operations during the early stages of the war was symbolically code-named *Tariq-al-Quds* – 'the Road to Jerusalem' – and conducted on 29 November 1981, in which Iranian armed forces liberated key strategic areas.⁴¹⁵ Subsequently, Iran's military leadership conducted a series of chained-operations – code-named *Beit-al-Moqaddas* ('the Grand Mosque of al-Aqsa in Jerusalem') – in May 1982, in which it forced the Iraqi army to retreat. These operations resulted in Iranian fighters liberating important strategic areas, including the city of Khoramshahr, which changed the military balance of the war in favour of Iran.⁴¹⁶ Through emphasising the idea that the road to Jerusalem passed through Karbala, Khomeini tried to directly appeal to the Islamist-revolutionary strata of Iranian society, particularly those within the Revolutionary forces on the frontline fighting the Baathist regime. By naming key military operations on the battleground Quds and Beit al-Muqaddas, Iran's leadership exhibited the moral importance of Palestine to Iranian soldiers in order to boost the war

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 145-146.

⁴¹⁵ During the 'Tariq al-Quds' (Road to Jerusalem) military offensive, Iranian fighters forced the Iraqi army to retreat and consequently liberated 650 km² of Iran's Khuzestan province. For more information on this operation, see the Defensive Science Research Centre website:

<http://dsrc.ir/Contents/view.aspx?id=8837> [Accessed 31 December 2013].

⁴¹⁶ For more details on the 'Beit-al-Muqaddas' military operation, see: <http://dsrc.ir/View/article.aspx?id=897> [Accessed 4 January 2014].

effort.⁴¹⁷ The propaganda implied that the war possessed a sacred aim; namely, to liberate Jerusalem and Baghdad.

Since the war began, the Iranian officials mainly used the designation *Doshman-e Baathi-Sehyounisti* – the Zionist-Baathist enemy – when referring to the Iraqi regime. In this regard, the issue of Palestine was not marginalised as some may expect. Rather, the religious and sacred dimensions of the liberation of Quds became a motivational vehicle for mobilising Iran's fighters against the Iraqi regime. In other words, by emphasising the liberation of Quds, the Islamic republic demonstrated the importance of the religious dimension of Quds for the Iranian fighters on the ground. Palestine became a tool to boost Iran's war efforts. The propaganda partially worked. According to Mohammad Amaanollah-zad, the Iran-Iraq war was perceived by veterans and revolutionary Iranians as a foreign-imposed conflict designed to prevent Iran from exporting its Islamic ideology and revolution abroad.⁴¹⁸ In his words,

[t]he Iranian veterans wholeheartedly regarded the Palestinian cause as the "just cause". The moral support for the Palestinian cause was not exhibited solely in the post-revolutionary era, but it did exist in the hearts of people during the Pahlavi's regime. The invasion of Iran and the occupation of Palestine were all regarded by the Iranian veterans as interconnected matters concerning the Islamic *Umma*. This is a moral duty to act and maintain the revolutionary ideas and fight against the invaders.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ During the Iran-Iraq war, military operations were coded using religious names and Islamic symbols in order to motivate Iranian fighters, and to reiterate the ideology of the Islamic Revolution. For more information, see the Defensive Science Research Centre website: <http://dsrc.ir/> [Accessed 20 January 2017].

⁴¹⁸ Mohammad Amaanollah-zad is an Iranian veteran of the Iran-Iraq war, and currently an academic member of the "Society for the Defence of the Palestinian Nation" based in Tehran. Interviewed in Tehran on 23 September 2013.

⁴¹⁹ Ruhullahzad, interviewed in Tehran on 23 September 2013.

The importance of Quds is reflected in the wills left by a number of Iranian veterans who lost their lives during the Iran-Iraq war, regarded as *shahid* (martyrs) by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Here, I indicate a few of these to demonstrate the prominence of Palestine in their worldviews. For instance, Shahid Hassan Binayian in his will states "O, youth! You have the accountability to support the oppressed people of Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq; rise up and support them to become liberated from tyranny".⁴²⁰ Shahid Ahmad Akbari in his will expressed that "I hope not only that we will root out the corrupt Baathist regime of Iraq, but also that we root out the occupiers of Quds in the future".⁴²¹ Shahid Hassan-Quli Tarahomi called on Iranian parents to permit their sons to participate on the battlefield against the Baathist and Zionist regimes. He stated "[s]end your sons to the frontline to support the Muslim fighters and to liberate Karbala, and from there liberate dear Quds. That is the first Islamic *Qibla* [Noble Sanctuary], and this dear Quds is under occupation of criminal Zionists who are creating tragedies against the Muslims every day".⁴²² Shahid Mehdi Budaghi urged his brothers in his will to rise up and fight against Israel and liberate Quds.⁴²³ Needless to mention that as noted in the previous chapter, many of these Iranian fighters were involved in the struggle against the Shah's regime and were motivated by anti-Zionism and anti-imperialist ideas of the period. They were a ready-made object of Khomeinism and its ideological precepts as indicated.

⁴²⁰ Defensive Science Research Centre, *Towsiye-hay-e Shahidan dar Morede Felestin* [The Wills of Martyrs about Palestine], <http://dsrc.ir/contents/view.aspx?id=9985> [Accessed 4 January 2014].

⁴²¹ Ibid.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Ibid.

The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Fahd Peace Plan, and the Islamic Republic's Response

Israeli armed forces invaded Lebanon in early June 1982. Seemingly, the invasion was triggered by an attempt to assassinate the Israeli ambassador to the UK on the night of 3 June 1982. According to Dilip Hiro, the assassination attempt was masterminded by an Iraqi intelligence officer named Nawal al-Rosan, which would lend credence to a theory that the Iraqi regime orchestrated the killing in order to provoke the Israelis to invade Lebanon and create the conditions suitable for an immediate ceasefire in the Persian Gulf.⁴²⁴ As noted before, the invasion of Lebanon came at a time when Iran had made a sequence of strategic victories on the battlefield against Iraq.

According to Chehabi, in early June 1982, the news of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon reached Tehran as the Pasdaran's Unit for Liberation Movements hosted a conference entitled "World Dispossessed" [*Mostaz'afan*] Day.⁴²⁵ Lebanese delegates participating in the conference asked for Iranian support, and both the governments of Syria and Lebanon urged the world to intervene. The Iranian government duly responded. In this regard, Velayati elaborates on the Islamic Republic's foreign policies in support of the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples facing Israeli aggressions. According to him, by invading Lebanon, Israeli hardliners pursued two major objectives: first, to destroy the PLO's military capabilities and force its army out of Lebanon, and second, to create a buffer zone in southern Lebanon and undermine any

⁴²⁴ Dilip Hiro, *Iran under the Ayatollahs*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987, p. 211.

⁴²⁵ H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, p. 212.

resistance within its immediate neighbourhood.⁴²⁶ Castigating the Arab states' "silence" during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Ayatollah Khomeini called on the Muslim governments to form a unified front against Israel:

[w]e hope that by defeating America's recent plot for preserving Saddam and the Aflaqite Party [Baathist-Party of Iraq], our brave forces will, with the final defeat of the Iraqi government, pave the way for an advance towards Beit-al Muqaddas [...] Today beloved Lebanon is being put into the gullet of these world-devourers and their vassals, and the same will happen to the other dear countries in the near future. For the umpteenth time we turn to the Muslim governments [...] and ask them, indeed advise them...to unite with us, the Syrian government and the Palestinians and present a single front to defend the glory and honour of Islam and the Arabs; and to sever for evermore the hands of these criminals from their rich countries.⁴²⁷

On the battleground, the Islamic Republic sent a high level delegation including the Minister of Defence and Commander of the Pasdaran to Syria to investigate how Iran could help and subsequently strengthened its ties with Damascus.⁴²⁸ According to Brigadier- General Moin-Vaziri from the Defensive Science Research Centre in Iran, on 7 June 1982, two groups of special forces – the 58th Commando- Brigade, and the 27th Special-Brigade of *Mohammad Rasoul-o-llah* (named after Prophet Mohammed) – were designated to support Palestinian and Lebanese fighters.⁴²⁹ These special brigades formed a combined force named as *Niroohay-e Quds* (the Quds Forces), and were sent

⁴²⁶ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Tārīkh-e Siyāsī-e Jang-i Tahmīlī-e 'Irāq 'alayhi Jumhūrī-i Islāmī-i Īrān*, p. 58.

⁴²⁷ *Felestine az Didgah-e Imam Khomeini*, pp. 191-192.

⁴²⁸ H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, p. 212.

⁴²⁹ See Sartip Nosratollah Moin-Vaziri, "The International Implications of the Biet-al Muqadas Military Operation", <http://dsrc.ir/View/article.aspx?id=1224> [Accessed 5 January 2014]

to Syria.⁴³⁰ According to Ramazani, as early as December 1979, Hojatolislam Mohammad Montazeri had already sent between two hundred and three hundred Iranian volunteers stationed in Syria to support the Palestinians in their fight against Israel. However, they were stationed in a Fatah military compound about fifteen miles from Damascus, and not permitted to engage on the battlefield.⁴³¹

According to Chehabi, six days after the invasion of Lebanon, the High Defence Council, chaired by then President Ali Khamenei, appointed the commanding officer Ahmad Motevasselian to lead the combined special forces.⁴³² On 11 June 1982, the Iranian brigades arrived in Syria and were greeted by the Iranian ambassador Ali-Akbar Mohtashami and Syrian officials. The Iranian troops were assigned in Zebdani to the Lebanese border, and were greeted by the local residents. Shortly after arriving in Zebdani, the Iranian commanders held a number of meetings with Syrian officials to decide on how Iranian troops could help the Palestinians and Lebanese against Israel. However, when President Assad's brother, Rifaat al-Assad, visited the Iranian troops and repeatedly drew attention to the proclaimed Israeli 'ceasefire' on 11 June, the Iranian commanders realised that the Syrian authorities would not facilitate their departure to the battlefield against Israel. In fact, the Syrian authorities seemed content to merely use the presence of the Iranian troops for propaganda purposes.⁴³³ This occurred at a critical moment for the Iranians, when the frontline required as many troops as possible and it became obvious that there was no direct role for them to act in

⁴³⁰ Ibid. According to Brigadier Moin-Vaziri, the Iraqi regime declared a 10-day ceasefire and withdrew its forces from the majority of occupied Iranian territory. However, the invasion of Lebanon was perceived by Iranian military experts as an excuse to divert Iran's attention from the battlefield. Iranian intelligence identified that the Iraqi regime was withdrawing its forces for tactical reasons, and in the process of fortifying its positions behind the border and maintaining its position in some part of occupied strategic areas.

⁴³¹ R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, p. 156.

⁴³² H.E. Chehabi, *Distant Relations; Iran and Lebanon in the Last 500 Years*, p. 214.

⁴³³ Ibid., p. 215.

Lebanon. The commanders sought advice from the Islamic Republic's leadership. Ayatollah Khomeini translated the Israeli invasion of Lebanon as a Zionist plot to divert Iran's attention from the battlefield against Iraq. As Chehabi rightly argues: Khomeini viewed Israel and Saddam's regime as the two "illegitimate offspring" of American imperialism.⁴³⁴

The invasion of Lebanon resulted in the PLO moving its forces out of Lebanon, split them across the region and – more importantly – relocated its headquarter to Tunisia. As Iran's foreign minister, Velayati attended the UN's General Assembly meeting and the Islamic Conference Organisation, announcing Iran's strong condemnation of the invasion of Lebanon. The Islamic Republic also condemned regional states' silence and disapproved of the PLO withdrawing its forces from Lebanon.⁴³⁵ Iran's foreign ministry announced

Because of the treacherous acts of some regional governments, the Zionist-imperialist front succeeds in forcing the Palestinian fighters out of Lebanon and spreading them throughout the region. The massacres committed by Israel against the defenceless Palestinian people in west Beirut proves that our position against the conspiracies to force the Palestinian fighters out of Lebanon was right.⁴³⁶

The Islamic Republic also directly denounced the PLO leadership's 'compromising' gesture of withdrawing from southern Lebanon. In particular, Iran believed that Arafat was responsible for abandoning the PLO's foundational revolutionary principles of fighting Zionism, and disapproved of the PLO having left Palestinian refugees defenceless in Lebanon. As Speaker of Iran's Parliament (Majlis), Rafsanjani criticised

⁴³⁴ Ibid., p. 213.

⁴³⁵ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jomhuri Islami-e Iran va Tahavolat-e Felestine 1357-1385*, pp. 60-61.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., p. 61.

the PLO's stance in his meeting with the PLO ambassador in Tehran, stating "[w]e do not see our duty of fighting against Zionism as having ended with the PLO retreating from southern Lebanon, we believed that the PLO should have maintained its forces and resisted".⁴³⁷ There was widespread condemnation from Iranian officials of a diverse political spectrum against the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and the PLO's decision to withdraw from the south of the country. The members of the Islamic Republic's Majlis unanimously issued a statement denouncing Israel and the US government for pressurising the Palestinian fighters in southern Lebanon, and viewed the Israeli invasion as a part of a larger conspiracy to undermine and destroy the resistance against Zionism. In an interview, Iran's ambassador in Damascus, Ali-Akbar Mohtashami, stated that "the U.S. and Israel have no fear from PLO, because in the past, they (PLO) have signed everything that would guarantee Israel's security and now we see no action from PLO in fighting against Israel or American interests".⁴³⁸

Many critics would cite the 'Iran-Contra affair' as an instance when Iran compromised its support for the Palestinians. Inevitably, my argument brings up the question about Iranian conduct during this period. As Said Amir Arjomand rightly argues: during the early 1980s, Iran had secret arms deals with the United States and Israel.⁴³⁹ After the American national security advisor, Robert McFarlane's visit to Iran in 1986, the deal came to be known as the Iran Contra Affairs or 'Irangate'.⁴⁴⁰ During 1985-1986, Iran traded over 200 spare parts of HAWK missile batteries for three American hostages held in Lebanon.⁴⁴¹ During the visit of the US delegate to Tehran,

⁴³⁷ Ibid, p. 62

⁴³⁸ Quoted in Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jomhuri Islami-e Iran va Tahavolat-e Felestine 1357-1385*, p. 62.

⁴³⁹ Said Amir Arjomand, *After Khomeini, Iran Under His Successors*, Oxford University Press: 2009, p. 135.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴⁴¹ Ibid

Majles speaker, Hashemi-Rafsanjani refused to hold a meeting with Robert Mcfarlane⁴⁴².

But the weapons deal has to be seen within the context of the Iran-Iraq war and the Islamic Republic's desperate need for weaponry. There have been periods in Iran's foreign policy when short term, pragmatic, tactical manoeuvres were meant to serve long term, strategic goals. In this case, the Iranian leadership accepted the deal in order to make advances on the battle-front. Khomeini was a Machiavellian politician, no doubt. But obviously, the weapons trade was not meant to to cosy up to Israel and the United States, but to bring the country closer to victory in Iraq, which was seen as a stepping stone towards supporting Palestine as well. In an interview with me, Hussein Royvaran explained that

The Islamic Republic of Iran urgently needed weapon spare parts during the war with Saddam Hussein. Unlike Iraq that was well-equipped by the Soviets, most of the arms used by Iran during the war were bought by the pre-revolutionary government from the U.S. and Israel. The Islamic Republic needed to re-equip its revolutionary armed forces and to do so such limited trade was not against the Islamic Republic's principles. During early Islam, the Prophet Mohammed (pbuh) signed a number of agreements with the hostile non-Muslim tribes, such as the Al-Hudaybiyah treaty. However, this did not mean that the Prophet compromised on its sacred mission and on Islam. Conversely, the Prophet permitted this because at that moment it was in the interest of the Islamic community. This did not mean that the Prophet was changing his course. The same rationality appeals to the Islamic Republic under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini.

⁴⁴² ibid

The Islamic Republic did not and will not compromise on its ideological and strategic values and did not and will not recognise the occupation of the Palestinian land.⁴⁴³

From this point of view, the Iran Contra Affairs did not alter Iran's ideological outlook. It was a tactical manoeuvre which fed into a larger strategy, i.e. supporting Palestinian movements in their quest for independence. After almost three decades since the Iran Contra Affair, the Iran and the U.S. remain at odds over the Islamic Republic's continued support for HAMAS, Islamic Jihad (and Hizbullah) and Iran has not fundamentally altered its approach to Israel. Iran continues to present itself as one the major supporters of the Palestinian Islamic movements because it is in the interest of the ruling elites to do so. One can conclude that beliefs inside the Islamic Republic help formulate the state's strategic actions. Thus, each governmental cabinet within the Islamic Republic may utilise a different narrative but nevertheless remain supportive of the Palestinians, at least at this moment of history

The Fahd Peace Plan

The Islamic Republic's disapproval of the PLO's stance during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was followed by Tehran's strong rejection of peace proposals such the Fahd Plan, and criticism of the PLO's leadership for its willingness to accept it. In August 1981, Saudi Arabia proposed a peace plan known as the Fahd Plan. The Saudis produced an eight points agenda in it, of which the seventh clause drew most attention as it confirmed "the rights of the states of the region to live in peace".⁴⁴⁴ From Dawisha's point of view, the seventh clause of the Fahd Plan was seen by many Arabs

⁴⁴³ Interviewed on 26 September 2015

⁴⁴⁴ For more information on the Fahd Plan's eight points, see Adeed Dawisha, "Saudi Arabia and the Arab-Israeli Conflict: The Ups and Downs of Pragmatic Moderation", *Canadian International Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 4: The Middle East after Lebanon, Autumn 1983, p. 681. According to Dawisha, the Saudis hoped to produce a positive response to the Camp-David Accord and strengthen the position of the United States' allies in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

as an implicit recognition of Israel. This divided opinion within the PLO's leadership. On the one hand, Arafat was willing to discuss and consider the plan further. On the other hand, Farouq Qaddoumi, head of the Organisation's political department, was more critical towards the proposed plan.⁴⁴⁵ According to Ioannides, the Fahd Plan was endorsed by six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and – more importantly – Arafat appeared willing to discuss it.⁴⁴⁶ Despite Arafat's posturing, the plan was opposed mainly from within the PLO and Syria, and subsequently collapsed during the Arab Summit in Fez in November 1981.⁴⁴⁷ The Islamic Republic reacted strongly against the Plan. Ayatollah Khomeini described it as an attempt by the 'imperialist Americans' to prevent the people of the region from taking control of their own affairs, and believed that it was incumbent upon Muslims of the region to condemn all peace plans in the same vein as the Fahd Plan. He specifically elaborated his opposition to the "American-backed" peace proposals, stating

[d]o you expect us to remain indifferent towards America, Israel and other superpowers who want to devour the region? No, we will not compromise with none of these superpowers or powers. We are Muslims and intend to live as Muslims. We prefer a poor life if it means that we are free and independent. We do not want this progress and civilisation which calls for us to stretch out our hands to foreigners. We want a civilisation which stands firmly on the foundation of dignity and humanity, and it is on this basis that we want peace preserved. The superpowers wish to control the humanity

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 681-682.

⁴⁴⁶ Chris P. Ioannides, "The PLO and the Islamic Revolution in Iran", in Augustus R. Norton and Martin Harry Greenberg (eds.), *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1989, p. 90

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid.

of the human beings and you and I are duty bound to resist, to refuse compromise and reject such plans as those of Sadat and Fahd, as indeed is any Muslim.⁴⁴⁸

The Islamic Republic's officials unanimously criticised Arafat's willingness to undermine and alter the anti-Zionist foundation of the PLO. Iran's acting Prime Minister, Mir Hussein-Mousavi, acknowledged the divisions inside the PLO on the matter of considering peace plans, clarifying that "the Islamic Republic condemns the compromising policies of some of the PLO's leadership and stands with those that understand the danger of the Fahd Plan"⁴⁴⁹ Ayatollah Khamenei, the acting President, declared that

[w]e view the Palestinian cause as an essential part of our revolution. Hence, we do not accept any peace-proposal that do not recognise and serve the Palestinian cause. Anyone that thinks to compromise with Israel is perceived by us as traitors to the Palestinian cause even if that person is Palestinian.⁴⁵⁰

Less than a year later at the reconvened Arab summit in Fez, the Fahd Plan with some amendments was accepted as a set of proposals that constituted the Arab conditions for peace with Israel.⁴⁵¹ In response to the outcome of the Fez summit and Arafat's "compromising" policy, Rafsanjani proposed during Friday prayers on 27 November 1981 that an active force named the "Liberation Army of Quds" be established to fight Zionism.⁴⁵² He suggested that Arab states needed to act economically, politically and militarily to fight Zionist expansion. From his point of view, the only solution left for

⁴⁴⁸ *Felestine az didgah-e Imam Khomeini*, pp. 90-91. Ayatollah Khomeini delivered his speech on 28 October 1981.

⁴⁴⁹ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Tārīkh-e Siyāsī-I Jang-I Tahmīlī-e 'Irāq 'alayhi Jumhūrī-e Islāmī-I Īrān*, p. 78.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Adeed Dawisha, "Iran's Mullahs and the Arab Masses," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1983, p. 684.

⁴⁵² Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jumhouri Eslami Iran va Tahavollaati-e Felestin 1357-1385*, p. 81

the Arab states was to consider the Islamic Republic's advice on cutting their supply of crude oil, and sever political relations with Israel's supporters and ask other Muslim nations to demonstrate their sympathy with the Palestinian cause.⁴⁵³ The Islamic Republic's Foreign Ministry condemned the outcome of the Fez summit and declared that "accepting any proposal that recognises the Israeli state will serve Israeli and American interests and it will undermine the Palestinian cause".⁴⁵⁴ In fact, the presence of Arafat at the Arab summit in Fez and approving the outcome of the summit was resented by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and further widened the gap between two sides. On the basis of this assertion, the Islamic Republic opposed every peace initiatives including the Camp David Accords, the Reagan plan, the Fahd Plan, and the Fez Plan.⁴⁵⁵

There are some suggestions in the scholarly literature for evaluating how Iran's relations with the PLO cooled down. According to Aburish, the Iranians began to doubt Arafat's motives at the time they held US embassy staff as hostages. He believes that Arafat was blind to everything except Palestinian consideration, misjudging the depth of anti-US feeling in Iran, and that Arafat hoped to gain recognition from the American administration. At the same time, the PLO's 'money men' – Kuwait and Saudi Arabia – played a vital role in Arafat's policies towards Iran. Aburish concludes that the contradictions in Arafat's behaviour, playing both the peacemaker and the revolutionary leader at the same time tripped him up. In this instance, he was convinced to sever relations with Iran despite the pro-Iranian sentiment of the Palestinian people and most

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁵ R. K. Ramazani, *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, pp. 154-155.

of the guerrilla groups.⁴⁵⁶ Bahgat believes that the disagreement between Iran and the PLO proved to be deep. He draws two valid conclusions: first, the Islamic Republic has always distinguished between the broad Palestinian population on one side, and Arafat and his top aides on the other. Second, the troubled relations between Tehran and Arafat did not lead to better relations between Iran and Israel (and thus, the two issues were detached from one another).⁴⁵⁷ Bahgat views Iran's strong opposition to Israel as being based on both ideological and strategic considerations. Ideologically, the Islamic Republic perceives the Palestinian cause as a struggle between Islam and the oppressive powers of the world – namely, Zionism and US imperialism. This perception implies two things. First, the political legitimacy of the Islamic Republic is strengthened by its antagonism towards Israel and resistance to any peace proposals that recognise Israel's legitimacy. To this end, neither Arafat nor any other leader has the right to give away "even an inch of the Islamic land of Palestine".⁴⁵⁸ Strategically, the Islamic Republic views the peace plans as political tools that serve the American government by boosting its hegemony in the region.⁴⁵⁹ Shireen Hunter highlights the role of Pan-Arabism, and Arafat's financial dependency on Gulf states, as the main vehicle which led the PLO to support Iraq against Iran. However, she acknowledges that Iran differentiated between Arafat and the Palestinian people. Despite the actions of the PLO, Tehran permitted the movement to maintain its embassy in Tehran, established Quds day, and continued its support for the Palestinian cause.⁴⁶⁰ Furthermore, Elaheh Rostami-Povey also argues that while Arafat's support for Saddam's regime undermined Iran's relation with PLO,

⁴⁵⁶ Saïd K. Aburish, *Arafat: From Defender to Dictator*, London: Bloomsbury, 1998, pp. 164-165.

⁴⁵⁷ Gawdat Bahgat, *Israel and the Persian Gulf: Retrospect & Prospect*, USA: University Press of Florida, 2008, p. 42.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁰ Shireen Hunter, *Iran and the World: Continuity in a Revolutionary Decade*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990, p. 127.

the Islamic Republic continued to maintain its pro-Palestinian policy, openly supporting Muslim Palestinian groups such as Hamas⁴⁶¹ and Islamic Jihad.⁴⁶²

I suggest that the ideological differences between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the PLO's leadership was the pivotal cause of Iran's estrangement with the PLO's chairmanship. Yet the Iran-Iraq war did not prevent the Islamic Republic from continuing its support for the Palestinian cause. Rather, Iran's clerical leadership perceived and conceptualised the Iran-Iraq war as one front in the Muslim world's wider battle against the influence of Zionism and imperialism, not least to mobilise Iranians for the war and to claim the leadership of the Islamic world. In fact, support for the Palestinian cause remained the central theme even at a time when Iran was heavily bogged down in the war with Saddam Hussein's Ba'thist state. I agree with Michael Barnett's argument that shared values and common identity are the foundation of alliance formation, or maintaining partnerships.⁴⁶³ In the case of Iran's relations with PLO, the incompatibility between the clerics' ideology of Islamic universalism and Arafat's pan-Arabism and pro-Baathist ideas – as well as the PLO's shift away from militancy – undermined ties between revolutionary Iran and the PLO. However, and as we will see in the following chapters, this shift strengthened Tehran's connection with Islamist Palestinian groups.

In the next chapters I examine two factors more closely: the ideological and strategic position of the Palestinian cause within Iran's foreign policy following the Iran-Iraq war, and Iran's relations with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In doing this, I concur with Zamel Saeedi that the Iran-Iraq war unveiled a bitter relationship between

⁴⁶¹ *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya* (Islamic Resistance Movement) is better known by its acronym HAMAS.

⁴⁶² Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Iran's Influence*, London; Zed Books, 2010, p. 159.

⁴⁶³ Michael Barnett, "Identity and Alliances in the Middle East", in Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 445.

Iran and the PLO. Indeed, many Iranians were disappointed by the PLO's policies, but choose to keep their frustrations in check. For Iran's leadership, Palestine remained a Muslim territory that had been occupied and subjected to aggression. From this perspective, the Islamic Republic opposed any debate on the core of the matter or the principles associated with the Palestinian cause.⁴⁶⁴ One of these principles was the need to repel Zionism from what was perceived to be the Islamic Holy Land. To this end, Tehran began to strengthen its relations with Muslim Palestinian factions that subscribed to Iran's Islamic shared principles.⁴⁶⁵ Palestine was cut and pasted into the interest of this Iranian state because it rallied public opinion behind the revolution and it boosted the morale of Iranian soldiers at the battlefield. This shows that the material interest of the state was cultivated in an ideational context that was pro-Palestinian – Iranian society genuinely felt for Palestine and the post-revolutionary state readily tapped into these sentiments.

⁴⁶⁴ Zamel Saeedi, "The Palestinian Question in Arab-Iranian Relations" in , Khair el-Din Hasseb, *Arab-Iranian Relations*, 1998, p. 374.

⁴⁶⁵ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jumhuri Eslami Iran va Tahavolla-e Felestin*, p. 43.

Chapter Three

Iran's Relations with Palestinian Islamic Jihad

This chapter provides an insight into Palestinian Islamic Jihad's ideological relations with the revolutionary state in Iran. Here I provide an introduction to the ideological outlook of Islamic Jihad's founder Fathi Shirqaqi. I will argue that the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran and its pro-Palestinian stance from the inception profoundly inspired Palestinian activists, and in the process revitalised the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian cause. To this end, I will also suggest that the Islamic Republic of Iran became the principal enabler of Palestinian Islamic Jihad's growth and development beyond the Occupied Territories. Before discussing Iran's relations with the Islamic Jihad movement, it is important to also grasp how Islamic Jihad likewise perceived Islamic Republic of Iran. I suggest that the leaders of Palestinian Islamic Jihad were motivated by the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran. In what follows, I show how revolutionary messages of Khomeini and others were absorbed with great enthusiasm by Fathi Shirqaqi, whom highlighted the Islamic discourse of the Palestinian cause after 1967.

Islamic Jihad – A New Page in the Palestinian Struggle

The emergence of Palestinian Islamic Jihad and its ideology is a compelling subject, particularly given its influence on Palestinian politics since its emergence in early 1980s. When it comes to Palestinian Islamic Jihad, we are faced with a lack of comprehensive academic sources. This can often lead to an over-reliance on selective media reports. Palestinian Islamic Jihad was established in the early 1980s by Dr Fathi al-Shirqaqi. Shirqaqi was born in the Fara'a refugee camp to a large and poor family

originating in the village of Zarnuqa, in the Ramala district. In his early life, Shiqaqi was greatly influenced by pan-Arab ideas, which by his own account precluded him from being influenced by socialism. Grasped by a feeling of destitution in the wake of the 1967 defeat, he quite naturally turned to Islam.⁴⁶⁶ The 1967 defeat was later characterised by Shiqaqi as "more difficult than the fall of Baghdad by the Tatars, Andalusia to the Spanish Christians, or Jerusalem to the Crusaders."⁴⁶⁷ In 1974, Shiqaqi travelled to Egypt to study medicine at Zaqaziq University. While studying in Egypt, Shiqaqi came into contact with a group of Palestinian students and established ties with Egyptian students from the Islamic Associations, and shared these students' incisive critique of the Ikhwan's (Brother's) for their reformist orientation and disregard for other Islamic groups.⁴⁶⁸ At the early stages of their comradeship in Cairo, Shiqaqi and his student comrades studied the works of modern Islamic thinkers such as Jamal al-Din Afghani, Hassan al-Banna, Mohammed Baqir al-Sadr and Ali Shariati thoroughly. Each of these thinkers brought about a specific message. For instance, Ali Shariati's ideas provided a model of "Just Muslim society".⁴⁶⁹

According to Kasra Sadeqi-Zadeh, the period between 1974-1981 in which Shiqaqi resided in Egypt was the most important period for the Palestinian Islamic movement. In Egypt, Shiqaqi and his followers moved towards an independent path from the Ikhwan and created the nucleus of what was the Palestinian Islamic movement within the University of Zaqaziq. By 1980, the first group of students under Shiqaqi's supervision – consisting of 60 Palestinian members across Egypt's universities – laid

⁴⁶⁶ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 23.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 24.

the cornerstone for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad in the heart of Gaza and West Bank.⁴⁷⁰ It was against this background of frustration with the Ikhwan and the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran that Shiqaqi authored a book, *al-Khomeini: al-Hall al-Islami wa al-Badil (Khomeini: The Islamic Solution and the Alternative)*, which was published by the pro-Iranian monthly *al-Mukhtar al-Islami*. According to Meir Hatina, Shiqaqi's book depicted the Islamic revolution as "a historically unique model of a humane revolution" and praised Ayatollah Khomeini.⁴⁷¹ The book's pro-Iranian orientation was to become the identifying tag of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad several years later.⁴⁷²

Shiqaqi's book *al-Khomeini* was authored and published on 16th February 1979, and the first written book in Arabic on the Islamic revolution in Iran.⁴⁷³ It is believed that all its copies were distributed and sold shortly after its publication in Egypt.⁴⁷⁴ According to Azzam Tamimi, despite receiving an order from the Ikhwan's leadership to not write a book about the Islamic revolution, he refused to obey. Consequently Shiqaqi was expelled from the Ikhwan while studying in Cairo in 1979, and ostensibly because he had published writings on Ayatollah Khomeini and praised the Iranian Revolutionary leadership.⁴⁷⁵ Tamimi argues that the Ikhwan's actions against Shiqaqi were chiefly due to his critique of the organisation's lack of a

⁴⁷⁰ Kasra Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi* [Martyr Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi], Tehran: Markaz-e Asnaad-e Enqelab-e Islami [The Centre for Islamic Revolution Documents], 1389 [2010], pp. 85-86.

⁴⁷¹ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 24.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

⁴⁷³ Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi*, p. 86.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁵ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, p. 43.

comprehensive strategy for armed struggle to liberate Palestine, and not his pro-Khomeini rhetoric.⁴⁷⁶

The Palestinian cause was not the major priority of the Ikhwan during the late 1970s, as their attention focused more on other Islamic issues such as the provision of social welfare and education for the poor.⁴⁷⁷ Shiqaqi strongly believed in prioritising the Palestinian cause as the mother of all causes.⁴⁷⁸ This brought Shiqaqi and his friends into an ideological confrontation with the Ikhwan, and as a result Shiqaqi set up a new Islamic-oriented organisation which recruited members from within and beyond the Ikhwan. Shiqaqi's disappointment with the Ikhwan's lethargy towards the Palestinian question coincided with the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran. Inspired by Khomeini's pan-Islamic ideas, *al-Khomeini* represented Shiqaqi's ideological manifesto. His main aim was to introduce and present his beliefs to the Arab and the Palestinian street.

Following the publication of the book *al-Khomeini*, Shiqaqi was detained in Egypt for four days. He was rearrested in July 1979 and detained in the al-Qalaa prison for four months. *Al-Khomeini* was subsequently banned by the Egyptian authorities in an attempt to prevent the spread of its revolutionary message.⁴⁷⁹ Upon his release, Shiqaqi authored a number of editorials for *al-Mukhtar al-Islami* mainly focusing on the Palestinian question, signing his articles with the pseudonym 'Izz al-Din Faris'.⁴⁸⁰ During his residence in Cairo, Shiqaqi continued his critical debate on Ikhwan's inaction over the Palestinian question and began writing for *al-Forsan* (the

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi*, p. 87.

⁴⁸⁰ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 25.

Horse-Riders) in response to the Communists propaganda pamphlet *al-Jiyad* (The Horses). Here he criticised their left-wing policies, and castigated the absence of religious-rhetoric in their political agendas.⁴⁸¹ Shiqaqi's political activities further exposed him and his circle of friends to the suppressive excesses of the Egyptian government, particularly at the time of Sadat's assassination in 1981. Nevertheless, Shiqaqi evaded the authorities and left Egypt in November 1981 for the Occupied Territories.⁴⁸²

After returning to Gaza from Egypt, Shiqaqi worked as a physician at Augusta Hospital in East Jerusalem and later opened his own private clinic.⁴⁸³ In Gaza, Shiqaqi was particularly active in organising an Islamic movement that was ideologically influenced by Ayatollah Khomeini's pan-Islamic rhetoric. The majority of recruits were largely students who had been expelled from Egypt for their activism against the regime. Among the most prominent members of Shiqaqi's movement were Sheikh Abd-al Aziz Awda, and Ramadan Abdullah Shalah – the latter one of the group's first recruits outside of the Ikhwan, and eventual successor to Shiqaqi after his assassination in 1995. Like Shiqaqi, Sheikh Awda came from a disfranchised Palestinian family that had migrated to the Jabaliyya refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. After obtaining bachelor and master's degrees in Arabic and Islamic Studies from Cairo, he was expelled from Egypt for membership to a "radical Islamic society" in 1975. After returning to Gaza in 1981 from the UAE, Awda served as Imam in the Sheikh Izz al-Din Mosque in Bayt Lahina, where he was able to attract and recruit new members.⁴⁸⁴ Shiqaqi actively recruited new members for the purpose of fighting Israeli forces, and soon clashed with

⁴⁸¹ Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi*, p.86.

⁴⁸² Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁸³ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 25.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 25-26.

the Ikhwan. According to Tamimi, Shirqaqi was not specifically interested in competing with the Ikhwan in the areas of social welfare and education. Where he did wish to compete with them was in an area he always believed they had abandoned as one of their prime responsibilities: "the jihad to liberate Palestine".⁴⁸⁵ Milton-Edwards elaborates that Islamic Jihad was the first group to emerge in the early 1980s led by two Palestinians from Gaza (Shirqaqi and Sheikh Awda).⁴⁸⁶ The faction is described as the largest of the Islamic Jihad groups in the 1980s with its central bases in the Gaza Strip. The armed sections of this faction, as Milton-Edwards characterises them, were "the catalyst for the Palestinian uprising in December 1987".⁴⁸⁷

Due to his noticeable success in recruiting new members, Shirqaqi was identified by the Israelis as a potential threat. He was subsequently imprisoned in 1983 for 11 months.⁴⁸⁸ According to Tamimi, during his first brief detention, he became acquainted with a number of Palestinian activists possessing various operational backgrounds that were of potential use to Shirqaqi's movement.⁴⁸⁹ In the meantime, Shirqaqi successfully forged an alliance with a group of Islamic-oriented members of Fatah – *Saraya al-Jihad al-Islami* – that were independently operating against the Israeli targets in the West Bank.⁴⁹⁰

Shirqaqi's Books – the Ideological Manifesto of Palestinian Islamic Jihad

It is necessary to evaluate Shirqaqi's ideas in order to better understand the fabric of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's ideological outlook, and the nature of its connections

⁴⁸⁵ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine*, London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1996, pp. 116-117.

⁴⁸⁸ Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shirqaqi*, p. 87.

⁴⁸⁹ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, p. 44.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

with the Islamic revolution in Iran. Besides writing various articles for the monthly *al-Mukhtar al-Islami*, and publishing and distributing pamphlets, Shiqaqi authored three major books that specifically echoed his appreciation towards the Islamic revolution in Iran. As previously mentioned, his first book was *al-Khomeini*. The second book was entitled *al-Sunnah wa al-Shia, Zhajah Moqtaneah (The Sunnah and The Shia: an Artificial Noise)*, and the third *Muqadamah Hawl Markaziyah Filastin wa al-Mashro'a al-Islami al-Muaser (An Introduction to the Centrality of the Palestinian Cause and the Contemporary Islamic Project)*.⁴⁹¹

Al-Khomeini is organised along three principal themes: a history of Iranian uprisings since the Constitutional Revolution in 1906, Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas and the Shias ideological outlook, and the internal politics of Iran. The last theme is cross-cutting, and discusses the contemporary history of Islamic movements in the region and analyses the challenges ahead for them. Shiqaqi begins by critically evaluating post-colonial Muslim states' suppression of Islamic movements. He argues that after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, the colonial powers realised that controlling the region by direct military involvement was too costly and impractical. The colonial powers accordingly divided the region into smaller states and supported local agents that would grab power and rule in the newly established states. Their main aim was to prevent Islamic unity amongst the nations in order to maintain their hegemony in the region.⁴⁹² He specifically refers to the role of military juntas in coercing the Muslim nations. To this end, he argues that military figures like Kamal Ataturk in Turkey and Muammar Qadafi in Libya were brought to power by the colonialists in order to suppress the

⁴⁹¹ Translated by Seyed Hadi Khosroshahi, Tehran: Entesharaat-e Etelaa'at, Second Edition, 1384 (2005). Seyed Hadi Khosroshahi collected three books of Fathi-Shiqaqi and translated from Arabic into Farsi and published as a single volume.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 36.

Islamic identity of their nations.⁴⁹³ From Shiqaqi's point of view, the Arab revolts against the Ottoman Empire were engineered by the British colonial rulers in order to undermine Muslim unity. In his view, Islamic groups were the most effective opposition to the colonial powers in the region, and he pointed to a number of Islamic movements as examples – such as the Sheikh Izzadin-Qassam movement in Palestine, and Algerian revolutionaries that were the champions of emancipation from colonialism and foreign invasions. In contrast, he argues that the "westernised thinkers" within the Muslim and Arab worlds became instruments of the colonial powers, and paved the way for foreign domination.⁴⁹⁴ Shiqaqi goes further and argues that Arab and Muslim nations were left disillusioned with liberals and nationalists after their failure to defend Palestine. According to him, the colonial powers masterminded a number of military coups in the post-colonial Arab states in order to prevent the Islamic movements from gaining power. Shiqaqi argues that the socialist and left-wing activists also failed to understand the importance of ideas and identity in history by devaluing the role of religion in combating colonialism in Muslim lands.⁴⁹⁵

Having introduced the anti-colonialist role of Islamic movements in the region, he expresses strong disappointment with the agendas of secularist and liberal movements. It was against this disappointment that Shiqaqi began to evaluate the Islamic revolution in Iran, and study Khomeini's ideas. In structuring his book, Shiqaqi provides a historical account for his readers on Iran's socio-political situation since the 1906 Constitutional Revolution right up to 1979 Islamic revolution. According to Shiqaqi, Iran's Muslim clerics played the most prominent role in Iran's Constitutional Revolution. In his rather partial narration of Iranian history, he draws a parallel between

⁴⁹³ Ibid., pp. 29-30.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

Pahlavi's attempts to modernise Iran and Ataturk's anti-Islamic and secular tendencies, architected by the western powers in order to deprive these nations from achieving independence.⁴⁹⁶ Shiqaqi describes the social policies of the Shah of Iran as endeavours to de-Islamise society and divorce the nation from its religious identity.⁴⁹⁷ Shiqaqi describes two main pillars of power in the Pahlavi regime: its army, backed by the West, and its notorious intelligence agency SAVAK. He underlines the connection between Israel and SAVAK, reminding Arab readers that Israeli intelligence services were the major source of training and support for it. In analysing pre-revolutionary opposition groups, Shiqaqi shows an appreciation for the powerful influence of the Shia *Marajii* and their uncompromising stance in upholding Islamic values. He specifically castigates secular and nationalist factions for their lack of understanding of Islam.

In his book, Shiqaqi also examines the international reaction to the Islamic revolution in Iran, and in particular from the United States, Israel and Soviet Union. By doing this, Shiqaqi attempts to show a link between foreign interventions in Iran, and the foreign occupation of Palestine. He argues that the main priority in the region for the United States is to safeguard the state of Israel, and also maintain a pro-American equilibrium. He also criticised the Soviets' anti-Islamic propaganda during the Islamic revolution in Iran, and praised Ayatollah Khomeini's independence from foreign influence. Saudi Arabia's regime is described by Shiqaqi as the closest ally of Washington in the region – even more than the Shah's regime. He further argues that the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini significantly troubled the White House and its regional allies, such as the House of Saud.⁴⁹⁸ In evaluating Israel's stance on the Islamic revolution in Iran, Shiqaqi goes further to argue that the animosity

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 86-87.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 125-126.

between Shia Muslims and the Jews has roots in Islam's history, dating back to when the Jews were accused of attempting to assassinate the Shia's first Imam, Ali ibn Abi Taleb.⁴⁹⁹

It is clear that Shiqaqi was influenced by the Shia clerics in the Holy Cities of Qom and Najaf – specifically Ayatollah Khomeini – in their support for the Palestinian cause. In his book, Shiqaqi echoes Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwas and religious decrees which denounced Israel, and called on Iranians and Muslims to support the cause of Palestine as their own. In this narrative, the Shah's regime represented the only vital ally of Israel in the region and a vital element on the frontline that opposed the emancipation of Palestinian land from Israeli occupation. From his point of view, the demise of the Shah's regime was the crucial step towards the liberation of Palestine under the banner of Islam, and proof that resistance was the only solution to the Palestinian predicament.

What is central in Shiqaqi's writings is the influence of Khomeini on his own ideological outlook. In *al-Khomeini* book, Shiqaqi categorises the Shia clergy into two groups: 'traditionalist' – also referred to as 'isolationists' – who believed in the separation of religion from politics, and 'activists' who under the charismatic leadership of Khomeini advocated that religion and politics were inseparable.⁵⁰⁰ Shiqaqi saw in Khomeini a figure that was calling on Muslims to actively seek justice, and unafraid to state that Islam belonged to those proactively seeking freedom, independence and justice.⁵⁰¹ In sum, he believed that Khomeini's understanding of

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p.128. Shiqaqi highlights that Imam Ali had defeated the Jews in Madina during the Battle of Khaybar.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 50-51. Shiqaqi castigated Sunni clerics as well as some Shia clerics in Iraq, such as Ayatollah Khomeini, for displaying 'traditionalist' and 'isolationist' tendencies and as such not advocating the participation of clerics in political affairs.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 51.

Islam was wider than most: inspirational, unique and admirable. Shiqaqi praises Khomeini for his criticism of traditionalist clerics that only interpreted Islam as a spiritual religion, with no relevance to the political life of the Muslims. In this regard, Shiqaqi is particularly inspired by the fact that Khomeini believed such *ulama* prevented Muslims from progressing politically and neglecting the socio-political and economic dimensions of their faith.⁵⁰² In fact, Khomeini's critical approach inspired Shiqaqi to criticise the Ikhwan's inaction towards the Palestinian issue. According to Meir Hatina, Shiqaqi concluded that such traditionalist clerics – in contrast to figures like Izza al-Din al-Qassam who rebelled against the British and the Jews in Palestine in the 1920s and Ayatollah Khomeini who led the struggle against imperialism and formed the Islamic revolution in 1979 – were unsuited to lead believers.⁵⁰³ In portraying Islam as the faith of emancipation from foreign intervention, Khomeini deeply inspired Shiqaqi to react against the inactivity of conservative Sunni Muslim clerics on the issue of armed struggle in Palestine. Furthermore, Shiqaqi highlights Khomeini's emphasis upon Islamic unity in the *umma* as the key liberating element against imperialism and colonialism. Panegyrising Khomeini the most for his uncompromising stance against the invaders of Palestine, it is no wonder that Shiqaqi believed that Iran's relations with Palestine stemmed from religious and revolutionary ideas that were being advocated by prominent Iranian Shia clerics. In order to draw his readers' attention to the roots of Iranian pro-Palestinian activism, Shiqaqi underlines the pre-revolutionary history of Iranian support for the Palestinian cause, citing a number of religious decrees issued by Khomeini during the 1960s and 1970s. Shiqaqi concludes his argument by defining the Islamic revolution in Iran as "purely Islamic", compatible with the Quran's teachings,

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 28.

and belonging to all revolutionary Muslims who believe in freedom and justice regardless of their sect or faction.⁵⁰⁴

Shiqaqi authored his second book *al-Sunnah wa al-Shia, Zhajah Moqtaneah* under the pseudonym Dr Islam Mahmood, and its first edition was published by *al-Mukhtar al-Islami* in 1982 in Cairo.⁵⁰⁵ Shiqaqi's endeavour was to respond to some of the radical Sunni clerics who were propagating against the Islamic revolution in Iran; dismissing it as a purely sectarian-based uprising with no transcendent agenda beyond its Shia constituents. Conversely, in his book, the Islamic revolution in Iran is presented as the vanguard of Islamic unity. Shiqaqi begins his argument by reprimanding regional powers for joining the "imperialist campaign" against the revolution in Iran. In doing so, some conservative regional states exaggerated and incited sectarian divisions in the Muslim world.⁵⁰⁶ Reviewing the history of Muslim nations since the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Shiqaqi argues that the Islamic revolution in Iran triumphed at the time that the Muslim nations had almost lost all hope of regaining their past glory.⁵⁰⁷ From his perception, the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran made Muslim nations less fearful by proving that imperialism could be defeated and that justice could be restored through resistance and unity.

Shiqaqi goes on to argue that sectarianism was the most powerful instrument of imperialism and colonialism against the unity and independence of the Muslim nations. Here, imperialism and its agents were believed to be tirelessly attempting to incite a division between Sunnis and Shias in order to prevent the ideological expansion of the Islamic revolution amongst the majority Sunni populations of regional states. In his

⁵⁰⁴ Shiqaqi, Fathi Abdul-Aziz, Translated by Hadi Khosroshahi, 1384 (2005), p.63

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 323.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 160-165.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 160.

view, the aim of imperialism was to safeguard Israel against the unity of the Muslim neighbouring states and to regain its foothold in the region.⁵⁰⁸ Shiqaqi is specifically critical about some radical Sunni clerics that incited sectarian hatred by using language in line with that of the imperialist powers, and those that were blind to the commonality between Sunni and Shia teachings. Shiqaqi structures his argument by referring to various historical religious decrees issued by prominent Sunni clerics in support of unity between Sunnis and Shia's. In a similar vein, Shiqaqi highlights historical relations between the Ikhwan and various Shia' clerics and thinkers. Hassan al-Banna, for instance, endeavoured to bring Sunnis and Shias together as one united *umma*. Shiqaqi underlines Abdul-Karim Shirazi's book *Wahdat Islami* (Islamic Unity) which defined a true Muslim as a person who believes in almighty God, and in his last messenger, Prophet Mohammed, and the holy book of the Quran and the day of resurrection.⁵⁰⁹ In other words, Shiqaqi was convinced that there were significant commonalities between Sunnis and Shias that would overshadow their disagreements.

In underlining the historical relations between the Ikhwan and the Shia clerics, Shiqaqi is specifically fascinated by Navab Safavi's pan-Islamic ideas, support for the Palestinian cause from its inception, and historical visits to Syria and Egypt.⁵¹⁰ Shiqaqi refers to the prominent Sunni scholar, Fathi Yakan,⁵¹¹ who regarded Navab Safavi as a great martyr sacrificing his life for the sake of the Islamic *umma*.⁵¹² Shiqaqi quotes Yakan sentiments that the Arabs needed to search for Navab Safavi's ideological

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 160.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 166.

⁵¹⁰ Navab Safavi (1923-1955) was the founder of Iran's Fadayeean-e Islam. For more analysis on Navab Safavi's relations with the the Palestinian cause, see Chapter 1.

⁵¹¹ Fathi Yakan (1933-2009) was among the pioneers of the Islamic movement in the 1950s, and the head of the Islamic Action Front (Lebanon).

⁵¹² Fathi Abdul-Aziz Shiqaqi, Translated by Hadi Khosroshahi, 1384 (2005), pp.168-170

brothers in Iran in order to unify the Islamic *umma*. However, according to Yakan, Arabs states failed to understand that the only reliable force capable of supporting the Palestinians from beyond the Arab world were Islamic movements.⁵¹³ Appealing to his Arab readers, Shiqaqi then raises the following question: for what reason, given that Khomeini (who possessed the same ideology as Navab Safavi) have some in the Arab world been reluctant to consolidate a relationship with revolutionary Iran? Shiqaqi also cites Sheykh Mahmud Shaltut, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar who encouraged harmonious interactions between the Sunni and the Shia and recognised the Shia as one of the main legitimate Islamic schools besides the Sunnis.⁵¹⁴

Furthering his pro-*umma* argument and challenge those advocating sectarianism, Shiqaqi goes beyond the al-Azhar institution by referring to another eminent Sunni scholar, Mohammed al-Ghazali.⁵¹⁵ Shiqaqi specifically highlights al-Ghazali's reference to the Quran's verse which states:

Indeed, those who have divided their religion and become sects - you, [O Muhammad], are not [associated] with them in anything. Their affair is only [left] to Allah; then He will inform them about what they used to do.⁵¹⁶

According to Shiqaqi, al-Ghazali effectively argued that the differences between the Shia and Sunnis were on minor issues, and that both schools were in agreement on the core principles of Islam. In other words, all Islamic schools were equal although they possessed diverse methodologies for interpreting Islamic contexts.⁵¹⁷ Shiqaqi also

⁵¹³ Ibid.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p. 173.

⁵¹⁵ Sheikh Mohammed al-Ghazali (1917–1996) was a well-known Egyptian Sunni scholar whose writings influenced Egypt's Islamist scene.

⁵¹⁶ Fathi Abdul-Aziz Shiqaqi, Translated by Hadi Khosroshahi, 1384 (2005), p.174; Quranic verse 6: 159

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 174-175.

refers to broader Sunni scholars such as the prominent Sunni jurist Sheikh Abdul-Wahab Khalaf (1888-1956), Muhammad Abu-Zahra (1898-1974) and Anwar al-Jundi (1917-2002) that all recognised the Shia as a legitimate sect, and likewise emphasised the necessity of consolidating unity between both branches of Islam.

After concluding his argument that no major differences existed between the Shia and Sunni schools, Shiqaqi describes the Islamic revolution in Iran as a contemporary Islamic revival. In particular, he believed that it was the duty of every Muslim who has faith in the unity of *umma* to condemn Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran.⁵¹⁸ Shiqaqi argues that many activists in the Muslim world including the Ikhwan could see a link between Saddam Hussein's invasion of Iran and the desire of the major powers to attack the unity of the Islamic *umma*. Shiqaqi praised the Islamic movements' and Ikhwan's anti-Saddam's positions towards the Iran and Iraq war. He argues that supporting the Islamic revolution against Saddam Hussein's invasion was the equivalent of supporting the Palestinians in their struggle against the Israeli invaders.⁵¹⁹ Shiqaqi concludes his book by citing Khomeini's idea that those advocating sectarianism within Islam were neither Sunni nor Shia, but in fact agents of imperialism aiming to pave the way for the imperialists to dominate the region.⁵²⁰

My point is that the aim of the Islamic Jihad movement is to avoid entering the historical aspects of the Sunni-Shia divisions by mainly concentrating on their essential commonalities. To this end, Shiqaqi encouraged his followers to downplay inter-religious disputes and to emphasise Khomeini's pan-Islamic messages and some prominent Sunni scholars' unionist ideas. Meir Hatina is right to state that from

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p. 188.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 194-195.

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 197.

Shiqaqi's perception, efforts by Arab regimes to batter the Iranian Revolution by inflaming the hostilities between Shia and Sunna distort the historic truth and only serve Western imperialism.⁵²¹ In fact, Shiqaqi in his book demonstrates that he was a prolific opponent of sectarian divisions as he repeatedly calls for unity amongst the Muslims in confronting the state of Israel.

The last book by Shiqaqi, entitled *Muqadamah Hawl Markaziyah Filastin wa al-Mashro'a al-Islami al-Muaser*, was published in 1989 in Beirut. Shiqaqi began writing this book in June 1985 while imprisoned in an Israeli jail cell. The book provided ideological guidance for Palestinians on the vital role of Islam in confronting Israel.⁵²² In this book, Shiqaqi divides his narrative into three interlinked sections. In the first section, Shiqaqi analyses the Palestinian question through a religious lens, highlighting the importance of the Palestinian question in contemporary Islamic history. Shiqaqi begins his argument by alluding that the Palestinian question is the most crucial contemporary issue for the Islamic world. Yet Arab regimes had in fact used the Palestinian cause in order to manipulate their Arab and Muslim constituencies, and gain legitimacy without taking concrete steps in unifying the *umma* and combating Israel.⁵²³ He is also critical in this book of Arab regimes for having joined the capitalist and communist camps, and ultimately neglecting the potential unifying power of Islam. Shiqaqi castigates post-colonial pan-Arab regimes for abandoning the Palestinians and surrendering the holy mosque of al-Aqsa to the Jewish state without solid resistance. In his view, nationalist regimes in the Arab world attempted to disconnect the Palestinian struggle from its Islamic core in order to suppress Islamic movements. In highlighting

⁵²¹ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 54.

⁵²² Fathi Abdul-Aziz Shiqaqi, Translated by Hadi Khsorowshahi, 1384 (2005), pp. 204-206

⁵²³ Ibid, pp. 207-208

the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian question, he accentuates the importance of Jerusalem in Islam. Shiqaqi refers to the Holy Quran and underlines *Surat al-Asra* (the chapter "Night Journey") as it states:

Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.⁵²⁴

Shiqaqi argues that this verse emphasises the importance of the land of Palestine in Islam as a link between the most holy mosques in Islam: Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem. In his view, the verse implies that all three mosques are equally sacred.⁵²⁵ In his book, Shiqaqi continues referring to the Quran and highlights two more verses that state:

And We conveyed to the Children of Israel in the Scripture that, "You will surely cause corruption on the earth twice, and you will surely reach [a degree of] great haughtiness.⁵²⁶ So when the [time of] promise came for the first of them, We sent against you servants of Ours - those of great military might, and they probed [even] into the homes, and it was a promise fulfilled.⁵²⁷

By referring to this verse, Shiqaqi argues that Jewish animosity against Muslims has its roots in history, and that there subsequently is a link between the current predicament in Palestine and historical antagonisms. Shiqaqi refers to various Muslim narratives of the Jewish presence in the Arabian Peninsula during the Prophet Mohammed's era, and

⁵²⁴ *Surat-al-Asra* (the chapter "Night Journey"), Quran 17:1.

⁵²⁵ Fathi Abdul-Aziz Shiqaqi, Translated by Hadi Khsorowshahi, 1384 (2005), p.220

⁵²⁶ *Surat al-Asra* (the chapter "Night Journey") Quran 17:4

⁵²⁷ *Surat al-Asra* (the chapter "Night Journey") Quran 17:5

revises the history of the first years of Islam.⁵²⁸ Shiqaqi highlights that the Jews took advantage of the compassion shown by the Muslims by unifying with pagan Arab tribes against the Muslims. He was certainly fascinated with early Islamic history which focused on how the Jews and the pagan Arabs – despite their power and wealth were eventually defeated by a small number of Muslims. This was because the latter had faith in God and his messenger, the Prophet Mohammed.⁵²⁹ Shiqaqi believes that the history of Islam is particularly inspiring for the Palestinians, who had faith in religion and freedom from occupation and discrimination. Shiqaqi therefore believes that the Palestinian question has a special status in contemporary Islamic history and could not be compromised or neglected.

Elsewhere in his book, Shiqaqi examines the contemporary history of the region. He identified that colonialism and imperialism had waged a war against the Muslims since the beginning of the 19th century. He argues that the Muslim world faces attempts to spread consumerism and undermine the foundation of Islamic values through spreading liberal principles in societies. In doing so, Shiqaqi argues that secular pan-Arab regimes and pro-western activists act as agents of the foreign powers. In his book, imperialism and Zionism are presented as two sides of the same coin, and the secular Arab regimes as a fifth column acting against the interests of Muslims. He believes that the failure of the Arabs in 1967 war with Israel was caused by the apathy of the secular Arab regimes. Zionism is considered an equal partner of imperialism.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ Fathi Abdul-Aziz Shiqaqi, Translated by Hadi Khsorowshahi, 1384 (2005), p. 233. For more on this narrative of the Jews living in the Arabian Peninsula during the time of the Prophet Mohammed, see Seyed Hadi Alizadeh, "Amaaliyaat-e Yahud baray-e Moqabeleh ba Payambar" [The Jewish Operation for Confronting the Prophet], *Religious Anthropology*, Institution of Shahid Mahalati Higher Education, Vol. 6, No. 19, Summer and Autumn 2009, pp. 3-25.

⁵²⁹ Fathi Abdul-Aziz Shiqaqi, Translated by Hadi Khsorowshahi, 1384 (2005), pp. 239-240

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 253-256.

Shiqaqi's books are best read as discursive tracts between him and the 'Arab street', and particularly with his fellow Palestinian countrymen. With these texts, Shiqaqi initiated a new inter-Palestinian dialectic about the potential role of Islam in liberating Palestine and the centrality of the Palestinian cause in contemporary Muslim affairs. For him, there was no room for sectarianism and ethnic-divisions. One can argue that he shared many of his ideas about the centrality of Palestine in Islam with Khomeini, producing a kind of hermetic sense of identity. Shiqaqi's writings also became ideological charters for Islamic Jihad activists, and to this day remain the roadmap for his followers. In this sense, Shiqaqi's pro-Iranian orientation formed the ideological backbone of Islamic Jihad several years later.⁵³¹

The impact of the Islamic revolution was not limited only to Shiqaqi and his immediate circle. A number of other Palestinians that had no direct contact with Shiqaqi were also influenced by Khomeini's ideas. Loren Lybarger provides an account on the ideological influence of the Islamic revolution on the Palestinian streets,⁵³² and specifically highlights the biography of Ibn Fadlallah – a Palestinian activist who began in the secular movement of Fatah in the early 1980s.⁵³³ Ibn Fadlallah's strong desire to fight against the occupation motivated him to join Fatah and undertake military training in its camps. After being imprisoned for 15 years, Ibn Fadlallah began to distance himself from the secular movement as he came to believe that Fatah's members were not "fully committed to Islam".⁵³⁴ Expelled to southern Lebanon in 1992 by the Israeli army, he came into contact with Iranian advisors and members of Hizbullah. Having

⁵³¹ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 24.

⁵³² Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity and Religion in Palestine: The Struggle between Islamism and Secularism in the Occupied Territories*, Princeton University Press, 2007, Chapter Three.

⁵³³ *Ibid*, p. 95.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*.

met Ibn Fadlallah for an interview, Lybarger found posters and photographs of Ayatollah Khomeini plastered across his doors and walls.⁵³⁵

Ibn Fadlallah was disappointed by a number of characteristics of the secular resistance: endemic corruption, disregard for Islam, and in particular the PLO's desire to enter into negotiations with Israel. According to Lybarger, Ibn Fadlallah's ideological metamorphosis coincided with a reassessment of the situation among Maoist-oriented leaders in Fatah's 'Student Brigades' in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and the expulsion of the PLO from Beirut three years later.⁵³⁶ Those activists – led by a Christian, Munir Shafiq – argued that against the backdrop of the striking triumph of the cleric-led Iranian revolution, their efforts at using leftist ideology as a catalyst for leading and winning the Palestinian struggle for liberation had ended in failure.⁵³⁷ Inspired by the Islamic revolution, these activists argued that Islam could provide the essential symbols and language for reigniting the Palestinian struggle on a much wider level.⁵³⁸ By this point, the PLO had lost credibility in the eyes of some Palestinians due to its corruption, authoritarianism, and more importantly for abandoning its arm struggle against Israel.⁵³⁹ Ibn Fadlallah's revolutionary rededication to the struggle passed instead through the militancy of Iran and Hizbullah, and the core symbols of that militancy.⁵⁴⁰ Iran and Hizbullah's successes gave legitimacy to those symbols, and Ibn Fadlallah adopted them in order to redefine the aspirations and approaches of the Palestinian cause.⁵⁴¹ Ibn Fadlallah's admiration for Iran and Hizbullah not only drove

⁵³⁵ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 116.

him to downplay Shia-Sunni divisions, but also to learn from the symbols of martyrdom in the form of the Twelve Shia Imams. For Ibn Fadlallah, Palestine demanded the revolutionary spirit possessed that he thought the Iranians and Hizbullah commanders had:

[t]heir action spoke louder than any words. They brought us [...] better tents and wood to build beds. The [Iranian] Revolutionary Guards brought these things to us over a distance of eight kilometres over steep mountains and under cover of darkness to avoid detection by the Israelis. They also brought us an electrical generator, TVs with satellite reception, special videos about the resistance [...] They also gave each of us five hundred dollars for our personal expenses. If anyone needed medical care, they took us to Imam Hospital in Ba'labakk (Baalbek) or to the American University's Beirut Hospital. The Iranians were completely selfless.⁵⁴²

Lybarger is right to hypothesise that the emergence of Islamism in Palestinian society epitomised a generational transfer in the political identities of the activists who, in earlier periods, would have allied with one of the PLO factions.⁵⁴³ Lybarger argues that the foundation of this alteration lay in occurrences which radicalised the Islamist milieu –specially the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the invasion of Lebanon by Israel, and the first Intifada of 1987-93.⁵⁴⁴

The Importance of Iran and the Centrality of the Palestinian Cause in the Ideas of Palestinian Islamic Jihad

Let me return to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's moral connections with revolutionary Iran. As I have argued above, the triumph of the Islamic revolution in

⁵⁴² In *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Iran inspired Shiqaqi to establish Palestinian Islamic Jihad. According to Meir Hatina,, Palestinian Islamic Jihad views the Islamic revolution of Iran as the major historic turning-point in the Muslim struggle against the domination of the Western powers.⁵⁴⁵ The removal of the pro-western regime of the Shah – one of Israel’s closest regional allies – proved to Palestinians like Shiqaqi, that the change was achievable. Palestinian Islamic Jihad expressed frustration with Sunni-Arab states' suspicions and antagonistic reactions against the Islamic revolution, viewing this opposition to Iran as being orchestrated by the imperialists. In the eyes of Islamic Jihad, such political campaigns aimed to prevent the *umma* from uniting. According to Meir Hatina, the leadership of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad aimed to construct a wider Sunni consensus around the Islamic revolution by means of highlighting the prominence of Palestine in Iran's policy.⁵⁴⁶

Islamic Jihad's founding leaders appreciated that despite the geographical distance, Khomeini treated the Palestinian question as an internal problem.⁵⁴⁷ Their appreciation of the Islamic revolution surfaced during the Iran-Iraq war, as they felt that the liberation of Palestine should be the first and foremost priority for all Arab states, including Iraq.⁵⁴⁸ Shiqaqi believed that the Western powers had supported Saddam Hussein in order to prevent the Islamic revolution from expanding its influence throughout the region.⁵⁴⁹ Palestinian Islamic Jihad just viewed the invasion of Iran by Iraq as resembling – at least morally – the invasion of Palestine, and that both events

⁵⁴⁵ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 53.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

⁵⁴⁸ Iyad Barghouthi and Lisa Hajjar, “The Islamist Movements in the Occupied Territories: An Interview with Iyad Barghouthi”, *The Middle East Report*, No. 183. Political Islam (Jul-Aug 1993), p. 10.

⁵⁴⁹ Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi*, pp. 120-121.

were interlinked in a wider conspiracy against Islamic movements. Islamic Jihad's leaders criticised Saddam Hussein for repressing Muslim activists in Iraq, such as Mohammad Baqir al-Sadr, and for his secular discourse. According to Meir Hatina, the Islamic Jihad's leadership accused the Iraqi regime of recruiting Arab and Western states to help him protect his oil resources and take revenge against Khomeini for overthrowing the Shah.⁵⁵⁰

It is vital to note that in contrast to the PLO (which turned its back on Iran during the Iran-Iraq war by supporting Baghdad), Islamic Jihad remained staunchly pro-Iranian. This was due to Palestinian Islamic Jihad's ideology having motivated its leadership further to stand by the Islamic revolution. Here, transnational ideas of Islamic solidarity were the main vehicles behind Islamic Jihad's decision to denounce Saddam Hussein and support Iran. Not only did the Iran-Iraq war not undermine Palestinian Islamic Jihad's ideological ties with the Islamic revolution – it in fact inspired it even more. According to Islamic Jihad, Islamic Iran stood on one side as it confronted the arrogance of Israel and Pro-American Arab conservative states. Islamic Jihad saw itself as an accompaniment to the Islamic revolution. The fact that Iran's military forces demonstrated strong resistance against the well-equipped Iraqi army motivated Palestinian Islamic Jihad to follow the same path, and to conduct armed struggles within the Occupied Territories. Meir Hatina argues that Shiqaqi observed and admired Khomeini and Iran's unwavering resistance against a superior military power that was nourished by a powerful faith in the triumph of Islam.⁵⁵¹ In other words, Iranian resistance – similar to Hizbullah's successful campaigns against Israel's

⁵⁵⁰ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, Tel Aviv: The Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2001, p. 57.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

invasion of Lebanon – awakened Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and encouraged the outbreak of the Intifada in 1987.⁵⁵²

The Intifada of 1987: The Islamic Dimension of the Palestinian Struggle

Shiqaqi was not only inspired by Khomeini's ideas to establish an Islamic state, but also Iran's resistance against its adversaries. Inspired by the formation of the Islamic revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in Iran, and Hizbullah's popular mobilisation in Lebanon, Shiqaqi in 1981 established *Saraya al-Quds* – the al-Quds Brigades – which would be Islamic Jihad's military wing.⁵⁵³ From the very beginning, *Saraya al-Quds* conducted armed struggles throughout the Occupied Territories, and routinely confronted the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF).

The word 'Intifada', or uprising in Arabic, entered the political discourse and academia in 1987 following a popular uprising in Palestine. In May 1987, six members of Islamic Jihad succeeded in escaping from Gaza Central Prison. According to Khaled Hroub, the six remained in the Gaza Strip and carried out a series of audacious attacks on Israeli armed forces. Four of these individuals were killed by the Israeli army during an ambush in October of that year. Following the wounding of dozens of students at the Islamic University campus by the Israeli Army – where students had gathered for prayers dedicated to the Palestinian Islamic Jihad's members who were killed by the Israeli armed forces⁵⁵⁴ - Palestinians erupted in anger. On 6th December, a member of Islamic Jihad engaged in an armed confrontation with Israeli settlers, and two days later an Israeli truck crashed into a number of Palestinian labourers on their way home – injuring nine and killing four. On the same day, mass protests erupted and

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ For more information on al-Quds Brigades, see: <http://saraya.ps/index.php> [Accessed 1 May 2014].

⁵⁵⁴ Khaled Hroub, *HAMAS: Political Thought and Practice*, USA: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000, p. 39.

spontaneously spread to other areas. 8th December is now considered to be the official start of the Intifada.⁵⁵⁵ There was a strong sense of solidarity between young members of Islamic Jihad and their imprisoned mentor, Shiqaqi, whose imprisonment galvanised them to increase their armed activities prior to the Intifada. As Shiqaqi was imprisoned, his followers intensified their armed operations. In October 1986, three young followers – Tareq al-Hallis, Abdul-Nasser al-Hallis and Ibrahim Aliyan – attacked a group of Israeli soldiers.⁵⁵⁶

Meir Hatina argues that although the Intifada was principally a public uprising incited by nationalist motivations and socio-economic grievances, it drew its validity from Islam as an integral element of Palestinian cultural identity.⁵⁵⁷ According to Meir Hatina, the Intifada was characterised in Islamic Jihad literature as a ‘revolution’ (*thawra*) rather than impetuous revolt, perceived by the movement as yet another stage of an Islamic struggle against the Zionist presence in Palestine.⁵⁵⁸ Henceforth, the year preceding the Intifada was declared by Shiqaqi as "the year of Islam".⁵⁵⁹

Indeed, from the earliest stages of the Intifada, the role of Islamic Jihad was visible. Islamic Jihad's underground printing-houses actively published and distributed pamphlets throughout the Occupied Territories, and in the process incited protests. On 11th December 1987, it was Islamic Jihad that first published a leaflet appealing for the Palestinians to hold a general strike.⁵⁶⁰ Such pamphlets during the early stages of the Intifada demonstrated Islamic Jihad's widespread activism. At the same time, I do not

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁶ Sadeq-Zadeh, *Shahid Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi*, p. 90.

⁵⁵⁷ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, p. 38.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 39.

intend to imply that the Intifada was monopolised by Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Indeed, even Shiqaqi stated that the "Intifada broke out with the bloodshed by Islamic Jihad's martyrs. Later, other forces joined in".⁵⁶¹ Shiqaqi thus never claimed that Islamic Jihad was the only vehicle behind the Intifada, and recognised that other Palestinian factions – including the PLO and the Muslim Brotherhood – took part.⁵⁶² Moreover, Azzam Tamimi argues that the Intifada caught the PLO leadership in Tunis off guard.⁵⁶³ Although Yasir Arafat and his advisors were active in promoting the image of the PLO image to the world as a peacemaker, they recognised a great opportunity in supporting the Intifada. According to Tamimi, the PLO aimed to seize control of the Intifada in order to gain recognition by the United States as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, with whom alone peace was to be negotiated".⁵⁶⁴ To do so, the PLO began competing with Islamic groups and mobilising its members and supporters to help fuel the Intifada – transforming the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank into a daily nightmare for the Israelis.⁵⁶⁵

Islamic Jihad expressed frustration with the inaction and lack of support from regional leaders in supporting the Intifada. Strong support for the Intifada was only shown by two states – Lebanon and Iran. Here, the people were free to exhibit their solidarity without fear of being reprimanded by the authorities.⁵⁶⁶ Mass rallies held frequently in Tehran and Beirut exhibited an awareness of both populations that "it was the fighters in Palestine who defended the last Islamic wall-Jerusalem and its

⁵⁶¹ In Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, p. 59.

⁵⁶² Ibid.

⁵⁶³ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009p. 53.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 54.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, p. 59.

surroundings."⁵⁶⁷ For Islamic Jihad, the failure of Arab leaders' to express strong sympathy towards the Intifada was because they feared the spread of the transnational Islamic message of the Intifada.⁵⁶⁸

Following the outbreak of the Intifada, Islamic Jihad's cells became major targets for the Israelis. Key figures and leaders of Islamic Jihad were either imprisoned or forced into exile, and both Shiqaqi and Awda were expatriated to Lebanon in 1988. Although the expulsion of Islamic Jihad's leadership created a vacuum amongst its cadres in the Gaza Strip, it also created a new momentum for its leadership to become closer with the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hizbullah. According to Hatina, with the move to Lebanon and Syria, the ideological link of Islamic Jihad to Revolutionary Iran was cemented as a close political and organisational bond.⁵⁶⁹ Through the Iranian Embassy in Beirut, and through Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad's leadership received logistical support and was able to revitalise its anti-Israeli military activities from Lebanon. As Nasser Abu-Sharif, the High Representative of the Leadership of Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Iran, stated

[f]rom the very beginning of the formation of Islamic Jihad and during the first Intifada there was no official connection between Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the view of Islamic Jihad, the Islamic revolution was a successful example that the Palestinian Muslims could follow in liberating their Islamic Land. Nevertheless, there was no institutionalised relations between Islamic Jihad and Iran at a diplomatic level. The official relations between both sides began after Shiqaqi and other high ranking figures of Islamic Jihad were expatriated to Lebanon in 1988. The Islamic Jihad leadership contacted Iranian officials in Lebanon and strengthened Islamic Jihad's

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 41.

connection with revolutionary Iran. Islamic Jihad also officialised its connections with Hizbullah's leadership as it viewed the Hizbullah's liberation project similar to its own. Nevertheless, the relations between Islamic Jihad and the Islamic Republic of Iran began officially by establishing the Islamic Jihad's representative office in Tehran in 1991 which operates at a very high level.⁵⁷⁰

Moving to Lebanon opened a new window of opportunity for Islamic Jihad, which had suffered from Israel's military campaigns. Along with wide support for the Intifada, Iran nurtured political links with the exiled Islamic Jihad leadership.⁵⁷¹ Iran's support became the primary enabling force behind Islamic Jihad and other exiled Palestinians in Lebanon. This support allowed Islamic Jihad to grow an infrastructure in Lebanon and in Syria, and included help to build training camps, develop military capacity, and assistance with publishing the movement's literature.⁵⁷² Meir Hatina argues that, like its patron Iran, Hizbullah devoted its full support for the Palestinian cause and placed itself alongside the Palestinians on the frontline of the struggle of Muslims against their oppressors.⁵⁷³ Meir Litvak is also of the opinion that moving to Lebanon enhanced Islamic Jihad's ties with Iran and Hizbullah; with Iran the main financial sponsor, and Hizbullah the provider of logistical aid and military training. Thanks to Iran and Hizbullah, Islamic Jihad was able to expand its network in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon.⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷⁰ Interviewed in Tehran on 5 April 2014.

⁵⁷¹ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, p. 110.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Meir Litvak, "The Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Background Information", *The Moshe Dayan Centre for Middle Eastern and African Studies*, No. 56, 28 Nov 2002, <http://d6.dayan.org/sites/default/files/taunotes56.pdf> [Accessed 2 May 2014]

Islamic Jihad's proximity to Hizbullah transformed the movement into a quasi-military organisation, complete with a military hierarchy and even a military spokesman. The centrality of the Palestinian cause galvanised Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah to conduct joint military operations in southern Lebanon against Israel. In April 1992, Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah conducted a joint military attack on the Israeli army in southern Lebanon, followed by the issuance of a collective statement announcing: "[w]e made an alliance with Allah, the Imam Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic nation al-Sayyid Khamene'i [...] to continue jihad, despite the great sacrifices which may be required."⁵⁷⁵ Returning briefly to the beginning of this chapter, which assessed the impact of the Islamic revolution of Iran on the Palestinian struggle and Islamic Jihad, the sentiments expressed by Nasser Abu-Sharif are noteworthy

[f]rom Islamic Jihad's perception, the triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran had profound effects on the Islamic World in general and the Palestinian cause in particular. Islamic Jihad perceives the victory of the Islamic revolution as the victory for the Palestinian cause. Iran (during the Pahlavi era) was one of Israel's friendly states and turned to become one of the major supporters of the Palestinian nation. Such transformation not only altered Iran but also the Islamic nations. Within a year after the triumph of the Islamic revolution, the Palestinian Islamists won the Student elections within the Universities and became the major popular rivals for the Palestinian mainstream nationalists. Also, in the early eighties, the Palestinian Islamic groups began adopting the revolutionary Islamic discourse into the Palestinian struggle against the Zionists. Islamic Jihad also began to adopt the idea of revolutionary Islam as a method for changing the Arab home land. When the book of *Al- Khomeini: Al-Hall al-Islami wa al-Badil* (Khomeini; the Islamic Solution and Alternative) was authored by Fathi Shiqaqi

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

in Egypt, the ideological links between Islamic Jihad and the Islamic revolution of Iran was shaped based on their common Islamic identity.⁵⁷⁶

Shiqaqi and his followers were thus certainly fascinated with and imbued by the revolution, the radical ideas of Khomeini in particular, and with the history of Iranian support for the Palestinian cause. Hatina highlights that Islamic Jihad viewed itself as a promoter of Iran's pan-Islamic and anti-imperialistic vision, with Iran providing both ideological inspiration and political backing.⁵⁷⁷ Yet this does not mean that Islamic Jihad were totally dependent on Iran; instead the movements sees itself as independent.

While in exile, Shiqaqi maintained his loyalty to the Islamic revolution in Iran, enhancing Islamic Jihad's relations with Hizbullah until his assassination in 1995. The assassination is widely believed to have been the work of Israel's intelligence services (Mossad).⁵⁷⁸ According to al-Quds Brigade, Mossad agents were well aware of the fact that Shiqaqi visited Iran frequently via direct flights from Syria. Due to the fact that Iran and Syria had protected Shiqaqi, the Mossad planned to assassinate Shiqaqi outside Damascus. In October 1995, Shiqaqi travelled to Libya via Malta in order to attend an international conference on guerilla warfare. On 26 October 1995, Shiqaqi – while carrying a Libyan passport bearing the name Ibrahim Al-Shawesh – was assassinated by two Mossad gunmen outside a seaside hotel in the town of Sliema in Malta.⁵⁷⁹ Shortly after the assassination, Iran's Supreme Leader Seyyed Ali Khamenei denounced Israel's "crimes against the Palestinian people", and praised Shiqaqi for achieving martyrdom. He issued a

⁵⁷⁶ Interviewed in Tehran on 5 April 2014.

⁵⁷⁷ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine: The Islamic Jihad Movement*, p. 111.

⁵⁷⁸ Joel Greenberg, "Islamic Group Vows Revenge for Slaying of its Leader", *New York Times*, October 30 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/30/world/islamic-group-vows-revenge-for-slaying-of-its-leader.html> [Accessed 19 June 2015]

⁵⁷⁹ "Al-Quds Brigades, The Military Wing of the Islamic Jihad in Palestine", 7 February 2015, <http://saraya.ps/post/38793/> [Accessed 20 June 2015]

public message of condolence: "I offer my congratulations and condolences over the great martyrdom to dear Islamic Jihad and his respected family as well as his prideful companions and the overall Palestinian nation".⁵⁸⁰ Khamenei's condolences were followed by similar messages from Hizbullah's leadership and Shia clerics and public figures in Iran and Lebanon. A day after his assassination, posters and photographs of Shiqaqi and the Palestinian flags were plastered across the walls of schools and public buildings in Tehran. In addition, Tehran's municipality named a street close to the Palestinian Embassy after Fathi Shiqaqi.

The killing of Fathi Shiqaqi was neither the end of Islamic Jihad's war against Israel, nor the end of its close relations with Iran. Shortly after Shiqaqi's assassination, the Islamic Jihad's committee nominated and selected Ramadan Abdullah Shallah, Shiqaqi's loyal companion, as its General Secretary. Similar to Shiqaqi, Ramadan Shallah believes that military resistance is the only avenue for the liberation of Palestine. He is specifically critical of PLO's 'soft' approach towards Israel. As I will argue in the following chapter, Ramadan Shallah continues Shiqaqi's path by placing Islamic Jihad's relations with Iran and Hizbullah as the top priority for the movement.⁵⁸¹

Shiqaqi was a singularly crucial character in Palestinian political history, not merely because he established the Islamic Jihad movement. I have suggested that Shiqaqi lambasted the passivity of the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic scholars. Shiqaqi presented a new discursive debate between Palestinian activists through

⁵⁸⁰ Khamenei.ir, *Payaam e Tasliyat Dar Peye Shahadat e Doctor Fathi Shiqaqi Rahbar e Jihad e Eslami Felestin* [The Message of Condolences Following the Martyrdom of Dr Fathi Shiqaqi, The Leader of Palestinian Islamic Jihad], <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/message-content?id=2771> [accessed 29 June 2015]

⁵⁸¹ For a biography of Ramadan Abdullah Shallah's, see Ahmad Soroush-Nejad, *Faa'lan Siyasi Felestini* [Palestinian Political Activists], Tehran: Moaseseh-e Tahqiqaat va Pajooheesha Elmi-Siyasi-e Neda, 1389 [2010], pp. 215-222.

highlighting the revolutionary Islamic resistance as the most reliable alternative to nationalist discourse. Inspired by the Islamic revolution in Iran, Islamic Jihad appropriated the discourse of resistance and imbued it with Islamic rather than nationalist or secularist values in order to distinguish it from other forms of resistance. The triumph of the revolution in Iran served as evidence for Shiqaqi and his followers that revolutionary Islam was the only alternative to the passive Muslim Brotherhood, and to the pan-Arabism of the PLO. What is central to my reading of the first Intifada is that it marked a new page in the history of the Palestinian struggle. Unlike previous conflicts and rebellions against the occupation of Palestine, the Intifada was not dominated by nationalist or secular discourses, and thus marked the end of their total hegemony on the Palestinian political stage. In fact, the Intifada reflected the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian movements, and projected it as part of a wider context. By championing the Intifada, Islamic factions highlighted a powerful religious discourse that was hidden under the veneer of nationalism since the beginning of the Palestinian struggle.

One of the most important outcomes of this process of Islamicisation was the formation of the Islamic Resistance Movement, known in Arabic as *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiya*: Hamas. The emergence of Islamic Palestinian factions further encouraged the Iranian leadership to deepen its pro-Palestinian stance. The Islamic Republic viewed Palestinian Islamic factions as being closer to its own ideological outlook than the PLO. To this end, Tehran did not hesitate to try to deepen and institutionalise its relations with exiled Palestinian leaders whom it viewed as better alternatives compared to the PLO. In the following chapter I will discuss the foundation of Hamas, and further analyse the Islamic Republic's relations with Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas during the post-Intifada period.

Chapter Four

Relations between Iran and Hamas (1987-2011) – Strategic Partnership, Shared Values, and Ideological Differences

Hamas has rapidly emerged to be the leading Muslim group active in Palestinian political life. While much attention has been given to Hamas' political structure, military activities, and political disagreements with the PLO, far less is known about its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran – one of its staunchest supporters. This chapter provides an overview of Iran's relations with Hamas and examines this relationship within a strategic and ideological context. It begins with an analysis of Hamas' emergence in the 1980s, before moving on to address the main dimensions of its relations with the Islamic Republic, and Iran's own behaviour towards Hamas. Using a political and historical analytical framework, this chapter traces Iran's relations with Hamas within two historical periods: first, from the establishment of Hamas during the first Intifada up until Hamas' electoral victory in 2006, and second, from its 2006 electoral victory through to the eruption of the Arab Spring in 2011, and during the subsequent crisis in Syria.⁵⁸² I contend that despite several ups and downs that Hamas seeks to consolidate its ties with Iran as Tehran proves to be a reliable regional ally for Muslim factions in Palestine. At the same time, drawing on fieldwork in Iran, and formal interviews with Hamas high representatives in Tehran, and Iranian officials active in the Palestinian field, I argue that the discourse of 'Muslim solidarity and common values' are the ideational foundation of Iran's support for Hamas.

⁵⁸² I will discuss Iran's relations with Palestinian Islamic movements in the post-Arab Spring era more exclusively in Chapter Five.

The First Intifada and the Emergence of Hamas

The Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood faced a range of challenges and opportunities within the Occupied Territories between 1979 and 1987. The triumph of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the subsequent emergence of Shīqāqī's Islamic Jihad led to an overhaul of the group's political strategy. The Muslim Brotherhood chose to engage more actively in resistance, including armed struggle, as a way of deterring the occupation and restoring the rights of Palestinians. According to Azzam Tamimi, from 1979 to 1981, the Ikhwan's younger members inside Gaza and the West Bank – inspired by the activities of Islamic Jihad – expressed one tenacious question: "[w]hy are we not involved in the military resistance to the occupation?"⁵⁸³ Pressured from within their own ranks, and subject to an increasing criticism from ordinary Palestinians of the Ikhwan's inaction, the leadership of the Palestinian Ikhwan attempted to recapture public trust. Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, the spiritual leader of the Palestinian Ikhwan, planned to arm some of his supporters and conduct their first military activities in 1982. According to Tamimi, only Yassin and a very close circle of his followers were aware of the plans, and other members of the Ikhwan remained strongly opposed to military actions within the Occupied Territories.⁵⁸⁴ Yet Sheikh Yassin's military plans failed to achieve its goals, and his followers were stopped by Israeli agents while attempting to obtain weapons. Sheikh Yassin was subsequently arrested and imprisoned. Although sentenced to a long-term prison sentence, Sheikh Yassin was released as part of a prisoner swap between Israel and the PFLP-GC in May 1985.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸³ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, p. 44.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

Azzam Tamimi explains that from 1982 onwards, two groups dominated the Palestinian Ikhwan's political strata. The first group was comprised mostly of older members of the Ikhwan, thus consisting of a generation influenced by a school of thought prevalent in Jordan which believed in awaiting for the appearance of an Islamic government which would then lead to the liberation of Palestine.⁵⁸⁶ The second group included younger affiliates of the Ikhwan – who had debated against leftist and nationalist tendencies among students on campus - that were inspired and invigorated by the Iranian revolution.⁵⁸⁷ These younger members were frustrated by the Ikhwan's inaction, and more than anything else dismayed by the incongruity between theory and practice. Meanwhile, Shiqaqi's Islamic Jihad captured the imagination of the Palestinians by taking the initiative in fulfilling the responsibility of Jihad against Israel.⁵⁸⁸ It appeared to these young affiliates of the Ikhwan that Islamic Jihad was winning the credibility and respect of Palestinian Muslims, and that all groups were now espousing the cause of Jihad.⁵⁸⁹ The Ikhwan's traditional position of Messianic fatalism had thus become indefensible and ineffective..

As discussed previously, the first Intifada erupted after Islamic Jihad had begun its confrontation with the Israeli army, and the deaths of a number of the Islamic Jihad's members in 1987. After escaping from Gaza's Central Prison, four out of the six escapee members of Islamic Jihad were killed in an Israeli ambush. On 8 December 1987, mass demonstration broke out and Palestinian public anger spread throughout the Occupied Territories. According to Khaled Hroub, on the following evening, the Political Bureau of the Palestinian Ikhwan in Gaza met and agreed that the reaction of

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 47.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 48.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

the public to Israeli aggression demonstrated the need to assign a top priority to the battle against the Israeli occupation. At the meeting, the first communiqué of Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyya (Hamas) was written, and those present – Sheikh Yassin, Abdul Aziz al-Rantisi, Salah Shehadeh, Muhammad Sham'ah, Isa al-Nashshar, Abdel Fatah Dukhan, and Ibrahim al-Yazuri – became its founders.⁵⁹⁰

In August 1988, Hamas published its Charter, declaring its ideological and political aspirations. The Charter highlights the group's strategy and specifically underlines that "Palestine is an Islamic trust". This charter sheds a light on common objectives between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hamas from its very beginning. Article 11, for instance, states that

[t]he Islamic Resistance Movement [firmly] believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic *Waqf* (Trust) upon all Muslim generations till the day of Resurrection. It is not right to give up nor any part of it. Neither a single Arab state nor all the Arab states, neither a King nor a leader, nor all the Kings or leaders, nor any organisation-Palestinian or Arab-have such authority because the land of Palestine is an Islamic Trust upon all Muslim generations until the day of Resurrection.⁵⁹¹

In Article 14 of Chapter three, the group states that:

[t]he problem of liberating Palestine is related to three spheres; the Palestinian sphere, the Arab sphere, and the Islamic sphere. Every one of them has a role to play in the struggle against Zionism. Each has obligations to fulfil. It is a grave error, and extreme ignorance, to ignore any of these spheres, because Palestine is an Islamic land

⁵⁹⁰ Khaled Hroub, *HAMAS: Political Thought and Practice*, USA: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000, p. 39.

⁵⁹¹ Muhammad Maqdsi, "Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) of Palestine", *The Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 22, No.4 (Summer 1993), pp. 122-134.

accommodating the first *Qibla*, the third Holy Sanctuary, the [place where the] ascent of the Messenger took place.⁵⁹²

In regard to its outlook towards secularism, Article 27 of Chapter Two states:

Secularist ideology is a total contradiction to religious ideologies, and it is upon ideology that positions, actions, and decisions are made. From here, with our respect for the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and what it might become, and not understanding its role in the Arab-Israeli struggle, we cannot exchange the current and future of Islam in Palestine to adopt the secular ideology because the Islamic nature of the Palestinian issue is part and parcel of our *din* (ideology and way of life) and whoever neglects part of his *din* is surely lost.⁵⁹³

Article 10 of Chapter Two also elaborates upon the movement's path:

[w]hile the Islamic Resistance Movement is forging its path, it will be a support to the weak, a victor to the oppressed; while all its might, using all of its energy, to realise the truth and defeat the falsehood, by words and action, here and everywhere it can reach and effect a change.⁵⁹⁴

Article 32 calls upon all Arab and Muslim peoples to work seriously and constructively in order to prevent "world Zionism and Imperialist powers" from taking over Muslim nations one by one. The Article states that:

[t]oday it is Palestine and tomorrow it will be another country, and another, the Zionist plan has no bounds, and after Palestine they wish to expand from the Nile River to the Euphrates. When they totally occupy it they look towards another, and such is their plan in the in the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*. Their present is the best witness on

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

what is said. Withdrawal from the circle of struggle is high treason and a curse on the doer.⁵⁹⁵

What is most interesting in the Hamas Charter is the language used in expressing the group's ideological aspirations. It emphasises the land of Palestine as an Islamic *waqf*, and thus allows the Palestinian cause to transcend the boundaries of Arab nationalism. The charter calls on Muslims and the oppressed to unify in order to liberate Palestine, and leaves no room for compromise with Zionism and imperialism. The Charter highlights the commonality between Hamas and the Islamic revolution in Iran. As I have argued in the previous chapters, Khomeini constantly emphasised the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian cause and called on all Muslims and the oppressed to salvage the land of Palestine from its occupiers. Both the Charter of Hamas and Shiqaqi's Islamic Jihad's brought Iran closer to the Muslim factions in Palestine, and opened a window for the Islamic Republic to view them as credible alternatives to PLO.

The Charter of Hamas also opened a new window of opportunity for Israel to suppress politicised Islamic factions. In August 1988, Israel initiated its first mass detention against Hamas' leadership. Mass detentions in late 1988 and early 1989 decapitated Hamas, with all of its first and second ranking officials and activists arrested.⁵⁹⁶ The Israeli campaign of mass detention and systematic suppression continued annually, and incarceration campaigns of 1990, 1991 and 1992 were on a large scale.⁵⁹⁷ Meanwhile, in December 1988, Yasir Arafat announced that the PLO accepted Israel's right to exist, thus paving the way for peace negotiations with Israel.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, p. 59.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

According to Tamimi, Arafat's compromise represented the forfeiture of the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Consequently, although PLO obtained recognition by the United States and Western powers, it lost credibility in the eyes of Palestinian refugees inside and outside of Palestine. As Azzam Tamimi puts it, the PLO's loss was Hamas' gain.⁵⁹⁸

Iran's Strategic Alliance with Hamas from 1987 to 2006: a New Page in the Palestinian Struggle

Following the PLO's declaration accepting the right of Israel to exist, Palestinian factions were divided into two camps: 'resistance movements' opposed to any concessions with Israel, and 'concessioners' under the umbrella of the PLO that were open to direct negotiations with Israel. Resistance movements were mainly from Islamic factions (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) and smaller left wing groups such as the PFLP-GC. Iran was determined to institutionalise its connection with the Islamist factions. To this end, the 'Committee of Support for the Palestinian Islamic revolution' was formed in 1990. and in May 1990, the Iranian Parliament ratified a bill entitled "Law to Support the Islamic revolution of the Palestinian People". In the following paragraphs I discuss various rules and articles ratified by the Parliament in relation to Iran's relations with Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The first law consists of eight articles. Article One of the bill states:

[t]he land of Palestine has belonged and does belong to the Palestinian people. The Quds-occupying regime and the usurper regime of Zionists which has dominated the land and the Beit ul-Moqaddas through bullying, usurpation, and massacre is condemned as usurper and oppressor so that all truth-seeking nations and people of the world, the people and the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in particular, are required to

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 61.

support and defend the wronged, homeless and combatant Palestinian people through any way possible until they realise their inalienable rights.⁵⁹⁹

Articles 3, 4 and 6 of the bill provide guidance for governmental institutions and agencies:

[t]he Islamic revolution Martyrs Foundation and the Islamic revolution Underprivileged and War Disabled Foundations, after receiving approval of the Islamic revolution Leader, as well as the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran are obliged to give support, within their material and spiritual capacity, to the families of martyrs, war disabled, captives and the missing of the occupied territories as well as other martyrs in other corners of the world who have given their lives in the path of liberation of Palestine.⁶⁰⁰ The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education are required to offer specified scholarship grants to Palestinian students in universities across the country on an annual basis.⁶⁰¹ The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Islamic Republic Broadcasting Organisation (IRIB) are obliged to keep Palestine at the top of their international agenda and to champion the Palestinian-Islamic revolution.⁶⁰²

The bill emphasises Beit ul-Moqaddas as the "centre of the Palestinian Islamic Government in exile", and urges all Muslim countries to recognise the city as the "capital of the Palestinian Islamic Government in Exile".⁶⁰³ The bill concludes by prohibiting any economic or commercial relations with Israeli corporations or institutions and requests the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to identify and make a list of

⁵⁹⁹ Seyed Qassem Zakeri, *Hemaayat-e Qanouni* [The Legal Support], Tehran: Markaz e- Motaleaat e-Felestin, 1390 [2011], p. 13.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., Article 3, p. 14.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid., Article 4.

⁶⁰² Ibid., Article 6.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., Article 7.

all corporations and companies worldwide related to Israel. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was legally obliged to submit the list to the Cabinet and Islamic Consultative Assembly.⁶⁰⁴ The bill forbids individuals and agencies from making any investments, directly or indirectly, which would profit from the occupation of Palestine. It also bans the import and export of any commodities or services which are manufactured or rendered in the Occupied Territories or by legal entities affiliated to or nationals of Israel.⁶⁰⁵ The bill remains a legal blueprint of Khomeini's pro-Palestinian ideas,. The language of the bill is important as it emphasises the "Islamic revolution" in Palestine. In other words, since the first Intifada, the Islamic Republic began institutionalising its connection with Muslim factions in Palestine, particularly Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Following the ratification of the Law to Support the Islamic revolution of the Palestinian People, Iran organised a series of conferences in solidarity with the Intifada. The first conference was organised in October 1991.⁶⁰⁶ According to Hatina, high-ranking religious figures and other delegates of Islamic movements from Arab and Muslim countries participated. The most important of these conferences – attended by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hizbullah and Hamas and delegations from some 40 Muslim countries – took place in Tehran between 14-22 October 1991, scheduled in order to precede the Madrid peace conference.⁶⁰⁷ The presence of Hamas was a significant milestone in furthering dialogue between the former and Iran.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., Article 8.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ For more information on the International Conference on Palestinian Intifada, see: The International Conference on Palestinian Intifada <http://icpalestine.parliran.ir/fa> [Accessed 21 October 2015]

⁶⁰⁷ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine*, pp. 109-110.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 110.

On 30 October 1991, the Middle East peace conference convened in Madrid. According to Iyad Barghouti, while the attitude of secular Palestinian factions towards the Madrid conference was by no means homogenous, there was unity among Muslim factions such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. All of Palestine's Muslim factions rejected the Madrid conference, labelling it the "conference for selling Palestine and Jerusalem".⁶⁰⁹ Hamas and Islamic Jihad viewed the Madrid conference as an attempt to lend international legitimacy to the existence of Israel. Inspired by Iran's anti-Zionist message, Hamas sent greetings to Iran and participated in the Tehran conference. The event in Tehran also brought Hamas closer to Islamic Jihad. Both were motivated by their opposition towards the Madrid conference.⁶¹⁰ The first event hosted by the Iranian Parliament took place in Tehran in October 1991, and was named the International Conference on Palestinian Intifada.⁶¹¹ High-ranking delegates and figures from various Muslim countries were invited –including Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Inviting delegates from Palestinian Islamic movements was a turning point in Iran's relations with Hamas. It paved a way for the institutionalisation of mutual diplomatic ties.

Certain statements made by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic in 1991 are worthy of attention, as they shed light on Iran's ideological stance towards the peace negotiations during the post-Intifada era. In a meeting with the participants of the first Islamic Conference on Palestine, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei stated:

Regarding the issue of Palestine, the goal is to liberate Palestine and wipe out the Israeli government. There is no difference between territories occupied before and after the year

⁶⁰⁹ Barghouti, "Palestinian Islamists and the Middle East Peace Conference", pp. 61-73.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ For more details on the Conferences' programmes see <http://icpalestine.farhang.gov.ir/fa/aboutconference/history> [Accessed 22 October 2015]

1967. Every inch of Palestinian lands is part of Muslims' homeland. Any non-Muslim and non-Palestinian rule over Palestine is an illegitimate ruler. As our magnanimous Imam Khomeini said, "Israel must disappear". If Palestinian Jews accept Islamic rule, they will live in Palestine. It is not a matter of anti-Semitism. The problem is that a Muslim homeland has been occupied. If the heads of Muslim countries were not under the influence of global powers, they could achieve this. Unfortunately they failed to do so.⁶¹²

Prior to the Tehran conference, Khamenei – as a part of his message on April 1990 on Quds Day, highlighted the responsibility of the Islamic Ummah towards the Palestinian Intifada, stating:

[t]he Islamic uprising of the people of Palestine has provided everybody with the ultimate proof and it has shown that in spite of the comprehensive pressure by the enemy and in spite of the deception and treachery of the friends, the sapling of resistance is not dead; rather, it has developed more roots and produced more fruit. Therefore, it is necessary for all people and governments to sincerely consider the Islamic issue of Palestine among their primary concerns and make as many contributions as they can.⁶¹³

In response to American efforts in organising the Madrid Conference, Khamenei highlighted the ideological importance of rejecting concessions and announced that responding to the Palestinian cries for help was a pre-condition for being a 'true' Muslim. In October 1991, as a part of his message to Muslim nations and religious scholars, writers and intellectuals and students, he stated

⁶¹² Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, "The Most Important Problem of the Islamic World: Selected Statements by Ayatollah Khamenei about Palestine (in English)", Tehran: Moasseseh Pajoohehi Farhangi Enqelab Eslami, 1391 [2012], p. 12.

⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 59.

[a]t this historical juncture, Muslims of the world should feel responsible. They should understand the duties that their Islamic faith has placed on their shoulders. On one hand, they have a duty to safeguard Islamic territories, which is necessary in Islamic jurisprudence. On the other hand, they have a duty to respond to an oppressed nation's cries for help....The Holy Prophet said, "A person who hears a Muslim's cries for help but fails to respond, is not a Muslim" [...] And today it is not just a single individual who is crying for help; it is an entire nation.⁶¹⁴

Ayatollah Khamenei clarified the Islamic Republic's position towards the Arab leaders who were participating in the peace conferences, and declared that any negotiations with Israel were forbidden. As a part of his message on 31 May 1991, on the occasion of the second anniversary of Ayatollah Khomeini's death, he declared:

The Palestinian nation should not, and cannot, seek its freedom and rights in conferences that are arranged by leaders of the Arab countries. These conferences, if not inauspicious-are useless and futile for the oppressed Palestinians. These leaders who have come together these days in the name of Palestine- if they were sincerely thinking about saving Palestine, they should have adopted a decisive and firm position against the hypocritical proposal by the American President and they should have decided to immediately provide weapons and financial and political assistance for the combatants who are fighting inside occupied Palestine [...]And if this does not happen - which has not happened yet and will not happen in the future either [...] Palestinian combatants should rely on God and their popular and Islamic forces.⁶¹⁵

From the very beginning of the Palestinian Intifada and following the Madrid Peace Conference, Iran committed its efforts to being head of the camp against 'concessions' with Israel. Hatina argues that Iran's stance against the peace negotiations

⁶¹⁴ Ibid., p. 64.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., p. 93.

with Israel galvanised Hamas to perceive Iran as an ally.⁶¹⁶ In an interview, Khaled al-Qadoumi, the high representative of Hamas' leadership in Tehran, stated to me:

[O]ne of the major elements within the Islamic Ummah is the Islamic Republic of Iran. Keeping in mind that Hamas is an independent movement and that it pursues balanced relations with the Muslim Ummah, Hamas moved towards establishing and consolidating relations with Iran. Hamas from its very beginning began studying the Islamic revolution. The experience of the Iranian revolution has its own input in Hamas' ideas. The pro-Palestinian literature sponsored by the late Ayatollah Khomeini inspired us to get closer to Iran. We in Hamas view the Islamic Republic as one of the leading countries in the region. We remember when the first embassy of Palestine was established in Tehran and then the Israeli diplomats were removed. We also view our relations with the Islamic Republic based on our major policy of mobilising and gaining solidarity for the Palestinian cause. To this end, we officially started our relations with Iran a year before the Madrid Conference. But, Hamas officially opened its office in Tehran in February 1992, two years after the accreditation of the Hamas representative. Since that time, our office is active at different levels of media awareness, political relations with high ranking officials within the Iranian government and institutions and also with NGOs and civil society..⁶¹⁷

By 1992 – a time described by Elaheh Rostami-Povey as one of mass detention and deportation of Palestinian academics, clergy, engineers, doctors and activists to southern Lebanon (where many were killed by the Israelis) – Hamas had emerged as a strong resistance movement. At this time, Hamas developed a closer connection with Hizbullah and consequently with Iran.⁶¹⁸ In 1992, Israel expatriated 415 Palestinians

⁶¹⁶ Meir Hatina, *Islam and Salvation in Palestine*, p. 114.

⁶¹⁷ Interviewed in Tehran on 9 November 2015.

⁶¹⁸ Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Iran's Influence*, p. 160.

(most of whom associated with Islamist movements, mainly Hamas) to southern Lebanon.⁶¹⁹ Although 100 of these deportees were permitted to return, some remained for additional months. During their exile, these Palestinians came into contact with members of Hizbullah who imparted to them "techniques of resistance" including suicide terror attacks.⁶²⁰ Hamas had fostered the idea of suicide mission four years earlier, after its high ranking officials became attracted to the tactic in 1989. According to Rola el-Husseini, "in leaflet no.68 [of Hamas] [...] there was an invitation to the movement's loyalists to start engaging in suicide missions against Israeli targets". Yet no suicide operations had been conducted during this period. The time spent in southern Lebanon by Hamas associates is a likely reason for the group's eventual adoption of suicide bombings.⁶²¹

The importance of Palestine for Hizbullah, Iran's closest ideological ally in Lebanon, should also not be understated. Dina Matar and Lina Khatib rightly argue that commitment to Palestine is one of the vital pillars in the construction of Hizbullah's identity.⁶²² To this end, Hizbullah greatly emphasised the importance of Quds Day, the day announced by Ayatollah Khomeini during the first days of the Iranian Revolution. Hizbullah offered its moral support from the very beginning of the Palestinian Intifada. These narratives were captured in powerful metaphor or iconography. For instance, in October 1990, an *al-Ahd* report depicted a blood-spattered wall against a black

⁶¹⁹ Rola el-Husseini, Resistance, "Jihad and Martyrdom in Contemporary Lebanese Shia Discourse", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Summer, 2008), pp. 399-414.

⁶²⁰ Ibid., p. 410.

⁶²¹ Ibid., p. 411.

⁶²² Lina Khatib, Dina Matar, Atef Alshaer, *The Hizbullah Phenomenon, Politics and Communication*, London: Hurst & Co., 2014, pp. 45-46.

background, with a banner reading: "Massacre of al-Aqsa...the siege of resistance...O where are the Muslims?"⁶²³

While resistance groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad have used the symbolism of al-Aqsa due to their constant battles with Israel in Jerusalem, it was Hizbullah that appropriated Jerusalem as the centre point of Muslim struggles, defining its emancipation as the decisive jihad. This hence provided coherent pan-Islamist imagery to compensate for the competing imageries of Jerusalem that had to that point been represented by many Arabs and Muslims up to the mid 1980s.⁶²⁴ Hizbullah portrayed Israel as an aggressive, racist and expansionist entity, and the slogan "today Iran, tomorrow Palestine" emerged in Hizbullah's narrative to establish that the success of the Islamic revolution would be liberation of Palestine.⁶²⁵ It was against the background of such pro-Palestinian ideas that during the early 1990s, Hizbullah received exiled members of Hamas in south Lebanon, and that Hamas subsequently expanded its relations with Hizbullah and the Iranian government. What is key to remember is that Hizbullah's pro-Palestinian stance is derived from the ideologies of the Islamic revolution in Iran, particularly as Hizbullah views Ayatollah Khomeini's ideas as its main ideological reference point.

After the Intifada in 1987, the Islamic Republic directed its attention towards Islamic Jihad and Hamas. It soon established political relations with Hamas, only to be followed by the Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel in 1993. Despite the propaganda from the PLO favouring the Oslo Accords, average Palestinians were frustrated by the PLO's recognition of Israel's occupation, and turned instead towards

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

Hamas and Islamic Jihad. After 1993, Hamas continued its strong electoral showing – beating Fatah in al-Najah student elections in 1996 and again in 1997.⁶²⁶

According to Rostamy-Povey, the Oslo Agreement legitimised Israel's seizure of Palestinian land and denied 5 million Palestinian refugees the right to return to their homeland.⁶²⁷ Following the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority (PA) was established, and subsequently dominated by the PLO under the leadership of Arafat. The PA took control of the Gaza Strip and some parts of the West Bank. The Oslo Accords brought Iran, Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah closer together. The Islamic Republic questioned the credibility of the Oslo agreement, and deepened its connection with Islamic movements in Palestine. Rostamy-Povey argues that Hamas had risen in popularity for its stance against Israel, while the PLO's popularity had shrunk.⁶²⁸ Throughout 1995 and 1996, Hamas (supported by Iran, and inspired by Hizbullah) used suicide bombings as a tactic to deter Israeli attacks on the Palestinian population, in what it believed was a last resort.⁶²⁹ The first suicide operation took place in Palestine in the aftermath of a massacre in 1993 in which 29 Palestinian worshippers were killed by an Israeli-American settler and army reservists, Baruch Goldstein.⁶³⁰ The strong relationship between Hamas, Iran, Hizbullah and Islamic Jihad continued into the 1990s, and developed as a response to the creation of the PA. From the very beginning of the establishment of the PA, the PLO led media campaigns against Hamas, lambasting it for maintaining relations with Iran. According to Khaled Hroub, in late 1992, Arafat accused Hamas of receiving as much as \$30 million annually in support

⁶²⁶ Are Knudsen, 'Crescent and Sword: the Hamas Enigma', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 8, pp. 1373-1388, 2005.

⁶²⁷ Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Iran's Influence*, p. 161.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*

from Iran, a claim that Hamas dismissed as being exaggerated.⁶³¹ These allegations were nevertheless covered in depth by Arab and Western media outlets.

Sheikh Yassin's historic visit to Iran

In October 1997, the spiritual leader of Hamas, Sheikh Yassin, was released from jail by the Israeli authorities.⁶³² Sheikh Yassin returned to Gaza to find that he was widely regarded as a symbol of resistance and defiance for millions of Palestinians who felt betrayed by the PLO leadership.⁶³³ In April 1998, Sheikh Yassin made a state visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran, and was received by its highest leadership.⁶³⁴ During this historical visit, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei received Sheikh Yassin and praised the Palestinian resistance against Israel. Khamenei regarded Yassin and his followers as "the true representatives of the Palestinian resistance".⁶³⁵ Ayatollah Khamenei announced that "the Iranian nation is determined to maintain its righteous position in supporting the Palestinian struggle and it also perceives the consequences of supporting the Palestine nation as God's given glory".⁶³⁶ He stressed that the spirit of the Palestinian resistance had to be maintained, adding that "the American government and the Zionist authorities aim to force the world to forget about the Palestinian cause by any means".⁶³⁷ During his visit, Sheikh Yassin praised Iran's support for the Palestinian struggle against Israel, and emphasised that Palestine belonged to all

⁶³¹ Khaled Hroub, *HAMAS: Political Thought and Practice*, USA: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000, p. 178.

⁶³² Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, pp. 109-110. According to Tamimi, Sheikh Yassin was released in an exchange with two imprisoned Israeli agents whom were attempting to assassinate Khalid Mashal in Jordan.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁶³⁵ Khamenei.ir, *Didar e Sheikh Ahmad Yassin Rahbar e Moqavemat e Felestin* [The Visit of Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, The Leader of the Palestinian Resistance], <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/news-content?id=11421> [Accessed 15 January 2016]

⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*

Muslims. No government or party would decide its fate.⁶³⁸ Upon his arrival in Tehran, Sheikh Yassin stated that "I would not have been here if I did not know this Islamic Republic and its supportive position towards our cause".⁶³⁹ Following his visit to Iran, Sheikh Yassin travelled to the city of Qum and was warmly received by high ranking Shia clerics at the *Hawza*, including Ayatollah Mesbah-Yazdi and Ayatollah Seyed Kazem Haeri.⁶⁴⁰ All of this happened within a context of heightend US penetration of the Persian Gulf area after Operation Desert Storm, the absence of the Soviet Union as a Balancing power and military installations in Iran's geo-strategic neighbourhood. For, Iran creating strategic depth in the Arab world was a rational response to those developments and the issue of Palestine always came in rather handy to that end.

Sheikh Yassin's historical visit to Iran went beyond a mere diplomatic state visit. Sheikh Yassin was received and regarded by the Iranian leadership and clergy as the champion of the Palestinian resistance. Appearing in his wheelchair with his grey beard, he was embraced by many Iranians as a strong-minded individual that in spite of his physical suffering and imprisonment by the Israelis continued to defend the Palestinian cause. The Iranian leadership appreciated Sheikh Yassin's visit to Iran after his release from jail, and perceived this as an indicator of the strong bond between Iran and Islamic movements in Palestine. Since then, the Islamic Republic of Iran intensified its rhetoric in favour of Hamas, describing it as the guardian of the Islamic resistance against Israel.

⁶³⁸ Ibid.

⁶³⁹ Al-Hayat Newspaper, 29 April 1998, *Wassala Ila Tehran wa Dafaa Aan Mowqif Iran Min Amaliya Al-Salam, Al-Sheikh Yassin Li Al-Hayat; Owlawiya Hamas Tashdid Zarabat Zid AAdou Al-Mohtal* [Arrived in Tehran and Defended Iran's Position Over the Peace Process, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin told Al-Hayat; HAMAS Priority is to Increase Attacks on Usurping Enemy]

<http://tinyurl.com/ybr4cpuz> [accessed 16 January 2016]

⁶⁴⁰ Jahannews, *Tasavir e Dideh Nashodeh Az Bonyangozar e Jonbesh e Hamas Zir e Parcham e Aba Abdallah Hussein* [Unseen Photos from the Founder of HAMAS Movement Under the Banner of Imam Hussein], <http://www.jahannews.com/fa/doc/news/303433> [accessed 16 January 2016]

The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon and the Second Palestinian Intifada

The year 2000 was a turning point in the region's history. After two decades - in compliance with UNSC Resolution 425 – the Israeli army pulled its troops from south Lebanon, and dismantled its militias.⁶⁴¹ Some have attributed Israel's defeat in south Lebanon to Iranian and Syrian support for Hizbullah. According to Lina Khatib, the liberation of southern Lebanon on 25 May 2000 was a watershed because it was the first time that Israeli troops had been expelled from Arab lands "at the hands of an Arab paramilitary group" since 1948, when the state of Israel was formed.⁶⁴² In May 2000, Hizbullah's leader Hassan Nasrallah directly addressed the Palestinian people:

[w]e grant this victory to our oppressed people in Palestine in occupied Palestine and to the peoples of our Muslims and Arab Nations. Our people in Palestine [...] you can regain your land without any negotiations over a village or a street, you can return with your families to your villages and territories without begging and humiliation [...] Leave and discard all these pretexts and negotiations. The real intifada and resistance are the ones which restore your rights completely as in Lebanon [...] We give this ideal Lebanese pattern to our people in Palestine as a gift, an example to follow.⁶⁴³

Israel's retreat from south Lebanon was widely covered by Arab media. Al-Manar TV repeatedly broadcasted images of Israeli troops leaving southern Lebanon, and thousands of displaced Lebanese refugees returning to their homes and land after years of occupation.⁶⁴⁴ The jubilation of the Arabs and Muslims in the region followed by the disappointment with the Camp David summit, which – hosted by Clinton and

⁶⁴¹ Imad Salamey, *The Government and Politics of Lebanon*, London: Routledge, 2014, p. 98.

⁶⁴² Ibid., p. 73.

⁶⁴³ Laleh Khalili, "Standing with my Brothers: Hizbullah, Palestinians and Limits of Solidarity", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2007, pp. 276-303.

⁶⁴⁴ Lina Khatib, Dina Matar, Atef Alshaer, *The Hizbullah Phenomenon, Politics and Communication*, London: Hurst & Co., 2014, p. 74.

attended by the Israeli PM Ehud Barak and PLO's leader Yassir Arafat – ended on 25 July 2000 without agreement.⁶⁴⁵ Frustration amongst the Palestinian population grew significantly due to the failed summits and the corruption of the PA.

Shortly after Hizbullah's triumph in south Lebanon, Israeli provocations ignited a second Palestinian uprising. On 28 September 2000, Ariel Sharon's uninvited visit to *Haram al-Sharif* – Islam's third holiest site – under heavy security protection by Israeli armed force triggered the second intifada, and united the Palestinians as never before.⁶⁴⁶ The peace negotiations proved to be fruitless for many Palestinians, as the Israelis failed to comply with many of the commitments required by the interim peace accords.⁶⁴⁷ At this point, the triumph of Iran's main ally, Hizbullah, in south Lebanon galvanised the frustrated Palestinian masses to follow the same path of resistance against the occupation. In other words, the idea that Israel could be forced to retreat the same way they retreated from south Lebanon led to popular uprising in the Occupied Territories. Here, the discourse of Islamic resistance championed by Iran and Hizbullah gained momentum even further during the Second Intifada. According to Laleh Khalili, Palestinian activists certainly consider Hizbullah a model or comrade in arms.⁶⁴⁸ Shortly after the Second Intifada began, Marwan Barghuti, the respected and popular Fatah activist in the West Bank, stated admiringly of Hizbullah that "the thinking of entire new Palestinian generation is influence by the experience of our brothers in Hizbullah and by Israel's retreat from Lebanon".⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁵ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, p. 198.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 199.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 200.

⁶⁴⁸ Laleh Khalili, "Standing with my Brothers: Hizbullah, Palestinians and Limits of Solidarity", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2007, p. 289.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid.

Iran and Hizbullah exhibited their strong moral support for and solidarity with the al-Aqsa Intifada. From 28-30 January 2001, the first Quds Conference was held in Beirut. It led to the establishment of the 'Quds Foundation', with a temporary headquarters in the same city.⁶⁵⁰ The final resolutions included the following:

- severing any engagement with the Middle East Peace process;
- calling for resistance as well as political; economic, diplomatic and media support for the intifada;
- boycotting American goods and using oil as part of a 'carrot and stick' policy;
- stopping all normalisation procedures with Israel;
- affirming that Jerusalem was the capital of Palestine; and finally
- lobbying in order to revive the UN Resolution 3379 that stipulates that Zionism is a form of racism⁶⁵¹.

The primary speakers at the conference were Nasrallah, and Ali Muhtashami (an Iranian reformist and ally of Iranian President Mohammad Khatami).⁶⁵² Muhtashami, the secretary general of the International Committee for the Support of Intifada, urged all regional countries to supply the Palestinians with arms to enable them to defend their "legitimate" rights.⁶⁵³ According to Joseph Alagha, Muhtashami reiterated Iran's solution to the Palestinian crisis, namely, a general referendum that includes the "indigenous Palestinian people ", composed of adherents of the three

⁶⁵⁰ Joseph Alagha, "Hizbullah, Iran and the Intifada", *Leiden University, ISIM Newsletter*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2002, p. 35.

⁶⁵¹ Ibid.

⁶⁵² Mohamad Khatami served as the fifth President of the Islamic Republic of Iran between 1997 and 2005.

⁶⁵³ Joseph Alagha, "Hizbullah, Iran and the Intifada", p. 35.

Abrahamic faiths worldwide to determine their future and the type of the government which they would adopt.⁶⁵⁴ In support of the Second Intifada, the Islamic Republic of Iran hosted the Second International Conference on Palestinian Intifada in Tehran in April 2001.⁶⁵⁵ According to Ali Akbar Velayati, representatives of more than 30 Muslim and Arab states as well representatives of the Palestinian opposition groups and 350 members of the Iranian parliament and high ranking religious figures participated in this conference.⁶⁵⁶ The Second International Conference on Palestinian Intifada began with a speech by Ayatollah Khamenei, and also featured speeches from Mahdi Karrubi (Speaker of the Iranian Parliament), the then President, Mohammad Khatami, Ramadan Abdullah (the leader of Islamic Jihad), and Khaled Mashal.

According to Velayati, the second Conference was dominated by the reformists by virtue of being organised and hosted by Iran's sixth parliament. Velayati argues that this fact demonstrated that there existed a strong consensus amongst all Iranian political strata over support for the Palestinian cause.⁶⁵⁷ From Velayati's point of view, locating the International Conference on Palestinian Intifada in Tehran, and enlisting the participation of non-Arab Muslim countries and organisations, furthered the message that the Palestinian cause was an Islamic rather than merely an Arab cause. The Islamic Republic of Iran further reiterated that the fate of Palestine was intertwined with the fate of other Muslim nations.⁶⁵⁸ The second conference unanimously condemned Israel's aggressive actions and meticulous plans to alter the demography of Palestine,

⁶⁵⁴ Joseph Alagha, "Hizbullah, Iran and the Intifada", *Leiden University, ISIM Newsletter*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2002, p. 35.

⁶⁵⁵ For more details on the Conferences programmes, see <http://icpalestine.parliran.ir/fa> [Accessed 21 January 2016]

⁶⁵⁶ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jomhuri Islami-e Iran va Tahavolat-e Felestine 1357-1385*, p. 192.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

and attempts at destroying Christian and Muslim sites in Jerusalem. The Conference emphasised supporting the Palestinian people in their struggle for liberation and freedom.⁶⁵⁹

Certain statements by Khamenei are worthy of attention, as they shed light on the Islamic Republic's perception of the Second Intifada. Shortly before eruption of the Second Intifada in December 1999, Ayatollah Khamenei detailed his outlook on the notion of peace-talks between Israel and the PA, and in the process also sent a message to the Palestinian people. He stated:

[O]ne of the issues that is apparent today in order to erase the issue of Palestine from memories and prevent it from being raised by public opinion of the Islamic Ummah, is the so-called peace talks that are held between a group of Palestinians-namely Arafat and his gang and the Israelis: the issue of negotiations, the Palestinian "Authority" and other such things. This is one the most reprehensible tricks designed by the Israelis and unfortunately, certain Muslims and certain Palestinians have fallen into this trap.⁶⁶⁰

Ayatollah Khamenei described the peace negotiations as "Israel's peace-plot", and appealed to Muslims and Arabs to support the Palestinians in their struggle. In December 1999, he stated that

[O]f course , today mentioning the appealing word "Peace" is the trick that is used by the Zionists and their supporters- and America is their most important supporter [...] aggression is [part of this regime's nature [Israel]]. Basically, the Zionist regime is founded on coercion, violence and cruelty and it is moving forward on the basis of these characteristics. It could not and will not, make any progress without cruelty and coercion, and yet you say Palestinians should make peace with this regime? What peace? No one

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ Ali Khamenei, *Selected Statements by Ayatollah Khamenei about Palestine* (in English), p. 11.

would fight them if they were not greedy, that is to say, if they returned Palestine to its real owners and went away or if they asked the Palestinian government to let some of them or all of them stay in Palestine. The war started when they forced their way into the Palestinian homes [...] They are a threat to all nations now. Therefore they want to make peace and use it as a stepping -stone for further oppression. If a kind of peace is established, it is just a break to prepare for another kind of aggression and transgression later on.⁶⁶¹

After the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Iran's leadership offered its solidarity with and support to the Palestinian uprising, and highlighted the Islamic nature of the al-Aqsa Intifada. As part of his inaugural speech delivered on 24 April 2001 at the International Conference on the Palestinian Intifada in Tehran, the Supreme Leader stated

[t]he main pivot of the al-Aqsa intifada is Beit ul-Moqaddas [Jerusalem]. In other words, the spark that provoked the anger of the Palestinian people was the Zionists' affront to the al-Aqsa mosque. Having realised their great mission to safeguard the sanctity of one of the most sacred Islamic sites, the Palestinian people entered the arena of struggle against Zionists. And relying on self -sacrifice, they started the sacred fire of struggle and resistance against the Zionist occupiers.⁶⁶²

From Khamenei's point of view, there is a direct link between the fate of Palestinians and non-Palestinians. In this regard, the threat of Israel is not confined and limited to the Palestinians. In November 2001, in a meeting with government officials on the occasion of the religious day of Eid ul-Fitr, he expressed that

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶⁶² Ibid., p. 11.

the issue of Palestine is the most fundamental issue of the world of Islam and it is intertwined with the destiny of non-Palestinians throughout the world of Islam. Government officials of Islamic countries should not think that if they leave the people of Palestine in the brutal clutches of their enemies, Israel would leave Muslim governments alone after it swallows up Palestine. Of course, such a thing will never happen.⁶⁶³

Ayatollah Khamenei in particular criticised the idea of western liberal democracy, and those in Iran and the region that advocated it. He highlighted the failure of humanism and democracy to recognise the predicament of the Palestinian people. This was directed against the United States at a time when there was more and more talk about liberal interventionism in the name of democracy and human rights – themes that also underlined the so called wars on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq at a latter stage in 2003. In a speech delivered in November 2001, Khamenei stated

[t]here was a time when liberal democracy was claimed to be the highest point of perfection that human thought and action could ever achieve. It was claimed that nothing could be better than liberal democracy. I believe these claims are a sign of being narrow-minded. It is wrong to claim that it is not possible for human beings to go beyond a certain achievement [...] This liberalism is what has given rise to the issue of Afghanistan and the issue of Palestine. This fake humanism of the west is what has ignored the Palestinian nation for fifty years and is determined to wipe it out. They do not ask themselves whether Palestine existed in the world or it is just a myth.⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶³ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

As a part of the solution to the Palestinian predicament, Khamenei called on all Muslim countries, intellectuals and NGOs to accomplish their ‘duty’ in supporting the Palestinian nation. He stated:

[t]his is the duty of all governments. Today the Palestinian nation has certain legitimate expectations of the Islamic Ummah as well as Muslim governments. Today the great Islamic Ummah expects Islamic governments, specially the Arab governments, to cut off their relations with the usurping, oppressive and insolent Zionists. Today this is our duty and we hope we will be able to fulfil it. Today Islamic governments have a duty to assist them [Palestinians] and provide them with political, financial and propaganda assistance.⁶⁶⁵ Everybody is responsible in this regard. Muslim intellectuals, politicians, poets, writers, artists and academia are responsible. They are influential people. They can feed the media in an appropriate way.⁶⁶⁶

At the conclusion of the Conference, Ayatollah Khamenei proposed general guidance for resisting against Israel:

The following should be the general guidance for fighting the usurper regime: a) Containing the usurper regime within the borders of occupied Palestinian lands, constraining its economic and political breathing space and severing its links with its surrounding environment. b) Helping the Palestinian people resist and struggle within their own homeland and providing them with whatever they need until they achieve ultimate victory.⁶⁶⁷

Khamenei's general guidance for Islamic countries were also perceived as a religious and political decree by the Islamic Republic – the blueprint of its foreign policy, and an

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 77.

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 95.

ideological and strategic recipe for its approach towards Palestinian factions after the Second Intifada. Velayati argues that one of the major achievements of the Second International Conference on Palestinian Intifada was that it empowered and harmonised the idea of resistance against the policies of "compromise and negotiations".⁶⁶⁸ In other words, it is safe to argue that the resistance narrative was now formally institutionalised. The representatives of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad were greeted by the Iranian leadership, including the reformists and the conservatives, and they were free to liaise with the leaders and representatives of Muslim countries that participated at the Conference.

On 22 March 2004, Sheikh Yassin was assassinated by the Israeli armed forces on the orders of Ariel Sharon. Shortly after, on 17 April, Sharon authorised the assassination of Dr Abd al-Aziz al-Rantisi (Sheikh Yassin's successor). According to Tamimi, the Israeli Prime Minister wanted to be sure that when Israel would eventually withdraw from Gaza, Hamas would not be in a position to take over.⁶⁶⁹ Condemnation of the assassination was widespread amongst all political strata of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei issued an announcement

I was informed that the hands of the occupying Zionist regime have committed the abominable crime of shedding the blood of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin. Certainly, martyrdom was what this pious man aspired but this cannot play down the gravity of the crime the criminal Zionist occupiers committed. The blood of Ahmed Yassin will feed the Islamic resistance and will further flare up the wrath of the

⁶⁶⁸ Ali Akbar Velayati, *Jumhuri Eslami Iran va Tahavollaati-e Felestin 1357-1385*, p. 196.

⁶⁶⁹ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, London: Hurst & Company, 2009, p. 206.

Palestinians. The spirit of Sheikh Yassin is alive and his thoughts will be a source of the inspiration for Palestinian youth.⁶⁷⁰

On 19 June 2005, the Iranian Parliament amended Article 1 of the "Law to Support the Islamic revolution of Palestinian People". According to the amendment, the presiding board of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament) was now required to deepen and expand its support for Palestine and – in due course – convene a conference of representatives of Islamic countries and other experts to that effect.⁶⁷¹ The amended article stated that a permanent secretariat of international Palestinian conferences would be established, with the aim of convening these conferences and following up the suggestions of the Islamic Consultative Assembly regarding Palestine.⁶⁷² The aim of this amendment was to intensify and further institutionalise Iran's support for Palestinian movements such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Hamas Government: A new Page in Iran's Relations with the Islamic Resistance Movement

Israel began the withdrawal of its armed forces from Gaza on 15 August 2005, and by 12 September 2005 it had completed this task. After 38 years, the occupation of Gaza had ended. Led by Hamas, the people of Gaza celebrated and attributed the victory to the defeat of Israel's superior military might. Tamimi argues that the failure of repeated peace negotiations – whether the Oslo Accords, Bush's Road Map, or

⁶⁷⁰ "Leader Condemns Sheikh Yassin's Assassination", *Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei*, 23 March 2004, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/287/Leader-Condemns-Sheikh-Yassin-s-Assassination> [accessed 4 February 2016]

⁶⁷¹ Seyed Qassem Zakeri, *Hemaayat-e Qanouni* [The Legal Support], Tehran: Markaz e- Motaleaat e-Felestin, 1390 [2011], p. 53.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 54. According to the amended Article, the secretariat would comprise of five members: one individual chosen by the Speaker of the parliament, two individuals from amongst the deputies of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and two individuals from the Parliamentary Commission of Security and Foreign Policy.

Sharon's disengagement policy – vindicated Hamas' approach.⁶⁷³ On 26 January 2006 Hamas gained a landslide victory in Gaza's legislative elections. Running under the name 'Change and Reform', Hamas won 74 seats in a 132 seat chamber (56 % of the seats), with Fatah coming in at second place with 45 (34%).⁶⁷⁴ After Hamas won its first democratic election to the legislative, Ismail Haniyeh announced a new government in March 2006. Hamas' electoral victory came as an unpleasant surprise for Israel, the United States, and Fatah.⁶⁷⁵ US President George Bush refused to recognise the Hamas-led government until it satisfied three demands: that Hamas recognised Israel, disarmed and renounced violence, and that it accepted all previous agreements between the PLO and Israel.⁶⁷⁶ Tamimi claims that Fatah's leadership put pressure on its members not to join the Hamas unity government, and insisted on Hamas accepting all pre-conditions laid down by the United States if they wish for Fatah to join their cabinet.⁶⁷⁷ The Fatah leadership in essence formed a parallel government to that of Hamas, maintaining policies diametrically opposed to those of Hamas.⁶⁷⁸ The most painful measures taken against Hamas were economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union (EU). A freeze on aid from the United States and the EU was followed by the blockade of the delivery of money to the government. Fatah's leadership encouraged protests, escalating its opposition into acts of sabotage and armed clashes with Israel's security apparatuses.⁶⁷⁹

⁶⁷³ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, 2009, pp. 206-207.

⁶⁷⁴ For more information on the Palestinian election result, see Research Paper 06/17, Library of House of Commons, 15 March 2006, <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/RP06-17/RP06-17.pdf> [Accessed 15 February 2016]

⁶⁷⁵ Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, 2009, p. 224.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

A poll conducted by the Mustaqbal Research Centre in early May 2006 revealed that almost 84% of the Palestinians in Gaza opposed the idea that the Hamas-led government should bow to the demands of the United States, EU and Israel.⁶⁸⁰ While the conflict between Hamas and Fatah continued for many weeks, Israel fired shells into Gaza allegedly taking pre-emptive measures against Palestinian rocket attacks. Subsequently, Israel invaded Gaza on 24 June, and kidnapped two members of Hamas.⁶⁸¹ It is safe to say that Israel intervened in the Hamas-Fatah conflict in order to support Fatah and undermine Hamas's democratically elected government due to the ideological stance of the latter against Israel. Tamimi argues that there was little doubt that the Israelis sought to accomplish what their allies in Fatah had not been able to do. However, the world's attention soon diverted away from Gaza towards south Lebanon, as Hizbullah conducted what Tamimi believes was an operation aimed at supporting Gaza.⁶⁸² During this operation, Hizbullah carried out rocket attacks and for the first time hit the port city of Haifa.

Throughout this period, Iran continued to offer its political and financial backing to the newly established government of Hamas, not least in order to safeguard "access" to Israel as a means to secure its own security. On 8 December 2006, the Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh told thousands of Friday prayer worshippers at Tehran University in Iran that "[w]e will never recognise the usurper Zionist government and will continue our jihad-like movement until the liberation of Jerusalem". He also stated that "they (Israelis) assume the Palestinian nation is alone. This is an illusion [...] We have a strategic depth in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This

⁶⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 231.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid. For more details on Israel's military action in 2006, see Azzam Tamimi, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, pp. 239-245.

⁶⁸² Ibid., p. 245.

country (Iran) is our powerful, dynamic and stable depth".⁶⁸³ Following an international economic boycott, which plunged the Occupied Territories into economic crisis in late 2006, Iran provided the Palestinian government with \$120m (£61.2m) of aid.⁶⁸⁴ Although talks on unity government with Fatah failed to achieve its goals in late 2006, Hamas appeared increasingly confident that its government could stay afloat without Western aid, mainly due to the help it received from countries such as Iran.⁶⁸⁵ In an interview, Hussein Royvaran, Director of the Society for the Defence of Palestinian Nation and former High Representative of Iran's Political Bureau in south Lebanon explained Iran's relations with Hamas:

Fathi Shiqaqi absorbed Iran's revolutionary message of resistance against global arrogance. Following the establishment of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood, that was mainly focusing on social activities, changed its name to Hamas. To some extent, Hamas followed the model of active resistance from the Islamic revolution in Iran although it mainly has its roots in the Muslim Brotherhood. Since its very beginning the Islamic Republic offered its moral and political support to Hamas. When Hamas won the election and maintained its hegemony in Gaza in 2006, Iran's relations with Hamas improved considerably. The Islamic Republic recognised that Hamas has considerable support in the occupied territories and welcomed its electoral triumph. The victory of Hamas demonstrated that the Palestinian public endorsed the narrative of resistance and rejected the discourse of compromise and failed negotiations.

⁶⁸³ "Hamas: We Will Never Recognise Israel", *The Guardian*, 8 December 2006, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/dec/08/iran.israel> [Accessed 21 March 2016]

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Ibid.

Based on its religious and revolutionary duties Iran welcomed the Hamas-led government.⁶⁸⁶

Royvaran also argued that the messages of the Islamic revolution of Iran was echoed by Hizbullah for the Lebanese and Palestinian publics:

Hizbullah translated the Islamic revolution of Iran into a narrative that was easy and accessible for the local Palestinians to absorb. When Hizbullah demonstrated its military capability in the 1980s, Palestinians championed the first intifada. When Hizbullah continued its resistance and gained victories, the Palestinians conducted the al-Aqsa intifada. When Hizbullah used martyrdom operations, it spread to Palestine. When Hizbullah began using short ranged rockets against Israel, Palestinian Islamic movements followed the same tactics and fought back against Israel. When Hizbullah entered the political process in Lebanon and demonstrated its willingness to be a part of the government, Hamas entered the general elections and institutionalised its presence within the government. Hence, this shows that the Islamic Republic has been influential in supporting the Palestinian resistance movements through Hizbullah.⁶⁸⁷

The electoral victory of Hamas was important for Iran because it allowed Tehran to upgrade its relations with Hamas to government-to-government level. According to Abdullah Karami, Iran's political, moral and financial support for Hamas ensured that the West and the United States in particular would continue to label Iran as a supporter of 'international terrorism'. He argues that the Islamic Republic of Iran faced enormous pressure from the West to stop supporting Hamas and the Palestinian resistance movements. However, Hamas electoral victory exhibited to the Iranians and the Arab

⁶⁸⁶ Interviewed in Tehran on 9 September 2015. The Society for the Defence of Palestinian Nation (SDPN) is an active research centre with a headquarters in Tehran.

⁶⁸⁷ Ibid.

streets that Iran was on the right side of history.⁶⁸⁸ Karami is certainly correct to identify that Hamas' electoral victory legitimised the group's discourse of resistance, and demonstrated that Iran supported a movement endorsed by the people of Palestine. In other words, the people of Palestine endorsed the discourse of resistance against Israel.⁶⁸⁹ Karami argues that the electoral victories of Hamas and Hizbullah, and the fall of the Taliban and Saddam's regime, all boosted Iran's political influence in the region.⁶⁹⁰

Rostami-Povey similarly argues that Iran's relations with Hizbullah, Hamas and the Iraqi and Syrian governments comprise a strong bloc of resistance against US and Israeli policies in the region.⁶⁹¹ From her point of view, this support, together with grassroots' support for Iran's policies against the US and Israel, put Iran in a strong position to defend itself against possible attacks from these two countries. Hamas also benefited from Iran's support. It is also important to acknowledge that for the Islamic Republic, the Syrian government remained a vital element in the camp against Israel due to its supports for Hizbullah and Palestinian Islamic movements. I shall return to this topic in the next chapter as I analyse Iran's relations with Hamas after the Arab-spring.

Israel's War on Gaza (2008–2009) and Iran's Reaction

Since the 2006 elections, Israel increased its systematic military campaign against the Hamas-led government and targeted Gaza routinely. One of the major military assaults on Gaza before the Arab Spring – known as the Gaza massacre – took

⁶⁸⁸ Abdulah Karami, *Piroozi-e-2006 Hamas va Cheshmanzaaz-e Ayandeh* [The Victory of Hamas in 2006 and the Outlook for it], Tehran: Bustan-e Ketab Publishers, 1387 [2009], pp. 140-143.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

⁶⁹¹ Elaheh Rostami-Povey, *Iran's Influence*, p. 184.

place between 27 December to 18 January 2009.⁶⁹² 1,400 Palestinians were killed, and more than 400,000 Gazans were left without running water. Furthermore, 4,000 homes were destroyed or badly damaged, leaving tens of thousands of people homeless.⁶⁹³ In response to Israel's attacks on the Palestinians during the Gaza war in 2009, Hizbullah's supporters conducted three attacks on Israel from south Lebanon.⁶⁹⁴ The 2009 war on Gaza is known in Iran as *Jang-e 22 roozeh*: the 22-Day War of Resistance. Iran strongly condemned the killings in Gaza, and criticised conservative Arab states for their inaction. Iran's Supreme Leader, in a letter to Ismail Haniyeh on 15 January 2009, stated:

Dear mujahid brother, Mr Haniyeh, we salute you for your patience. The patience that you and the brave and selfless people and mujahids of Gaza showed during the past twenty days in the face of one of the most tragic war crimes in history has raised the flag of grandeur in the Muslim world [...] Today, not only Muslim nations, but many European and American nations sincerely acknowledge your righteousness[...] Remember that "Your Lord has not forsaken you, nor is He displeased" [the Holy Quran, 93:3] [...] the bloody and tragic events which are happening in Gaza, especially the killing of Palestinian civilians and the innocent children of Gaza, have caused our hearts to bleed [...] The nations of the world support the people and mujahids of Gaza and those governments that do not support the people of Gaza only widen the rift between themselves and their people and their destiny is already clear [...] I salute you and those that fight in Gaza, as well as your oppressed and resisting people. Besides all efforts

⁶⁹² Ibid., p. 175.

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid.

made by the Islamic Republic of Iran to support you, we pray for you day and night and we ask all the Exalted to bestow patience and victory on you.⁶⁹⁵

In response to Israel's assault on Gaza in 2009, Iran organised the fourth International Conference in Support of Palestine from 4-5 March 2009 in Tehran, and named Gaza as the 'symbol of resistance'.⁶⁹⁶ The conference organisers issued a formal declaration. The participants agreed on 27 articles in support of the Palestinian people, and a declaration at the Conference condemned Israel's "war crimes" against the people of Gaza. The Conference announced that the Palestinian issue was the most far-reaching issue the Islamic *ummah* faced, and on this basis all Muslims, Arabs and freedom-loving individuals of the world had a duty to prioritise the issue and refrain from taking courses of action that could potentially damage the Palestinian cause.⁶⁹⁷ Crucially, the conference recognised Israel as "a racist regime" and strongly condemned its brutal treatment of the Palestinians.⁶⁹⁸ The Gaza war in 2009 was defined by the declaration as genocide against the people of Gaza, and it called upon the entire Muslim *ummah* to unify in supporting the people of Palestine.⁶⁹⁹ The Conference organised a committee to follow up on the actions contained in the declaration. The conference in Tehran also called upon this committee to organise a series of annual political, cultural and promotional events and activities that would help facilitate conditions for the return of all Palestinian refugees.⁷⁰⁰ The Conference was important for giving publicity to the Gaza war, and in the process drew attention to the crisis in Gaza. The Conference

⁶⁹⁵ Ali Khamenei, "The Most Important Problem of the Islamic World", pp. 52-54.

⁶⁹⁶ Declaration of the Fourth International Conference on Palestine in Tehran, <http://icpalestine.farhang.gov.ir/en/pastconferences/declaration> [Accessed 19 March 2016]

⁶⁹⁷ Article 1 of the Declaration of the Fourth International Conference on Palestine in Tehran. Ibid.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., Articles 3 and 4.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., Articles 18 and 21.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., Article 24.

received considerable media attention within Iran and the region. More than 700 delegates – including representatives from Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah – were in attendance.

Following the Gaza war, the Islamic Assembly of Iran unanimously ratified an Act that established 18 January as “Gaza Day” in the official calendar of the Islamic Republic.⁷⁰¹ In the following year, the Islamic Assembly approved a law amending the Act of Supporting the Islamic revolution of Palestine, which had been ratified in 1990. According to the amendment, Iran’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs was now obliged to present the case for sanctioning goods from the Zionist regime at world forums and international conferences, such as the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Moreover, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) was prohibited from airing advertisements for any goods manufactured by Israel according to a list submitted by a specialist committee.⁷⁰²

Finally, we should return briefly to Iran’s main ally, Hizbullah, and its connection to the Palestinians. With regard to the relations between Hizbullah and Muslim movements such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, Laleh Khalili provides a comprehensive account. Khalili accurately classifies Hizbullah’s relationship with the Palestinians as a “relation of solidarity”.⁷⁰³ From Khalili’s point of view, the extent and intensity of Hizbullah’s support vis-à-vis the Palestinians has as much to do with solidarity on the basis of shared aspirations and ideologies as it does with finely-tuned politics (whether these politics are Hizbullah’s relations with local Palestinian political

⁷⁰¹ Seyed Qassem Zakeri, *Hemaayat-e Qanouni* [The Legal Support], Tehran: Markaz e- Motaleaat e-Felestin, 1390 [2011], p. 67.

⁷⁰² Ibid. For more information, see Seyed Qassem Zakeri, *Hemaayat-e Qanouni*, pp. 71-72.

⁷⁰³ Laleh Khalili, “Standing with my Brothers: Hizbullah, Palestinians and Limits of Solidarity”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 49, No. 2, 2007, p. 278.

actors, Lebanese politics, or with Islamist and anti-imperialist mobilisation).⁷⁰⁴ Khalili argues that Hizbullah has, on the basis of ideological considerations, but also out of a genuine sense of identification, acted in solidarity with various Palestinian actors.⁷⁰⁵ She adds that it would be analytically reductive and politically naive to conceive that, in its relationship with the Palestinians, ideological commitment and human sympathy are not affected by shifts in Hizbullah's role nationally, regionally, and beyond.⁷⁰⁶ To this end, Khalili examines factors that place limits on Hizbullah–Palestinian solidarity, and emphasises that such factors which 'limit' solidarity demonstrate that ideological solidarity can be affected, but not completely extinguished. In other words, solidarity and shared aspirations provide guidance for actors to shape their relations: "identities, interests, and strategies of two actors in solidarity must be sufficiently compatible as to allow action in concert".⁷⁰⁷

Let me conclude this chapter by returning to the theoretical framework of my discussion. Khalili's account of Hizbullah's relations with the Palestinians provides a reliable prescription for my analysis of Iran's relations with Palestinian Islamic factions. From my point of view the above discussion is compatible with Alexander Wendt's and Michael Barnett's identity arguments. As outlined at the beginning of this thesis, Wendt argues that actors shape their actions according to their beliefs and interests. From Wendt's point of view, identities refer to who or what actors are, and interests refer to what actors want. In other words, without interests, identities have no motivational force, and without identities, interests are directionless. In this formula, identities

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 296.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 296.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 301.

belong to the belief side of the intentional equation (desire + belief = action).⁷⁰⁸ Wendt also argues that the most important structure in which interests are made of is ideas and not material forces. Ideas are what determine meaning and the content of power, the strategies by which states pursue their interests, and interests themselves.⁷⁰⁹ Wendt also highlights the vitality of "collective identity", or the sense of being part of a group or collective. He argues that collective interests mean that actors consider the welfare of the group entity an end in itself. When the cultural content of this group entity is threatened, actors will tend to defend it. Here I believe that the narrative of "Islamic resistance" provides a "we narrative" for the Iranian leadership, and for Palestinian Islamic movements, in particular Islamic Jihad. Their shared aspirations and ideological tendencies guide the Islamic Republic to continue supporting Palestinian actors. In this regard, Barnett provides a clear pattern for formation of alliances. Barnett specifically highlights the importance of identities and ideological solidarity in the formation of alliances. In short, he argues that identity potentially signals whom to balance against, and whom to bandwagon with.⁷¹⁰ He adds that there is close connection between identity and threat, contending that identity is linked to the construction of the threat, but also represents a potential source of alliance formation. In this latter regard, identity makes some partners more attractive than the others⁷¹¹ In the context of this thesis, it is shared Islamic values with a radical content, anti-Zionist tendencies and common Islamist identities that are the foundation of Iran's alliance with the Palestinian Islamic movements. In the following chapter, I examine Iran's solidarity with the Palestinians against the background of the Syrian crisis, and will highlight some factors that have

⁷⁰⁸ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 231.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 309.

⁷¹⁰ In Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 446.

⁷¹¹ Ibid., p. 410.

acted as spoilers in Iran's relations with Hamas, not least in order to balance the analysis presented in this chapter.

Chapter Five

Iran and Palestinian Islamic Movements in the post-Arab Spring Era

At the tail end of 2010, widespread protests broke out in a number of Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain and Yemen. These waves of unrest were referred to as the ‘Arab Spring’, and subsequently spread into Syria, resulting in an enormous humanitarian catastrophe. The uprising in Syria against President Bashar al-Assad swiftly developed towards a mixture of civil war, armed clashes, and street protests. This chapter examines the impacts of the Syrian crisis on Iran's relations with Palestinian Islamic movements, including Hamas and Islamic Jihad. It is vital to note that this chapter will not explore the *modus operandi* of Iranian military involvement in Syria, which is beyond the scope of this discussion. Furthermore, regional developments such the Iranian nuclear negotiations and sectarian tensions in the region likewise are not the topic of this chapter. By examining the relationship between Iran and Hamas and Islamic Jihad during the Syrian conflict, I hope to contribute to our understanding of what motivates Iran's approach toward the Palestinian cause. To this end, I will highlight Iran's political behaviour during the Gaza-wars in 2012 and in 2014 as an empirical case study. I believe that these wars after the Arab Spring acted as a litmus test for Iran's solidarity with the Palestinians. Drawing on the basis of fieldwork in Iran and formal interviews with representatives of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as well as Iranian officials, and the analysis of the speeches of Iranian high profile authorities, I argue that Iran continues supporting the Palestinian Islamic movements. I argue that Iran perceives its relations with Hamas as both strategic and tactical, while it views its relations with Islamic Jihad as more ideological. However, within the framework of its pro-Palestinian stance, the revolutionary rhetoric changed

to something more pragmatic specially during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani because for the reformers and their ambition to open up Iran's international relations it was not conducive to be radical about the issue of Palestine.

Iran and Syria: A History of Alliances, and the Champions of the Axis of Resistance

As the crisis in Syria divided the population itself, it also dragged regional players into a pool of disagreements. A number of regional states including Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia joined the United States and EU in demanding that Bashar al-Assad stand down, and likewise supported anti-government forces in Syria. Despite growing pressures within the region, Iran and Hizbullah stood behind their Syrian ally. One of the most important implications of this divide between those opposing and supporting Assad's government concerned Iran's relations with Palestinian Islamic movements. Both Iran and Hizbullah were caught off guard when their Palestinian ally, Hamas, joined the anti-Syrian coalition and turned its back on Damascus. Yet before discussing the impact of the Syrian crisis on Iran's relations with Hamas, allow me first to shed a light on the essence of Iran's historical alliance with Syria's Assad, and then evaluate the approaches of Iran and Hamas towards the Syrian conflict.

Nadia von Maltzhan provides a comprehensive historical account of the roots of Iran's alliance with Syria. Maltzhan argues that during the first decade of the revolution, Iran's change of strategy towards Israel and its commitment to the Palestinian cause and anti Zionism naturally brought it ideologically closer to Syria. Both countries shared not only an antagonism towards Zionism, but also an anti-imperialist ideology primarily directed against US foreign policy in the region.⁷¹² During Iraq's invasion of Iran, Hafez al-Assad made the regionally unpopular decision of siding with Iran.

⁷¹² Nadia von Maltzhan, *The Syria-Iran Axis: Cultural Diplomacy and International Relations in the Middle East*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2013, p. 28.

Damascus portrayed Iran as a "committed force in the general struggle against Israel".⁷¹³ Strategically, it viewed its support for Iran against Saddam as a way for the Muslim world to concentrate all its forces against combatting "Zionism and Imperialism".⁷¹⁴ Syria's Assad remained a loyal ally and supporter of Iran throughout the 1980s. For instance, in November 1981 and September 1982, during the Arab Summits in Fez, Syria could not be persuaded to drop its support for Tehran.⁷¹⁵ Assad continued to condemn Saddam's war as the wrong war against the wrong enemy. To fight Iran was a folly, as it would inevitably exhaust the Arabs, fragment their ranks and divert them from "the holy battle in Palestine".⁷¹⁶

Iran's strategic alliance with Syria was further cemented in the Lebanese political arena. In the aftermath of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Iran strongly declared its support for Lebanon and dispatched military consultants to the Syrian border with Damascus' consent. With Syria's blessing, Iran played a leading role in the creation of Hizbullah in south Lebanon, and both Iran and Syria played key roles in reconciling Shia factions in Lebanon. With the initial goal of ending Israel's invasion, Hizbullah developed as a Shia resistance movement, remaining ideologically, spiritually and financially supported by Iran.⁷¹⁷ For its part, Damascus used its alliance with Iran to mobilise support against the Israeli military presence in Lebanon.⁷¹⁸ In other words, there have been mutual interests and shared values between Tehran and Damascus in containing Israel and empowering anti-Israeli forces.

⁷¹³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Ibid.

⁷¹⁶ Ibid., p. 31.

⁷¹⁷ Ibid., p. 35.

⁷¹⁸ Ibid.

After Khomeini's death, the Iranian-Syrian alliance remained strong and developed further as both sides cooperated in the region. In the aftermath of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Hafez al-Assad visited President Rafsanjani in Tehran, where both leaders announced the creation of a Syrian-Iranian Higher Cooperation Committee in November 1990, jointly condemned Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, and rejected foreign intervention in the region.⁷¹⁹ Both Palestine and Lebanon were at the core of Iran's alliance with Syria, as both states opposed Israel. In 1991, following arbitration from Washington, Syria agreed to join peace negotiations with Tel Aviv which ended with little success. Although the Islamic Republic declared its opposition to negotiations with Israel, Syria's participation did not undermine its relations with Tehran. Although Washington pushed Assad to turn away from Iran in return for peace and financial supports, Damascus sustained its relations with Iran. According to von Maltzhan, "US Secretary of State Warren Christopher tried hard to persuade Assad to distance himself from Iran and sign a peace treaty with Israel, but in the end it all came to nothing".⁷²⁰ President George Bush's invasion of Iraq in 2003 brought Iran and Syria even closer as both states opposed foreign interventions in the region. After the invasion, US attempts at breaking the Iranian-Syrian alliance backfired and brought the two allies towards each other even closer.⁷²¹ Under Ahmadinejad's presidency, Tehran's relations with Damascus grew stronger, and Ahmadinejad's strong support of the resistance against Israel was viewed positively in Syria by its government and people, turning him into a popular figure in Damascus.⁷²²

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷²¹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁷²² Ibid., p. 49.

Mutual support for Hizbullah and Palestinian resistance movements strengthened Iran-Syria ties. Iran in particular used “good relations with Syria to further support anti-Israeli resistance, using the frequent trips to Damascus of its high officials to meet also with Hamas leader Khaled Mashal.”⁷²³ The Islamic Republic of Iran's policies towards Palestine and Lebanon were mainly conducted through its embassy in Damascus. In other words, Damascus became a platform for Iran's anti-Zionist activities in the Levant. Von Maltzhan is of the opinion that fostering solidarity amongst resistance groups remains one of the priorities of the Islamic Republic – an issue repeatedly highlighted during bilateral visits in Syria.⁷²⁴ In other words, Syria played a major role as a bridge between Iran and Palestinian resistance movements and Hizbullah.

During Israel's ground-assault on Gaza in January 2009, Saeed Jalili – a senior member of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) – travelled to Damascus to visit Hamas' political leaders (including Khaled Mashal) and Islamic Jihad leader Ramadan Abdullah. During his visit, Jalili emphasised Iran's strong support for the Palestinian resistance movements and condemned Israel for its assaults on Gaza.⁷²⁵ On 7 January 2009, Ali Larijani, speaker of Iran's Parliament, met several high level officials from Hamas at the Iranian embassy in Damascus, including Khaled Mashal, as well as leaders of Islamic Jihad, to discuss the situation in Gaza, and offered Iran's

⁷²³ Ibid., p. 51.

⁷²⁴ Ibid.

⁷²⁵ BBC Persian, 3 January 2009, Available at: *Didar-e Saeed Jalili va Rahbar-e Hamas dar Dameshq dar Aghaz-e Hafteh Dovom Hamleh be Gazeh* [Saeed Jalili's Meeting with the Leader of Hamas during the second Week of War in Gaza] http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2009/01/090103_mg_jalili_mashal_hamas.shtml [Accessed 4 April 2016]

strong support. According to Khaled al-Hariri,⁷²⁶ Iran and Syria played key roles as the primary backers of Hamas, and Syria hosted members of Hamas's exiled leadership, including Khaled Mashal, in Damascus.⁷²⁷ During a visit to Damascus in late 2010, Deputy Secretary of the SNSC Ali Baqeri referred to Iran and Syria as "strong pillars of resistance in the region".⁷²⁸ In Damascus, Syrian and Iranian officials accused the Americans of attempting to dominate the region and promoting instability. During his visit in 2010, Ahmadinejad stated that "the Americans want to dominate the region but they feel Iran and Syria are preventing that".⁷²⁹ He added, "[w]e tell them that instead of interfering in the region's affairs to pack their things and leave. If the Zionist entity wants to repeats its past errors, its death will be inevitable."⁷³⁰ In October 2010, Ahmadinejad awarded the Grand National Order of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for his support for Palestine and Lebanon.⁷³¹

Hussein Ajorloo has delved into Iran's perception of Assad. He argues that Iran views the Syrian government as a crucial element within the 'Axis of Resistance' due to its history of anti-Zionist activities and support for Lebanese and Palestinian movements. Ajorloo believes that Syria occupies a crucial place within the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy for five reasons. First, Syria has been one the closest strategic allies of Iran in the region. Second, Iran and Syria foster common values based

⁷²⁶ Khaled Al-Hariri, "Iran's Larijani Meets Hamas in Damascus", *Reuters*, 7 January 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-israel-hamas-iran-idUSTRE50709K20090108> [Accessed 5 April 2016]

⁷²⁷ Ibid.

⁷²⁸ Von Maltzhan, *The Syria-Iran Axis*, p.52

⁷²⁹ Ian Black, "Iran and Syria Put on Show of Unity in Alliance Clinton Finds troubling", *The Guardian*, 25 February 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/feb/25/syria-iran-alliance-clinton-america-israel> [Accessed 6 April 2016]

⁷³⁰ Ibid.

⁷³¹ "Assad Receives Iran's Highest National Medal", 2 October 2010, *Mehr News Agency*, <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/42254/Assad-receives-iran-s-highest-national-medal> [Accessed 6 April 2016]

on common discourses of anti-Zionism and anti-imperialism. Third, Syria is geopolitically important in the region due to it sharing borders with Israel, and hence, Syria allows Iran to contain and limit Israel's expansion closely from its borders. Fourth, Syria has a vital role in maintaining the political equilibrium in Lebanon, which is valuable for the Islamic Republic's leadership. Fifth and finally, Syria has historically played a key role in supporting the Palestinian cause with "no compromise".⁷³² In other words, in order to preserve its identity and national interests, Syria has played a considerable role in providing logistical and intelligence support for anti-Israeli factions in the region. Organically, it became a close ally to Israel's archenemy, the Islamic Republic of Iran.⁷³³ Von Maltzhan also makes a point that opposition to Israel's occupation of Palestine is one of the cornerstones of the Syrian regime's foreign policy. According to her, "the issue of Palestine is certainly is a point of convergence in official Syrian and Iranian values and outlook, both sees themselves as part of resistance front-the Axis of Resistance".⁷³⁴ She furthermore argues that whilst Syria's pan-Arab secular ideas are at odds with Iran's pan-Islamic ideology, both states share anti-Zionist and anti-imperialist views, which facilitate their close alignment.⁷³⁵

What is central to my reading of Iran's foreign policy behaviour towards Syria is that both regimes pursue the unifying discourse of anti-imperialism and resistance against Israeli occupation. It is necessary to gain an even deeper understanding of the roots of Iran's alignment with Syria before evaluating the impact of the Syrian uprising on Tehran's relations with Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas. The point I wish to underline is that it was against such background of anti-Zionism that the Iranian

⁷³² Hussein Ajorloo, "An Analysis on the Position of Syria in Support for the Resistance", *Palestine Studies Quarterly*, Tehran: Neda Institute for Scientific Political Studies, Vol. 15, Winter 1390 [2012], pp. 57-76.

⁷³³ Ibid.

⁷³⁴ Nadia von Maltzhan, *The Syria-Iran Axis*, pp. 78-79.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., p. 75

leadership pursued a supportive policy towards the Syrian regime, and backed Damascus during the Syria crisis.

Political Turbulence within the Axis of Resistance: the Syrian uprising

In October 2010, shortly before the beginning of the Syrian uprising, in a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, Ayatollah Khamenei commented on the stability and continuous good relations between Iran and Syria over the previous 30 years. The Leader of the Islamic revolution reiterated: "[t]here are no two other countries in the region that have enjoyed such firm and excellent bilateral relations for thirty years".⁷³⁶ Ayatollah Khamenei further stated that "America is the main opponent of the axis of resistance in the region".⁷³⁷ Referring to the efforts by US officials to break this resistance, he commented that their "efforts [would] not achieve any results, just as they did not in the past".⁷³⁸ In that meeting, Assad stressed that "Syria and the Islamic Republic of Iran are in the same camp and have the same goals".⁷³⁹ It is vital to recognise that throughout three decades of alliance with Syria, the Iranian leadership has routinely emphasised the two states' common values against a common enemy. With this in mind, Iran's leadership were cautious prior to the Arab- spring about plots by the United States and Israel to weaken the 'Axis of resistance', and thus undermine the Iran-Syria alliance.

In March 2011, the turbulent waves of Arab uprisings hit Syrian shores and spread throughout the country, jeopardising the very existence of the Syrian state. The trajectory of the Syrian uprising swiftly turned towards violence and factional

⁷³⁶ "Leader meets with Syrian President", *Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei*, 2 October 2010, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1357/Leader-Meets-with-Syrian-President> [Accessed 8 April 2016]

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

⁷³⁸ Ibid.

⁷³⁹ Ibid.

militancy, dragging in regional and global actors. From the very beginning of the Syrian uprising, the Islamic Republic of Iran cautiously navigated regional and international approaches towards the Syrian crisis. From Tehran's point of view, the Western and pro-Western states supporting anti-Assad forces were an indication of a 'Zionist plan' masterminded by the Americans to eliminate the Syrian government because of its anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist stance.⁷⁴⁰

According to von Maltzhan, Iran initially ignored the growing tensions in Syria, but nevertheless stood by it and supported the Syrian regime's reform initiatives, stressing the need for a political solution to the crisis.⁷⁴¹ Criticising the United States and conservative Arab states (including Saudi Arabia) for supporting anti-Assad forces, Iran from the very beginning of the Syria crisis pledged its support for the Assad government. The Syrian crisis however presented a direct threat to Iran's grand-strategic ideas of anti-Zionism and pro-Palestinian and pro-Resistance movements. In other words, one may safely argue that the collapse of the Syrian regime weakens Iran and Hizbullah's standing against their ideological enemy, Israel. The Iranian leadership is convinced that the fall of Assad's regime would incite hardliners in Tel Aviv to conduct military operations against Hizbullah and the resistance in Gaza, and subsequently damage the 'Axis of Resistance' tangibly.⁷⁴² The support for Syria was therefore aimed at sustaining the pro-Palestinian, pro-Hizbullah and anti-Israeli camps, and maintaining Iran's foothold in the Levant. In an interview, Mohammad

⁷⁴⁰ Hussein Ajorloo, "An Analysis on the Position of Syria in Support for the Resistance", *Palestine Studies Quarterly*, Tehran: Neda Institute for Scientific Political Studies, Vol. 15, Winter 1390 [2012], p. 65.

⁷⁴¹ Nadia von Maltzhan, *The Syria-Iran Axis*, p. 54.

⁷⁴² Seyed Ali Alavi, "Iran's Connections with Syria: Current Status and Future Perspective", *Open Democracy*, 20 June 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/seyed-ali-alavi/irans-connections-with-syria-current-status-and-future-perspective> [Accessed 12 April 2016]

Amaanollah-zad, a high ranking official in the IRGC and a member of the Society for the Defence of the Palestinian Nation, stated

[t]he Islamic Republic's support for the Axis of Resistance is based on its Ummah-centric approach. We decided to support the Syrian government not to salvage Bashar al-Assad as an individual, but to sustain and save the anti-Zionism factions in the region. Of course, supporting the Syrian government and resistance movements also serve our national interests. Our national interests are defined by our revolutionary and theological ideas. To this end we need to be in the position to lead the Islamic Ummah against global arrogance of Zionists and Imperialists. In doing so, we are obviously paying heavy costs as our efforts are labelled as sectarian-driven policies. We are accused by the conservative states and the West of interfering in the internal affairs of Syria and Palestine and Lebanon. However, we continue our efforts to help anti-Zionist forces in order to end the occupation of al-Aqsa. We shall support anyone that act in this direction. History proves to us that Syria's Assad constructively supported anti-Zionism in the region. We witnessed how Americans and pro-American regimes in the region began arming and supporting Takfiri-Salafi groups such as Al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra Front and the ISIS, hence, we have no doubt that the Zionists are attempting to undermine and to neutralise the Axis of Resistance. Therefore, we act according to our grand strategy of anti-Zionism and act accordingly to undermine their plans. We cannot simply sit and witness how Zionists are destroying the Axis of Resistance and expanding their hegemony in the region.⁷⁴³

Despite the fact that Tehran was engaged in heated debates over the Syrian crisis in 2011, the Islamic Republic scheduled the Fifth International Conference for Supporting the Palestinian Intifada for 1-2 October 2011 in Tehran. The main motto of "Palestine:

⁷⁴³ Interviewed in Tehran on 25 September 2015.

the Homeland of Palestinians" was chosen for the fifth Conference.⁷⁴⁴ Parliamentary representatives of over 170 states joined the Conference after receiving invitations from the Islamic Shura Council of Iran. Both Khaled Mashal and Ramadan Abdullah Shalah, along with Ismail Haniyeh (the Prime Minister of the Hamas-led government), Mahmoud al-Zahar (a high ranking official from Hamas), and Nasrullah, were amongst the participants at the conference. Khaled Mashal delivered a speech in which he asked if the Palestinians would continue to seek recognition from the UN without making efforts to liberate the Occupied Territories.⁷⁴⁵ He stated "[t]he Arab's abandonment years ago to the military option and wagering on what is so called peace without any point of strength require resistance, so does the failing of any settlement process and the International Community, as well as the American efforts for negotiations call for resistance."⁷⁴⁶ These were efforts by Iran to position itself prominently during a time of serious upheaval and to capitalise on its support of Palestine to that end.

Some of Khamenei's comments at the inauguration of the Fifth Conference of Intifada shed light on the Iranian leadership's proposed solutions for the Palestinian predicament, and also demonstrates Iran's intention to bring all anti-Zionist factions under a unified frontline of the so called "Axis of Resistance." He stated

[a]mong all the issues that deserve to be discussed by religious and political figures from across the world of Islam, the issue of Palestine enjoys special importance. Palestine is the primary issue among all common issues of Islamic countries. This issue has unique characteristics. The first characteristic is that a Muslim country has been taken away

⁷⁴⁴ See the official website of the ICOPI: <http://icpalestine.farhang.gov.ir/en/fifthconference/timeplace> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

⁷⁴⁵ "International Support for the Palestinian Intifada in Tehran", *Al-Manar*, 1 October 2011, <http://english.almanar.com.lb/adetails.php?eid=29816&cid=23&fromval=1&frid=23&seccatid=32&s1=1> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.

from its people and entrusted to foreigners who have come together from different countries and formed a fake and mosaic-like society. The second characteristic is that this historically unprecedented event has been accompanied by constant killings, crimes, oppression and humiliation. The third characteristic is that Muslims' original qiblah and many respected religious centres which exist in that country have been threatened with destruction, sacrilege and decline. The fourth characteristic is that at the most sensitive spot of the world of Islam, this fake government and society has played the role of a military, security and political base for the arrogant governments since the beginning up until today.

And the pivot of the colonialist west - which has been opposed to the unity, development and progress of Islamic countries for various reasons - has always used it like a dagger in the heart of the Islamic Ummah. The fifth characteristic is that Zionism - which is a great ethical, political and economic threat to the human community - has used this foothold as a tool and stepping stone to spread its influence and hegemony in the world [...] Our magnanimous Imam Khomeini announced that one of the goals of the Revolution was to liberate Palestine and to remove the cancerous tumour, Israel. The powerful waves of this Revolution, which engulfed the entire world at that time, conveyed this message wherever it reached: "Palestine must be liberated". Even the repeated and great problems that the enemies of the Revolution imposed on the Islamic Republic of Iran failed to discourage the Islamic Republic from defending Palestine.

The solution of the Islamic Republic to the issue of Palestine and this old wound is a clear....We propose a referendum among the Palestinian people. Just like any other nation, the Palestinian nation has the right to determine its own destiny and to elect its own government. All the original people of Palestine - including Muslims, Christians and Jews and not foreign immigrants - should take part in a general and orderly referendum [...] What is threatening the Zionist regime is not the missiles of Iran or resistance groups, so they can build a missile shield here and there in order to confront it. The real

and inescapable threat is the firm determination of men, women and youth in Islamic countries who do not want America, Europe and their puppets rulers, to dominate and humiliate them any longer⁷⁴⁷.

Ayatollah Khamenei's speech is important because it explains how the Islamic Republic continued to highlight the importance of the Palestinian cause during the Arab Spring era, as the Palestinian question received less attention in the Arab world. In other words, the Fifth Intifada Conference was a political and social attempt to remind Muslim and the Arab worlds not to marginalise the Palestinian issue due to heated debates over the Arab Spring and internal disagreements. This has been central to the strategy to claim regional leadership and to position Iran as a strong regional power at a time of upheaval.

Iran, Hamas and Islamic Jihad: a Crossroad Approach to the Syrian Crisis

As the Syrian crisis prolonged, the political leadership of Hamas moved from Syria to Egypt and Qatar in February 2012, with Khaled Mashal and his aides moving to Doha and Ismail Haniya announcing his support for the anti-Assad uprising.⁷⁴⁸ Since 1999, the Syrian government had welcomed and hosted the Hamas political bureau after the Jordanian authorities accused the group of using the country as a base for illegal activities, and briefly detained Khaled Mashal and a key aide.⁷⁴⁹ Hamas leadership had been provided with a safe haven, and enjoyed the luxury of receiving

⁷⁴⁷ "Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's Speech at the Fifth International Conference on the Palestinian Intifada", Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, 1 October 2011, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1527/Leader-s-Speech-at-International-Conference-on-Palestinian-Intifada> [Accessed 16 April 2016]

⁷⁴⁸ "Hamas Political Leaders Leave Syria for Egypt and Qatar", 28 February 2012, *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17192278> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

financial and logistical support in Damascus from the Syrian government, Iran and Hizbullah.

Iran and its allies were caught off guard when Hamas moved its offices from Syria, and endorsed the anti-Assad's forces. Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic's authorities avoided any direct criticism of Hamas, and maintained its channel of communication. In an interview, Hussein Royvaran explained the situation in which Hamas' leadership decided to pursue a different approach towards its traditional ally, the Syrian government in 2012. He stated:

[d]isagreement and differences between the Islamic Republic and Hamas began during the beginning of the Syrian Crisis. Iran believes that the Syrian Crisis was an American-Zionist plot against the Axis of Resistance. In fact, Hamas felt nostalgic and therefore celebrated the victory of Mohammed Mursi in Egypt. Because the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood acted against the Syrian government, hence, Hamas decided to stand in the line of Muslim Brotherhood and moved its mission from Damascus. From the Hamas political leadership point of view, if the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and other Arab states could gain governmental positions as they did in Egypt, Hamas could forge its own close circle of alliance. The triumph of the Muslim Brotherhood in the region could bring about a new bloc in the region and therefore, Hamas could reduce its dependency on Iran.

The common goal between the Axis of Resistance and Hamas is their anti-Zionist ideas whereas the common goal between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood is about the organisation's ideology. During the Syrian Crisis, Hamas political leaders prioritised their common goals with their fellow Muslim Brotherhood over their common goal with the Axis of Resistance. The Hamas political leadership calculated that standing against the Syrian government will also open doors within the Gulf States, especially the wealthy state of Qatar. However, it is vital to note that the members of the Hamas leadership did

not simply pursue such changes of policies homogeneously. In fact, Khaled Mashal's faction within the Hamas political bureau used its influence to persuade its leadership to change its tactics. However, the Islamic Republic of Iran prioritised its anti-Zionist ideas and stood with the Axis of Resistance. On the other hand, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad pursued a pragmatic and neutral stance and did not turn its back on its traditional allies. It is vital to say that it was the Hamas political leadership that turned its back on the Axis of Resistance and not the Islamic Republic. In fact, Iran did not cut its relations with Hamas and remained open to Hamas as before.⁷⁵⁰

In relation to Hamas moving its political bureau to Doha from Damascus, Mohammad Zarei argues that Khaled Mashal's decision was linked to his negotiations with the emir of Qatar in September 2011. According to Zarei, Khaled Mashal influenced Hamas' political bureau to tilt towards Qatar and benefit from Doha's financial and political support.⁷⁵¹ According to Mehdi Lazar, the emirate of Qatar became aware of the unique opportunity that the Arab Spring presented in redistributing power across the region. He argues that Doha realised that the political climate of the Arab Spring would not last, and that it therefore attempted to gain as much political clout as possible through supporting the Muslim Brotherhood in the region, and its offshoot in Palestine in particular, in order to expand its influence.⁷⁵² Hamas' leader Khaled Mashal lived in Qatar in the early 2000s, and resided there continuously after leaving Damascus in early 2012. In February 2012, Doha promised \$250 million to Hamas – a sum that increased to \$400 million. Lazar makes a valid point that Qatar's policy towards Hamas is mainly designed to counter Iran's increasing influence in the region. Iran still

⁷⁵⁰ Interviewed in Tehran on 26 September 2015.

⁷⁵¹ Mohammad Zarei, Neda Institute, *Seyre Tahavol e Mavaze Hamas Dar Qebal e Syria va Yaman Az Bidariye Eslami Ta Konoon* [The Evolution of HAMAS Positions Towards Syria and Yemen From the Islamic Awakening Until Today], <http://nedains.com/fa/news/311168> [Accessed 25 March 2016]

⁷⁵² Mehdi Lazar, "How Qatar is Using Gaza to Isolate Iran", *Open Democracy*, 3 December 2012, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/mehdi-lazar/how-qatar-is-using-gaza-to-isolate-iran> [Accessed 8 April 2016]

maintained strong influence over Lebanese and Palestinian resistance movements, particularly since Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005. Since Hamas political leadership left Damascus to Doha in 2012, Qatar seized an opportunity to separate Iran from Gaza by strengthening ties with Hamas. From Lazar's point of view, Qatar's policy towards Gaza should be viewed through the wider prism of Doha's regional policy, namely to strengthen the power of Sunnis in the Middle East and to counter Iran's foreign policy.⁷⁵³ The same policy is also implemented in Syria, where Qatar backs the insurgency against Assad, the key ally of Iran, from the very beginning of the Syrian uprising. According to Lazar, there is an added layer to Qatar's attempts at separating Hamas from Iran's point of view that goes beyond ideology. According to him, Qatar and Iran share the world's largest deposit of non-associated gas that lies between the waters of the two countries. Qatar's close relations with the United States, and the presence of a major American military base in al-Udeid (the largest outside of US soil), in addition to the political situation in Gaza after the Syrian crisis, all help Qatar to protract its 'Sunni-policy' and isolate the Islamic Republic.⁷⁵⁴

In October 2012, the Emir of Qatar paid a surprise visit to Gaza, and pledged \$400m in investment in Gaza's infrastructure. Travelling to Gaza through Egypt under the Muslim Brotherhood government, the Emir seemed to confirm that "Qatar is the principal supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood's take over in Egypt and elsewhere".⁷⁵⁵ One can argue that "Qatar was using the Muslim Brotherhood to replace Iran as the major player in the Palestinian issue".⁷⁵⁶ The emir's visit to Gaza in 2012 was seen in

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Ian Black and Harriet Sherwood, "Qatari Emir's Visit to Gaza is a Boost for Hamas", *The Guardian*, 23 October 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/23/qatari-emir-welcome-gaza-visit> [Accessed 12 March 2016]

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid.

part by the observers in the region as a "reward to Hamas for ending its support to Assad".⁷⁵⁷ Qatar had opposed Assad since the beginning of the Syrian uprising, aiming to gain a foothold in the region and expand its influence through Jihadist forces on the ground.⁷⁵⁸

On the other side of the Palestinian political spectrum, Islamic Jihad maintained its position within the Axis of Resistance. Following the eruption of the Syria crisis, the Islamic Jihad's leadership refused to cut relations with Damascus and maintained its neutrality. In January 2012, Ramadan Abdullah and his delegation visited Ayatollah Khamenei in Tehran. During the meeting, Khamenei referred to conditions in Syria, stating: "[r]egarding Syria, if the developments are considered from a broad and comprehensive perspective, it becomes completely clear what plot America has designed for Syria and unfortunately certain countries inside and outside the region are cooperating with America in this plot."⁷⁵⁹ The Supreme Leader added that "if the Syrian government promises the Americans that it will stop supporting the Islamic resistance of Palestinian and Lebanese groups, all issues will come to an end. Supporting resistance groups is the only crime that Syria has committed".⁷⁶⁰ He reiterated: "[t]he position of the Islamic Republic regarding Syria is to support any kind of reforms that would benefit the Syrian people and to oppose the interference of America and its followers in the internal affairs of Syria"⁷⁶¹. In the meeting, Ramadan Abdullah clarified the position of Islamic Jihad, stating that the "Islamic Awakening and the regional developments are a very valuable opportunity for Muslim nations, particularly for the people of Palestine, and everybody should watch out for

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹ "Leader Meets with Ramadan Abdullah", *Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei*, 31 January 2012, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1579/Leader-Meets-with-Ramadan-Abdullah> [Accessed 24 March 2016]

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

the enemies' efforts to cause sedition". He also referred specifically to developments in Syria, and expressed that "Westerners are trying to take Syria - which is a base for resistance in the region - away from the camp of resistance."⁷⁶² Ramadan Abdullah's meeting with Khamenei in early 2012 was important as both sides were able to underline the importance of their alliance during an especially turbulent period of time. Ayatollah Khamenei's discussion with Ramadan Abdullah was aimed at appealing directly to the Palestinian streets, and at explaining the Islamic Republic's rationale for supporting the Syrian government. Ramadan Abdullah's statement in Tehran likewise was aimed at assuring the Iranian leadership that Islamic Jihad would remain an important pillar of the so called Axis of Resistance. In an interview, Nasser Abu-Sharif, the high representative of Islamic Jihad who had accompanied Ramadan Abdullah during the 2012 meeting, stated

[w]e in the Palestinian Islamic Jihad understood Iran's concerns over the Syrian Crisis. Our only priority is to liberate the land of Palestine and to this end we value Iran's anti-Zionism ideology and its historical pro-Palestinian stance. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad rejects and denounces sectarian discourse within the Islamic Ummah. We also believe that Takfiri extremists' activities in Syria were not serving our interests as they pursue divisive policies within the Ummah. The Palestinian Islamic Jihad's leadership values the Axis of Resistance and therefore we maintain our neutrality from the very beginning of the Syrian Crisis.⁷⁶³

Although the Hamas leadership pursued a different path from Iran and its allies in Syria, Tehran nevertheless maintained the channel of communication with it. On 10 February 2012, Ismail Haniyeh arrived in Tehran for an official visit, and was received by high ranking officials of the Iranian government, including the Supreme Leader and

⁷⁶² Ibid.

⁷⁶³ Interviewed in Tehran on 5 April 2014.

the President. In a meeting with Ismail Haniyeh, Iran's Vice president Mohamad-Reza Rahimi described Iran's support for the Palestinian nation as a "lofty aspiration" pursued since the victory of the 1979 Islamic revolution, noting that the Iranian nation was still committed to this ideal. Rahimi highlighted that Iran's backing of 'oppressed peoples' around the world, especially those of the Palestinian nation, and opposition to the Zionist regime, all formed a dominant ideological principle of the Islamic Republic. Haniyeh for his part expressed "Iran has stood beside the Palestinian nation since the victory of the 1979 Islamic revolution and we have witnessed the Iranian nation's strong support for the oppressed Palestinians."⁷⁶⁴ In a symbolic gesture, during a rally to mark the 33rd anniversary of the Islamic revolution at Azadi (Liberty) Square in Tehran in February 2012, Haniyeh stood beside Ahmadinejad. Addressing the crowd, Haniyeh congratulated the Iranian nation and government on the occasion of the 33rd anniversary of the victory of the Islamic revolution and said that "Iranians play a role in constructing a bright future for the Palestinians".⁷⁶⁵ Khaled al-Qadoumi, High Representative of Hamas and who had accompanied Haniyeh in Tehran, described the moment as follows:

[o]n the eve of commemoration of the Islamic revolution in 2012, Ismail Haniyeh stood in Azadi Square and delivered a speech to the Iranian audience who were cherishing the Palestinian struggle and were praying for the liberation of Palestine and al-Aqsa. He flew over the large crowd beside the Iranian president and saw a brave nation that was gathering to welcome him.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁴ "Iran Vows to Support the Palestinian Nation", *Press TV*, 11 February 2012, <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/226092.html> [Accessed 16 April 2016]

⁷⁶⁵ "Iran Marks 33rd Anniversary of Islamic Revolution", *Xinhua News Agency*, 11 February 2012, http://china.org.cn/world/2012-02/11/content_24611580.htm [Accessed 26 February 2016]

⁷⁶⁶ Interviewed in Tehran on 9 November 2015.

Despite disagreements over the Syria crisis, Iran maintained its connections with Hamas' leadership through Hamas representatives in Tehran during 2012. At the NAM Summit, held in Tehran in August 2012, Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbass announced that they both received and accepted invitations from Iran. However, President Abbas – leader of Fatah – threatened to boycott the summit if Hamas were in attendance. Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki proclaimed that "President Abbas will not take part in the Non-Aligned summit if Ismail Haniyeh is present, no matter what form his attendance takes."⁷⁶⁷ The Iranian authorities later made following statement; "Up to now, no official invitation from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the person of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has been sent to Hamas' popular Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh."⁷⁶⁸ Hamas later announced that its political bureau received an invitation from the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic and Mahmoud al-Zahar and Marwan Issa from al-Qassam brigades visited Iran.⁷⁶⁹

The 2012 Gaza War: Iran, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad

On 14 November 2012, the Israeli army launched a massive military offensive in Gaza. The operation, dubbed 'Pillar of Defence', lasted 8 days, and began after the assassination of Ahmad al-Jabari, Chief Commander of Hamas' military wing (al-Qassam Brigade), in a missile strike in Gaza city.⁷⁷⁰ Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood president, Mohammad Morsi, was reported to have pressured Hamas to agree to a

⁷⁶⁷ "Tehran Hosts Non-Aligned Movement Summit with Focus on Syria", *Russia Today*, 26 August 2012, <https://www.rt.com/news/non-aligned-movement-summit-tehran-583/> [Accessed 3 April 2016]

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁹ Mohammad Zarei, *Palestine Special Edition*, Neda Institute for Scientific -Political Research, Winter 1391 [2012], pp. 99-113. Also available at <http://nedains.com/fa/news/306402/1391-ویژه-نامه-فلسطین-در-سال-> [Accessed 11 April 2016]

⁷⁷⁰ Harriet Sherwood, "Hamas Says Gates of Hell Opened as Israel Kills Military Leader in Gaza", *The Guardian*, 15 November 2012, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/14/israel-assassinates-hamas-military-chief> [Accessed 11 April 2016]

ceasefire.⁷⁷¹ During the operation, the Israeli army bombarded Gaza indiscriminately, and its targets included civilian buildings and governmental institutions. In response, Palestinian Islamic movements launched rocket attacks against the Israeli heartland with Fajr-5 missiles. Its targets included Tel Aviv.⁷⁷² After eight days of war which destroyed Gaza's civilian infrastructure, a ceasefire was successfully mediated by Egypt's Morsi and US authorities on 21 November 2012.

The most important implication of the Gaza war was the impact of Iran's support for Palestinian Islamic movements on their military performance. During the eight days of resistance, the Palestinian Islamic movements demonstrated their ability to strike back against Israel. During the conflict, Palestinians utilised a rocket – the Fajr-5, developed by Iran and supplied to Hizbullah – with a range of up to 75 km, which allowed them to strike Israel's capital.⁷⁷³ In an interview with Al-Alam, Ziad Nakhleh, Deputy Leader of Islamic Jihad, stated

[t]hanks to our generous brothers in Iran, we have Fajr 3 and Fajr 5 missiles. Our Iranian brothers helped us to obtain these missiles. Iranian technology helped us considerably to change the equilibrium of power. For the first time we were able to strike back and we proved to the Israelis that we can target their towns the way they target ours. The Palestinian resistance forced the Israelis to accept a ceasefire. We continue our resistance

⁷⁷¹ Matthew Kalman and Rob Williams, 'Gaza Counts its Dead as Israel Plans Invasion', *Independent*, 19 November 2012, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/gaza-counts-its-dead-as-israel-plans-invasion-8326960.html> [Accessed 11 April 2016]

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Ian Black, 'Fajr 5 Missiles Give Palestinians Rare if Short Lived Advantage', 16 November 2012, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/16/fajr5-missile-gaza-israel-iran> [Accessed 11 April 2016]

despite intense pressure from the world powers. No one could dream that we can return the enemy's fire and target Israel's heartland.⁷⁷⁴

Major General Mohammad Jafari, head of the IRGC, confirmed in November 2012 that Iran supplied military assistance to Hamas and to other resistance movements in Gaza, including technology needed to manufacture long-range Fajr-5 rockets. Jafari stated that "Gaza is under siege, so we cannot help them. The Fajr-5 missiles have not been shipped from Iran. Its technology has been transferred and (the missiles are) being produced quickly."⁷⁷⁵ He clarified the ideological reasoning for Iran supplying technology of manufacturing rockets to Hamas: "[w]e offer all Muslims technological aid to help them stand up against arrogant powers and we offer to give them our experiences to defend their people".⁷⁷⁶ The Iranian commander added that "Iran supports a ceasefire between Gaza and the Israeli regime if such a truce is to the interest of Palestinians."⁷⁷⁷

Iran's Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani echoed Iran's concern and support for the Palestinians during the Gaza war. In November 2012, Larijani called for immediate international and regional action to support the people of Gaza. To this end, Larijani liaised with the parliamentary speakers of other Islamic countries, including Iraq, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon and Syria and Jordan, as well as the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Anders Johnson, about Israel's

⁷⁷⁴ Ziad Nakhleh, Al-Alam, 21 November 2012, *Jahad e Eslami; Selah e Iran Movazeneh ra Taghyeer Dad* [The Islamic Jihad; Iran's Weapons Changed the Balance], <http://fa.alalam.ir/news/399224> [Accessed 11 April 2016]

⁷⁷⁵ "Iran Confirms Military Aid to Hamas, Sending Long Range Missile Technology", *Russia Today*, 22 November 2012, <https://www.rt.com/news/iran-hamas-aid-missile-256/> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

⁷⁷⁶ "Iran Gave Hamas Only Technical Know-How of Fajr-5 Missile", *IRIB World Service*, 22 November 2012, <http://english.trib.ir/news/item/102158-iran-gave-hamas-only-technical-know-how-of-fajr-5-missile-cmdr> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid.

ongoing war on Gaza, urging unified action to help the people of Gaza.⁷⁷⁸ Addressing MPs, Larijani expressed solidarity with the people of Gaza, stating “Iran is proud of defending the Palestinian people and will continue to help Palestine at difficult times [...] We are proud that our assistance was material and military in nature.”⁷⁷⁹ Addressing the Arab countries, the Iranian Majlis speaker stated, “The Palestinian people do not need speeches and meetings, rather they are in need of a serious support.”⁷⁸⁰

Without claiming credit for providing missile technology to the resistance movements, Ayatollah Khamenei praised the Palestinians for their resistance during eight days of war:

[a]n 8-day war broke out between the people of Gaza and the Zionist regime which claims to have the strongest army in the region [...] Would anybody have believed ten years ago that one day there would be a war between the Palestinians - not all Palestinians, a group of them in Gaza - and the Zionist regime and it would be the Palestinians who set conditions for a ceasefire? Well done to the Palestinians. Well done! Well done to Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the soldiers who fought in Palestine and Gaza for their outstanding courage. What they did is a perfect example of courage. I want to express my gratitude to the Palestinian soldiers for their sacrifices, their efforts and their

⁷⁷⁸ “Majlis Speaker Urges Action on Gaza”, *IRIB World Service*, 18 November 2012, <http://english.trib.ir/programs/your-letters/item/101933-majlis-speaker-urges-action-on-gaza> [Accessed 20 April 2016]

⁷⁷⁹ “Iran Proud of Military Assistance to Gaza, Says Larijani”, *The Syria Times*, 22 November 2012, <http://syriatimes.sy/index.php/news/world/1069-iran-proud-of-military-assistance-to-gaza-says-larijani> [Accessed 20 April 2016]

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid.

patience. They saw that "Verily, with every difficulty there is relief" [The Holy Quran, 94: 6].⁷⁸¹

Such sentiments towards the Gaza war in 2012 were not limited to the government however, and the Shia *Marajii* also made separate statements aimed at the Iranian public. Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi delivered a statement praising the Muslim fighters for defending the defenceless people of Gaza during eight days of war. In his statement, he castigated the conservative regimes of Saudi Arabia and Qatar and praised Iran for supporting Gaza with weaponry, and emphasised that the Islamic Republic of Iran was honoured to be the main supporter of the Palestinians during their darkest days, and would continue its duty to support the Palestinian people.⁷⁸² This was obvious propaganda to buttress Iran's claim to regional leadership at a time of increasing escalation of the Saudi-Iranian Cold War. Palestine, as I have repeatedly stated, was also a Trojan Horse for Iran's strategic preferences and national interests.

On the other side of the spectrum, one of the most notable implications of Gaza war in 2012 was the reaction within Gaza towards Iranian support. According to Nidal al-Mughrabi, Gazans offered very public thanks to Iran for helping them fight against Israel on 27 November 2012, as Iranian-manufactured rockets were fired out of the Palestinian enclaves towards Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.⁷⁸³ Large billboards on three major road junctions in the Gaza Strip bore the message "Thank you Iran" in Arabic, English, Hebrew and Farsi. The posters also depicted the Iranian Fajr-5 rockets. It was

⁷⁸¹ "Leader's Speech to Participants of International Conference on Islamic Awakening", Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, 11 December 2012, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/1726/Leader-s-Speech-to-Participants-of-International-Conference-on> [Accessed 17 April 2016]

⁷⁸² "Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi's Statement Regarding the Gaza War in 2012, issued on 26 November 2012", *Official Website of Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi*, <http://makarem.ir/main.aspx?typeinfo=4&lid=0&mid=254113> [Accessed 12 April 2016]

⁷⁸³ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Gazans say Thank You Iran after Israel Conflagration", Reuters, 27 November 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-iran-thanks-idUSBRE8AQ0VZ20121127> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

the first time that there has been such public admission of Iran's role in the arming of the Islamic fighters in the territory.⁷⁸⁴ Khader Habib, a senior official in Islamic Jihad, stated that it was "natural to show gratitude for Iran's role in the conflict".⁷⁸⁵ He told the Reuters that "Iranian rockets struck at Tel Aviv, they reached out to Jerusalem. Therefore it was our duty to thank those who helped our people".⁷⁸⁶ He added that "We have distinctive, good relations with Iran and such a relationship will continue as long as Iran supports the Palestinian people and backs up the resistance".⁷⁸⁷

Asmaa al-Ghoul highlights some other reactions in Gaza among Islamic movements who benefitted from Iran's support. According to her, Daud Shihab (media spokesman for Islamic Jihad) did not conceal that Iran is the movement's major supporter. He acknowledged that "[a]ll of the weapons in Gaza are provided by Iran, be they weapons intended for the Hamas movement or for the PIJ. Perhaps Hamas even has more Iranian weapons than us; and everyone knows that Iran is financing us." Shihab states that "the PIJ is a resistance movement, and while there are many parties in the Arab and Muslim world offering support for the resistance, the largest share of this financial and military support is coming from Iran."⁷⁸⁸ Shihab downplays allegations concerning Islamic Jihad's inclinations towards Shi'ism, and that it acts according to Iranian guidance. Specifically, he highlights Islamic Jihad's neutrality on Syria as an example of the group's independence from Iran. Shihab states that the pivotal element that defines Islamic Jihad's relationship with various states is the extent

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁸ Asmaa al-Ghoul, "Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Iran Supplies all Weapons in Gaza", *Al-Monitor*, 14 May 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/05/gaza-islamic-jihad-and-iranian-arms.html> [accessed 21 April 2016]

to which these states are close to the Palestinian cause. Hence, Iran supports the Palestinian people and the resistance, and is not ashamed of this support, but nonetheless confronts a lot of pressure because of it. Therefore, he adds, the relationship between Iran and Islamic Jihad is solid and strong.⁷⁸⁹

The Fall of Muslim Brotherhood Government in Egypt, and Hamas' dilemma

After the Muslim Brotherhood came to dominate the government in Egypt, Hamas' political bureau under Khaled Mashal saw an opportunity to break its regional isolation. As I suggested, Hamas political leadership began to prioritise its ideological ties with the circle of Muslim Brotherhood in the region and distance itself from Iran over the Syria crisis. Under Mashal, Hamas' political leadership hoped that a new alliance under the umbrella of the Muslim Brotherhood could provide Hamas with more power to achieve its goals. However, on 3 July 2013, Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood was toppled and replaced with a government dominated by the military. Henceforth, General Fatah al-Sisi, the new head of government in Egypt, put pressure on Hamas by isolating it economically and politically in an effort to purge the country of the Muslim Brotherhood. Due to its own differences with the Muslim Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia supported al-Sisi's government, which put Hamas under further regional pressure. Shortly after Morsi was toppled, the Egyptian army destroyed many of the smuggling tunnels that ran under the Egypt-Gaza border, which had provided the cramped coastal enclave with commercial goods as well as weaponry, damaging Gaza's fragile economy in the process.⁷⁹⁰ Losing its strong base in Syria after moving its offices from Damascus, and having caused disagreements with its traditional ally, Iran,

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁰ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Hamas Reeling from Egyptian Crackdown on Gaza Tunnels", *Reuters*, 21 July 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-palestinians-egypt-tunnels-idUKBRE96K05320130721> [Accessed 19 April 2016]

Hamas seemed more isolated than ever. Shortly after the removal of Morsi, the campaign against Gaza's tunnels caused Hamas to be unable to cover its payroll in Gaza. Hamas was reportedly hit by a downturn in its relations with its main backer Iran, which had previously provided the organisation with arms and funds estimated at \$250 million dollars a year.⁷⁹¹ The situation in Egypt, and Hamas' isolation, caused Hamas leadership to reconsider its approach towards its allies Iran, Hizbullah and Syria. Hence, the discourse of 'Islamic solidarity' reappeared.

In October 2013, the Deputy Chief of Hamas Musa Abu-Marzouk stated that "Khaled Mashal was wrong to have raised the flag of the Syrian revolution on his historic return to Gaza at the end of last year."⁷⁹² Nasrin Akhtar argues that Abu-Marzouk's statement suggested a conspicuous change of policy for Hamas. According to her, "coming as it did in the wake of a reconciliation agreement with Hezbollah in July 2013 at a meeting hosted at the residence of the Iranian ambassador to Beirut, the first visit by a Hamas representative there in some two years, Hamas appears to be reaching out to its erstwhile resistance allies".⁷⁹³ In an additional blow, Hamas' close connection with Qatar was also dented during the summer of 2013. The Emir of Qatar, who visited Gaza and promised millions of dollars in donations, abdicated in June 2013, and "his heir has shown much less interest in Hamas."⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹¹ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Isolated Hamas Faces Money Crisis in Gaza", *Reuters*, 9 October 2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-palestinian-hamas-crisis-idUKBRE99804U20131009> [Accessed 20 April 2016]

⁷⁹² Nasrin Akhtar, "Hamas' Response to the Syrian Uprising", *Open Democracy*, 18 January 2014, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/arab-awakening/nasrin-akhter/hamas%e2%80%99-response-to-syrian-uprising> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁴ Nidal al-Mughrabi, "Cornered Hamas Looks Back at Iran", *Reuters*, 20 August 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-hamas-iran-idUSBRE97J0DO20130820> [Accessed 21 April 2016]

With regard to Hamas' perception of its foreign policies, Hussein Royvaran explained to me that

Hamas is the biggest Islamic Movement in Palestine and it has a complex structure and therefore it is not a homogenous movement. Hamas leadership's decision to turn its back on its traditional allies was not a homogenous decision based on an absolute consensus. There are different trends within Hamas. Khaled Mashal's trend is more pro-Qatari and intent to tilt towards the Sunni-conservative Arab states, Muslim Brotherhood and even Turkey's Erdogan who has pro-Muslim Brotherhood tendencies. However, some prominent figures within the movement like Emad al-Elmi and Mahmoud al-Zahar and more importantly, al-Qassam brigade are closer towards Iran's Axis of Resistance. It seems that Hamas' political bureau succeeded in persuading the Hamas leadership to move from Damascus and publically support the anti-Assad forces. However, the military-backed coup against Mohammed Mursi and increasing economic and political hardship and the subsequent isolation of Hamas in late 2013 inspired the other factions within Hamas to voice their disagreement with Khaled Mashal and to try to reconcile with their traditional allies, particularly with Iran.⁷⁹⁵

Due to the factors mentioned above, Hamas aimed to repair its ties with its allies, and particularly with Iran. According to Mohammad Zarei, during the second half of 2013, Hamas demonstrated its willingness to return to the Axis of Resistance. After the Gaza war 2012 and the fall of Morsi in Egypt, Hamas witnessed internal disagreements over its regional policies. He argues that the pro-Iranian trend within Hamas actively lobbied within the movement to repair its political ties with Iran, and that such attempts highlight their commitment to maintaining resistance as the most effective option for the liberation of Palestine. To this end, pro-Iranian members liaised with Iranian and Hizbullah officials to restore ties. Throughout the rapprochement, relations between

⁷⁹⁵ Interviewed in Tehran on 21 September 2015.

Iran and the Islamic Jihad remained as strong as before, although Islamic Jihad's headquarters did move to Lebanon due to security reasons. Between 2012 and 2013, Islamic Jihad continued to receive aid from Iran, which it distributed amongst Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.⁷⁹⁶

Gaza War of 2014 – A Litmus Test for Iran's Commitment to the Palestinian Cause

In July 2014, Gaza was heavily bombarded by the Israeli Defence Force, and an intensive military campaign ensued. Israel's aim was to eliminate the Palestinian Islamic movements' fire-power. After 10 days of indiscriminate aerial bombing, Israel launched a ground campaign on 17 July 2014 supported by gunboats, fighter jets and tanks. It was reported that the Israeli assault on Gaza was triggered by the killing of three Israeli citizens in the West Bank in June 2014.⁷⁹⁷ While the details of the Gaza War in 2014 and the scale of devastations on the ground, as well as the rationale behind the Israeli invasion of Gaza, are beyond the scope of this discussion, Iran's reaction towards Israel's actions are worthy of attention. Specifically, it is important to examine the solidarity expressed by Iran and Iranians during the 51 days of the devastating war. Throughout the conflict, Iran demonstrated that its pro-Palestinian values had remained intact since the 1979 Islamic revolution. It is vital to note that the war on Gaza coincided with a period in which Iran was engaged in a series of marathon negotiations with the world powers over its nuclear programme. Tehran was also at the time supporting the Syrian regime, and still faced disagreements with Hamas' political bureau over the Syria crisis. Throughout the following paragraphs, I will look into both

⁷⁹⁶ Mohammad Zarei, *Palestine Special Edition*, Neda Institute for Scientific -Political Research, Winter 1391 [2012], pp. 99-113. Also available at <http://nedains.com/fa/news/306402/1391-ویژه-نامه-فلسطین-در-سال-1391> [Accessed 11 April 2016]

⁷⁹⁷ For more information, see Nidal al-Mughrabi and Jeffrey Heller, "Israel Launches Ground Offensive in Gaza Strip", Reuters, 17 July 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-israel-idUSKBN0FI04420140717> [Accessed 22 April 2016]

Iran's government and non-governmental actors' behaviour towards the Gaza War in order to inform my argument that the country's support to the Palestine cause has been largely consistent.

One of the most notable pro-Palestinian reactions in Iran came from the pragmatist President Hassan Rouhani, elected in August 2013. Rouhani assumed office due to two main election promises: de-escalating tensions with the West over the nuclear dossier, and conducting economic and political reforms within the government. Shortly after the Israeli invasion of Gaza, on 12 July 2014, Rouhani commissioned Mohammad Javad Zarif Iran's (Foreign Minister) to concentrate all of NAM's activities towards condemning Israel's "inhuman acts in the Gaza strip".⁷⁹⁸ Rouhani stressed to Iran's FM the necessity of taking care of Gaza's residents, especially those wounded during the attacks. As head of the NAM, Iran requested that the UN Security Council heed its responsibilities towards the oppressed Palestinians.⁷⁹⁹ On 12 July 2014, Rouhani issued a declaration as the head of NAM which strongly condemned Israel's military assault on Gaza. Rouhani concluded the declaration by stating

I, as the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the rotating head of the Non Aligned Movement [NAM], while seriously condemning the systematic, illegal, and inhumane crimes against the Palestinians, ask the entire concerned regional and international bodies to heed their legal responsibilities immediately, in line with immediate and full lifting of the Gaza siege and in forwarding of humanitarian aids for the Palestinian people, as well as blocking the path for more aggressive acts and the

⁷⁹⁸ "President Commissions FM Zarif on Zionists Crimes on Gaza", Official Website of President Hassan Rouhani, 12 July 2014, <http://www.president.ir/en/79194> [Accessed 22 April 2016]

⁷⁹⁹ Ibid.

greater massacre of the oppressed Palestinian people through adoption of an effective legal and international mechanism to pursue and put to trail the criminal Zionists.⁸⁰⁰

In July 2014, Rouhani issued a letter calling on heads of Muslim states to do their utmost in support of an immediate end of the blockade in the Gaza Strip, adding that “[h]elping the oppressed Palestinian people and preventing the aggressive acts of the Zionist regime are the shared responsibility of all international institutions and the world’s freedom-seeking countries”.⁸⁰¹ At the cabinet session on 20 July 2014, Rouhani expressed outrage at the "Zionist-regime’s crimes against humanity in Gaza", further stating that the "Iranian government and foreign ministry will draw attention of the international community to what is going on in Gaza".⁸⁰² Rouhani dismissed Israel’s attempted justifications for the massacre of Palestinians, and accused Israeli leaders of ethnic cleansing in Gaza. He castigated the global community for its silence and stated: "[g]lobal reactions unfortunately reveal that the western governments and many Arab and Muslim governments have kept silent toward the crimes or their reactions fall short of the extent of the catastrophe underway in Gaza Strip."⁸⁰³

On 23 July 2014, Hussein Dehghani, Ambassador and Charge d’Affaires of Iran to the UN, delivered a statement before the meeting of ambassadors of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the UN. The statement reads

[t]he Iranian people, like other peace-loving people all around the world, are shocked by the savagery committed by the Occupying Zionist regime against the innocent

⁸⁰⁰ “Dr. Rouhani Publishes NAM Declaration in UN on Criminal Acts in Gaza”, Official Website of President Hassan Rouhani, 12 July 2014, <http://www.president.ir/en/79195> [Accessed 22 April 2016]

⁸⁰¹ “President Calls on Muslim Countries to Help Palestinians in Gaza”, Official Website of President Hassan Rouhani, 11 July 2014, <http://www.president.ir/en/79167> [Accessed 23 April 2016]

⁸⁰² “President Rouhani at the Cabinet Session”, Official Website of President Hassan Rouhani, 20 July 2014, <http://www.president.ir/en/79381> [Accessed 22 April 2016]

⁸⁰³ Ibid.

Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in the besieged Gaza Strip." In line with the Islamic precious values of brotherhood among Muslims, unity of the Islamic Ummah and supporting the oppressed, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready and appeals to all Members of the OIC and the OIC institutions, to extend their moral and humanitarian support to Palestinians in the Gaza Strip during this difficult time [...] Like always I would like to reiterate that the Islamic Republic of Iran is and will remain by its Palestinian brothers and sisters in pursuit of their aspirations for their land, freedom, justice and dignity.⁸⁰⁴

In a public message to a gathering of Iranian children in Tehran (a public show of solidarity dubbed "Gaza children and Iranian Children") Rouhani expressed that "[i]t is not only human being [sic] which is killed in Gaza, but it is the humanity [sic] as a value being victimized".⁸⁰⁵ Rouhani appealed to western governments to support the oppressed people of Palestine, despite any interests they had in maintaining an alliance with Israel. He stated "[b]ombardment of schools and killing of children in Gaza is a clear example of genocide in the world today."⁸⁰⁶ Rouhani was amongst tens of thousands of Iranians attending the Quds Day demonstrations in July 2014 in Tehran, showing his government's solidarity with the people of Gaza. During the demonstrations, Rouhani stated that "those who have kept silent in the face of these crimes are and will be ashamed and history will judge them. Innocent people and children are being killed, and they – Western countries – either keep silent or support

⁸⁰⁴ For more details see "Statement by H. E. Hossein Dehghani Before the Security Council Open Debate on the Middle East", Islamic Republic of Iran Permanent Mission to the United Nations, 22 July 2014, <http://iran-un.org/en/2014/07/22/22-july-2014/> [Accessed 25 April 2016]

⁸⁰⁵ "President's Message to a Gathering of Gaza Children-Iranian Children", Official Website of President Hassan Rouhani, 7 August 2014, <http://www.president.ir/en/79775> [Accessed 22 January 2017]

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

the criminal."⁸⁰⁷ Following Rouhani's recommendations, Zarif called on the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate Israel's actions during the 2014 Gaza War 2014, and prosecute it. He stated "Israel has committed serious crimes in Gaza which need to be prosecuted by an international court."⁸⁰⁸ On the condition of anonymity, one employee of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs explained to me that

[t]he atrocities of Israel in Gaza in 2014 coincided with the negotiations over the nuclear issue with the world powers. Although Mr Rouhani's focus was on solving the nuclear dossier and the removal of imposed sanctions, but, he and Mr Zarif did not neglect the people of Gaza. Since the atrocities began in Gaza, we were commissioned to speed up our activities and to liaise with other countries through our diplomatic missions and to do all we can diplomatically to help the people of Gaza, I personally expected Rouhani's administration to prioritise the removal of sanctions than the war in Gaza, but, it seemed that helping Gaza was as important as the Nuclear issue for Rouhani's administration. I was worried that shifting all diplomatic efforts to Gaza War could have had negative impacts on the removal of the sanctions at such critical moment. However, it was clear that although Rouhani was using a more diplomatic language than his predecessor, but his administration effectively demonstrated its uncompromising commitment towards the Palestinian cause.⁸⁰⁹

Both conservatives and reformists factions within the Iranian Parliament unanimously voiced their strong support for the people of Gaza. During the Inter-Parliamentary Union troika meeting of the OIC in Tehran on 24 July 2014, Ali Larijani particularly praised Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hizbullah for their resistance against Israel. Larijani

⁸⁰⁷ "Al-Quds Day Sparks Huge Rallies in Support of Palestinians", Euronews, 25 July 2014, <http://www.euronews.com/2014/07/25/al-quds-day-sparks-huge-rallies-in-support-of-palestinians/> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁸⁰⁸ "Iran's Zarif Urges Int'l Courts to Deal with Israel's Serious Crimes in Gaza", *Fars News*, 3 August 2014, *Fars News*, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13930512000780> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁸⁰⁹ Interviewed in Tehran on 21 September 2015.

called on the OIC Inter-Parliamentary Union to use its power to support the Palestinian people and requested that the Egyptian government open the Rafah border crossing for the passage of humanitarian and medical aid to the people of Gaza.⁸¹⁰ Despite the differences between Iran and Hamas over the Syria crisis, Larijani voiced Iran's full support for the "oppressed Palestinian nation's righteous struggle for the liberation of their homeland" in a phone call with Khaled Mashal in July 2014.⁸¹¹ The speaker of Iran's Parliament also confirmed that Iran had liaised with the Egyptian government and requested that it permit the Iranian Red Crescent to send humanitarian aid to Gaza through Egypt.⁸¹² President Rouhani commissioned the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) to harmonize with Palestinian and Egyptian Red Crescent societies in order to deliver Iranian medical aid, medical equipment, physicians, as well as relief and rescue workers through the Rafah Passage to Palestinians in Gaza. Rouhani also commissioned Zarif to announce Iran's readiness to treat injured Palestinians in Iranian hospitals, and to arrange for their safe transfer to Iran for the same purpose.⁸¹³ Nevertheless, Iranian officials received no resolute response from Egyptian authorities, and they instead attempted to send aid through the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC). Zarif, however, remarked that "although the Egyptian foreign minister has promised twice that he will do his best in this regard and we hope to see results."⁸¹⁴

⁸¹⁰ "PUIC Troika Meeting Voices Full Support for Palestinians Resistance", *Islamic Republic of Iran Parliament*, 24 July 2014, <http://en.parliran.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=84&pageid=3060&newsview=25057> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁸¹¹ "Iranian Speaker Discusses Gaza with Palestinian Leaders over Phone", *Islamic Republic of Iran Parliament*, 18 July 2014, <http://www.parliran.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=84&pageid=3060&newsview=24990> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁸¹² "Egypt Vows to Help Iran to Send Humanitarian Aid to Gaza", *Islamic Republic of Iran Parliament*, <http://en.parliran.ir/index.aspx?fkeyid=&siteid=84&pageid=3060&newsview=25056> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁸¹³ "Egypt Sets Conditions for Delivery of Iran's Aid to Gaza", *Fars News*, 5 August 2014, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13930514001073> [Accessed 28 April 2016]

⁸¹⁴ Ibid.

Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei defined the Israeli war against the people of Gaza as "genocide". According to Arash Karami, despite their differences over the Syrian Civil War, Iran has worked to maintain close ties with Hamas.⁸¹⁵ During the Eid al-Fitr address to Iranian government officials, Ayatollah Khamenei strongly criticised calls from Western nations to disarm Hamas. Khamenei stated that the

president of America issued a fatwa that the resistance must be disarmed. Yes, it's clear; you want this [minimal] attack in response to all of these crimes not to happen. We say the opposite. The entire world, especially the Islamic world, has a responsibility: whatever it can do to equip the Palestinian people...Our clear message to Islamic governments is this: Let's help the oppressed rise and show that the Islamic world will not be calm in the face of oppression. To realize this goal, all Islamic governments, irrespective of their political and non-political differences, [must] accelerate help to the oppressed.⁸¹⁶

Following the examples of Khamenei, President Rouhani, and the Iranian Parliament, the the governmental agencies of the Islamic Republic rushed to voice their support as well. The commander of the IRGC, Major-General Mohammad Ali Jafari highlighted the readiness of his forces to continue supporting Palestinian resistance movements in their battle against Israel. He remarked "[w]hen speaking about defending the Muslims, Shias and Sunnis are of no difference to us, and our devotion and dedication goes to the entire Muslim world and the oppressed".⁸¹⁷ Praising the

⁸¹⁵ Arash Karami, "Iran's Supreme Leader Calls on Muslim World to Arm Gaza", *Al-Monitor*, 29 July 2014, Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/khamenei-asks-muslim-countries-arm-gaza.html#ixzz484Datha3> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

⁸¹⁶ Ibid.

⁸¹⁷ "Commander: IRGC Ready to Support Palestinian Resistance", *Fars News*, 4 August 2014, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13930513001267> [Accessed 26 April 2016]

resistance exhibited in Gaza during 51 days of war, General Jafari stated that "the Gaza war displayed that the power of the Resistance (front) has no end."⁸¹⁸ Jafari commented that the number of rockets fired at Israel demonstrated that the power of resistance was growing tangibly. Defining the Palestinian cause as the backbone of Islamic unity, he stated that "the Zionist regime [of Israel] will collapse soon as a result of the unity among Shia and Sunni Muslims and we are ready for that day."⁸¹⁹ More notably, support for the people of Gaza was echoed most vociferously within the volunteer sections of the IRGC: the Basij. Brigadier-General Mohammad Reza Naqdi, the Commander of the Basij, announced that there was no limit to Iran's humanitarian support for the people of Palestine. He announced that "the Iranian nation's aids to the Palestinian people recognizes no boundary and whatever they need, it will be included in our aid packages."⁸²⁰ High ranking Iranian officials underlined Iran's military support for Palestinian resistance movements too. Ex-Commander of the IRGC, and head of the Expediency Council, Mohsen Rezaei, announced that the resistance groups – including Hamas – now had the capability to make and launch rockets "thanks to technology transfer from Iran."⁸²¹ Rezaei emphasised that the transfer of defence know-how should be continued in order to enable the Palestinians to make weapons to defend themselves against Israel, and reiterated Iran's commitment to the Palestinians in their battle to liberate their homeland.⁸²² In other words, the Gaza war overshadowed Iranian politics once again and facilitated a consensus amongst political factions within the regime. The

⁸¹⁸ Ibid.

⁸¹⁹ "Military commander: Iran Defends Muslims, both Shia and Sunni", *Al-Alam*, 4 August 2014, <http://en.alalam.ir/news/1620021> [Accessed 27 April 2016]

⁸²⁰ "Basij Commander: No Limitations for Iran's Aid to Palestinians", *Fars News*, 5 August 2014, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13930514000621> [Accessed 27 April 2016]

⁸²¹ "Iran Supplies Palestinians with Rocket Technology: Ex-IRGC commander", *Al-Alam*, 5 August 2014, <http://en.alalam.ir/news/1620231> [Accessed 28 April 2016]

⁸²² Ibid.

most prominent Shia Marajii in Iran, including Grand Ayatollah Mazaheri,⁸²³ Ayatollah Makerm-Shirazi,⁸²⁴ and Ayatollah Noori-Hamedani,⁸²⁵ all issued individual statements supporting the people of Gaza and condemning Israel. They called on all Muslims to forge unity and put aside their differences in order to support the Palestinian nation. These clerics defined the commitment to the Palestinian cause as taklif [religious duty].

Iranian Public Reaction to Gaza War

It is vital to acknowledge that opponents of the conservatives in Iran equally voiced their support for the Palestinians during the Gaza war. According to one *Al-Monitor* correspondent, the Iranian political establishment was clearly shocked by the fact that the opposition had managed to completely take over the streets on Quds Day in 2014.⁸²⁶ Although the political establishment attempted to accuse supporters of the Green Movement of being ignorant towards the Palestinian issue, many of its supporters responded with clear solidarity with the people of Gaza. *Al-Monitor* reported that Iranians posted thousands of pictures with hashtags in support of Palestinians on a daily basis on social media. Many showed their support for Gaza by publishing pictures of murdered men, women and children, along with a poem.⁸²⁷ On 24 July, members of a group known as ‘Iranian Mothers for Peace’ – including the mother of an Iranian activist within Green Movement killed by the security forces in the aftermath of the

⁸²³ For more information on Ayatollah Mazaheri's statement, see <http://www.almazaheri.ir/farsi/Index.aspx?TabId=0003&ID=585> [Accessed 6 May 2016]

⁸²⁴ For more information on Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi, see <http://makarem.ir/main.aspx?typeinfo=4&lid=1&mid=326226&catid=0&start=1&PageIndex=0> [Accessed 6 May 2016]

⁸²⁵ For more information on Ayatollah Noori-Hamedani statement, see <http://www.noorihamedani.com/fa/news/view/1864/567> [Accessed 6 May 2016]

⁸²⁶ “Gaza demonstrations in Iran draw Reformists”, *Al-Monitor*, 3 August 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/08/iran-gaza-reformists-green-movement-2009.html#> [Accessed 28 April 2016]

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*

2009 elections and subsequent protests – gathered outside the UN office in Tehran alongside other civil-rights activists and held up signs reading “End the massacre in Gaza”.⁸²⁸ On the same day, Khatami – though without access to government dominated media platforms – used his Twitter account to invite his followers to participate in Quds Day, and show their support for the Palestinians. Mohammad Khatami expressed that the ‘honourable’ people of Iran always stood with the deprived Palestinian nation. Condemning Israel for its atrocities in Gaza, Khatami stated that "exhibiting support for the Palestinians is about supporting humanity and it stems from the Islamic and humanitarian values".⁸²⁹

Iran’s Youth Cinema Society, alongside a number of artists, organized blood-donation events for the children of Gaza in August 2014. The humanitarian movement was staged simultaneously on 2 August 2014 at different centres of Iran’s Blood Transfusion Organization.⁸³⁰ After donating blood, a large number of Iranian artists, actors, writers and directors wrote an open letter to the children of Gaza. Some sentences from the letter are worthy of attention, as they demonstrate the feeling of the Iranian public towards Palestine

Greetings, people of Gaza, Children, Infants, Mothers in late pregnancy, Grandfathers, Grandmothers [...] We have heard it has been rainy over there, these last few days [...] Rain lets children shelter their dolls under their umbrellas. What rain is this that makes the dolls into umbrellas for children, entangled with them, in their graves? I saw a cat, roving in the rubble of Gaza, lost, lamenting, Avoiding the shreds of flesh, detritus of the

⁸²⁸ Ibid.

⁸²⁹ Former President Mohammad Khatami's Twitter; 23 & 24 July 2014, Available at https://twitter.com/khatami_ir?lang=en [accessed 29 April 2014]

⁸³⁰ 'Iran cineastes to donate blood to Gaza war-stricken children', 2 August 2014, IRIB, Available at <http://english.trib.ir/news/world/west-asia/item/193139-iran-cineastes-to-donate-blood-to-gaza-war-stricken-children> [accessed 1 May 2016]

lives of the Children of Gaza. She recognizes the children who shared their meagre meals with her, in rainy days past. The lady of Gaza/Palestine: If the rain over Gaza gives you leave to carry your baby on your back out of the wreckage, do not forget to take along pen and paper. Write my lady; say: "Rain gave me leave to leave [...] Lady Gaza/Palestine: We have heard that your neighbour yonder – the same one who came over in 1948; the same one with whom you shared your bread and water, The same neighbour of 1948 who bemoaned the horrors of Hitler's crematoria, The same neighbour who had told you your home is the cradle of the prophets, The same neighbour who had told you: Palestine is the land revelation, The same neighbour who had told you: are Muslims not famed for their hospitality?

Lady, we have heard that your neighbour yonder now watches your slaughter from hilltops in jubilation, as if from the galleries on an amphitheatre [...] Lady Gaza/Palestine: You were hospitable to the unannounced guests of 1948 [...] Lady Gaza/Palestine: We are left on this shore, pen and camera in hand. We are left astonished: what is to be done? How do we come to pay homage to your prone body? Your shameless neighbour has blocked all of the paths to us — your guests [...] Lady Gaza/Palestine: We were thinking: now that bullets rain on you, Now that the deluge of blood has carried away your children, May be we can infuse life into your children's innocent bodies, from our own veins.⁸³¹

The Iranian Oscar-winning director Asghar Farhadi began a media campaign condemning the killing of the Palestinians, and posted a picture on his Facebook of himself holding a banner that read "stop killing your fellow human beings".⁸³² More notably, Iran's legendary actor Izzatollah Entazami issued a statement which called on

⁸³¹ 'Letter of the Iranian Filmmakers to the Children of Gaza', 29 July 2014, Nedaye Azadi (Official website of Nehzat-e Azadi), Available at <http://www.nedayeazadi.net/en/2014/07/1762> [accessed 2 May 2016]

⁸³² Arash Karami, 'A Separation director criticized in Iran for Gaza Facebook post', 17 July 2014, Al-Monitor, Available at <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/07/iranian-gaza-antiwar-campaign.html> [accessed 1 May 2016]

the Iranian people to gather outside the UN Office in Tehran in solidarity with the people of Gaza. In his statement, Entezami stated that

it is about a month since all this genocide began in Gaza that I can neither sleep, nor eat well, I cannot rest and I cannot calm down. I do not understand how one can see all these wounded children in Gaza and still sleep at night [...] I call on all my beloveds that their hearts beat for the sake of humanity and are disgusted by this genocide to join me in condemning the crimes of the Zionists.⁸³³

Such statements assert the genuine solidarity of many Iranian people with the Palestinian nation. They also show a connection to the Islamic revolutionary ideas of supporting *Mazloomin* [suppressed] against *Zalemin* [suppressors], the same narratives that unified the Iranian nation during the Islamic revolution in 1979. This is not to say that all Iranians are homogeneous in expressing sympathy with the Palestinians, and certainly some have criticised the Islamic Republic's approach towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In this regard, one MP with no affiliation to either conservatives or reformists, on the condition of anonymity, explained to me that

Since I became an MP in 2012, I have noticed that when there is a discussion on Gaza and on the Palestinian cause, my fellow MPs have a strong consensus and become more Palestinian than the Palestinians. However, on other issues, they may have disagreements. I was astonished when I visited an Arab country for inter-parliamentary meetings that some fellow Arab MPs had no ideas about the historical depth of Iran's prop-Palestinian ideas. They were mainly discussing with me about Iran's supports towards the Shia communities in Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Ironically those who were asking me questions about sectarianism in Iran were from an Arab country that has relations with Israel. To me this was frustrating. I believe we should focus on our

⁸³³ For more on Izzatollah Entezami's statement see <http://www.isna.ir/fa/news/93051909498/-فراخوان-عزت-> [accessed 1 May 2016]

economy and unemployment-rate and allow our Arab brothers to pay more attention to the Palestinian cause. We need to update ourselves with the global Market and solve our budget deficit. Although it is vital to mention that my colleagues in the Parliament do not agree with me on this case.⁸³⁴

Similarly, one taxi driver explained that

Every year I see hundreds of thousands of people pour into the streets of Tehran for the Quds Day, bringing their children, carrying the Palestinian flags. Some of them have no affiliation with the regime including my brother in law. But, when we watch news, we hear some Arab states blame us for Shia-Sunni conflict and some [of them] even call us non-Muslims. Then we hear about Emirates and Saudi Arabia keep calling Iran to give up our islands in the Persian Gulf. We hear that Israel has embassies in some Arab countries. We see photos of this Emir or that Sheikh with the American president. We hear those Emirs and Kings enjoy seeing us not allowed trading our oil so they can sale theirs with higher price. We hear that our government relentlessly spends millions of dollars to help Hamas and other Palestinian groups. I have no doubt that the Israelis unjustly invaded the Palestinian lands. But, we should let the Arab regimes to deal with this and help the poor Palestinians too. We have been paying heavy costs because of our anti-Israeli and Anti-imperialist tendencies. Since the revolution, we are witnessing more and more sanctions every year. Where are those [Arab] regimes that were supporting Saddam during the war, to see the [Iranian] people in the streets, chanting; Down to Israel since the revolution? We do not even have borders with Israel but we are louder than all the Arab and Muslim states in voicing our support for the Palestinians. I remember my late mother was praying for the Palestinians when she was hearing news about them and she never had political agenda. It is because we believe we are Muslims

⁸³⁴ Interviewed in Tehran, 19 September 2015

and we need to care about suffering of the Palestinians, but do those [Arab regimes] know about this?⁸³⁵

These countering opinions demonstrate the frustration amongst some Iranians with both the Islamic Republic's handling of internal affairs, and with ever-escalating regional conflicts. Both statements above imply disappointment with some Arab states for not acknowledging Iran's historic and genuine solidarity with the Palestinian nation. These opinions, however, continue to be marginal to the mainstream political discourse in Iran, both within civil society and certainly the state.

The Gaza War and its Impact on Gaza's Islamic Factions' Perception of Iran

One of the most tangible outcomes of the 2014 Gaza War was its impact on the Palestinian Islamic movements' relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran's support for the Palestinian resistance in Gaza after the Arab Spring once again demonstrated that it was a reliable ally for the Palestinian resistance movements. According to Hussein Royvaran, the strong resistance shown by Hamas during the 2014 war consolidated its reputation in the eyes of Iran. Likewise, Royvaran argues that many prominent figures in Hamas also realised that Iran's military and political support were invaluable in the fight against Israel. Unwilling to lose their offices in Tehran, Hamas demonstrated a willingness to improve its ties with Iran by visiting Iranian officials in Tehran. To this end, Ramadan Abdullah played a central role in mediating between Tehran and Hamas. Royvaran sheds a light on Iran's approach towards the Palestinians and argues that Iran's support towards Hamas is "tactical", but that Iran's approach towards the Palestinian cause remains ideological and therefore

⁸³⁵ Interviewed in Tehran on 18 September 2015.

uncompromising. He states "the tactics are defined by the ideologies and therefore ideologies influence tactics". Royvaran explains

For the Islamic Republic, supporting the Palestinian cause and the Ummah is about fulfilling *taklif*, it is like daily prayers for a Muslim, It cannot be terminated or abandoned because we feel not liking it. The Islamic Republic is aware that few elements within Hamas attempt to make political manoeuvres in region and to widen their networks of support from all regional players such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Similar things happened in regards to our relations with PLO during the first decade of the Islamic revolution, but, the difference is that Hamas and its military wing are committed to the resistance. Nevertheless, the Islamic Republic never requires to be thanked for fulfilling its *taklif*. As the Quran says; We feed you only for the countenance of Allah .We wish not from you reward or gratitude [76:9] [...] The Islamic Republic supports any movements that is committed to the resistance against Zionism.⁸³⁶

Since the end of the Gaza War in 2014, and at the time of writing, representatives of both Hamas and Islamic Jihad make routine visits to Tehran. Osama Hamdan, Director of Hamas, headquartered in Beirut during his visit to Tehran in February 2016, reiterated that the Islamic Republic of Iran had a role in terms of political, financial and direct support in all of Hamas' victories. In an interview with the Office of Iran's Supreme Leader, Hamdan acknowledged 25 years of Iranian support for Hamas and described Iranian support towards the Palestinian nation as valuable. Declining to explain the details of Iran's supports for Hamas, Hamdan stated

I will say that any victory the resistance has gained, our Iranian brothers had a role in it...

In the year 2014, the occupiers believe that the Islamic Republic was too busy with the events in the region and the Arabs distanced themselves from the Palestinian issue.

⁸³⁶ Interviewed in Tehran on 26 September 2015.

However the outcome shocked the enemies because missiles reached Tel Aviv and Haifa. They were traumatized by seeing the forces of resistance combat the occupiers on the front lines. As a precaution, we say it is difficult to talk about the details regarding Iran's support for the resistance [...] Iran is not one of those countries who would brag and boast about supporting the resistance; in fact Iran's support for the resistance is more a matter of faith and belief than a political one [...] In 2014, the world witnessed this support and its consequences in facing the enemy.⁸³⁷

Similar to Hamas officials, the High representative of PLO and the Palestinian Ambassador to Tehran, Salah al-Zawawi, praised Iran for supporting the Palestinians during the Gaza War. He stated "I want to thank the Islamic Republic of Iran for providing us with training, financial support and weapons and also thank the country for its political and diplomatic stances on Palestine."⁸³⁸ Al-Zawawi explained to me that "since years of representing the Palestinian Authorities in Tehran, I feel I am at home here. Everywhere I go and when I say I am a Palestinian, the Iranian people show their genuine solidarity. I cannot express my gratitude towards the Iranian nation for their hospitality and support and solidarity."⁸³⁹

It is worth noting that Iran's support for Palestinian cause also brought with it some political implications in Gaza, as some adherents of the Islamic revolution and followers of Shafaqi established a relatively small group that emerged from Islamic Jihad. In May 2014, a new Muslim faction emerged in the north of Gaza which expressed strong ideological affiliation with the Islamic Republic of Iran. This new

⁸³⁷ "Arab Vs Non-Arab Conflicts are Set Up by the Arrogant Front to Destroy the Muslim World", Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, 23 February 2016, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/3412/Arab-vs-Non-Arab-conflicts-are-set-up-by-the-arrogant-front-to> [Accessed 6 May 2016]

⁸³⁸ "Palestinian Envoy Thanks Iran for Support in Gaza War", 22 September 2014, Fars News, <http://en.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13930631001283> [Accessed 9 May 2016]

⁸³⁹ Interviewed in Tehran on 26 September 2014 at the office of the Society for the Defence of Palestinian Nation.

movement was called *Harakat al-Sabireen, Nasran li Filastin* (Al-Sabireen Movement for Supporting Palestine (HESN)). It was established by Hesham Salem, who was himself a leading member of Islamic Jihad.⁸⁴⁰ In an interview with *Al-Monitor*, Salem denied that his movement represented a split from Islamic Jihad, but nevertheless noted that his movement view Islamic Jihad's founder Fathi al-Shaqaqi as a father-figure and inspiration: "[The movement] will preserve the embodiment of Shaqaqi's ideas without any changes."⁸⁴¹ Salem denied accusations that his movement is Shia, and stated: "This is untrue. We have always believed in Islamic unity, and I see no reason to separate Sunnis and Shias." On the similarity of his movement's banner with that of Hezbollah, he said: "This is an unintended coincidence. All the banners of the Palestinian factions are similar in terms of their content and symbols."⁸⁴² Salem rejected the discourse of sectarianism and denounced the prevalent beliefs in Palestinian society that Shias constitute an existential threat to Sunnis. Salem argues, "I don't think that Shias don't like Sunnis. I am suspicious of that. The Shias are providing substantial assistance to the Sunnis, and an example of that is the historic Iranian support to Palestinian parties."⁸⁴³ The al-Sabireen movement has also publically expressed its gratitude towards the Iranian nation for its historical support towards the Palestinian cause. The emergence of al-Sabireen demonstrates that the Islamic revolution and its pro-Palestinian discourse continues to attract the attention of the Palestinian fighters, many of whom are frustrated by the global inaction against Israel's ongoing wars. Such Palestinians are keen to continue their resistance against Israel. Just as the Islamic

⁸⁴⁰ For more information, see Official Website of al-Saberin: <http://alsabireen.ps/ar/> [Accessed 22 January 2017]

⁸⁴¹ Rasha Abou Jalal, "Ex Islamic Jihad leader Launches New Armed Group in Gaza", *Al-Monitor*, 10 June 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/06/gaza-new-palestine-faction-shiism-islamic-jihad.html#> [Accessed 10 May 2016]

⁸⁴² Ibid.

⁸⁴³ Ibid.

revolution's message attracted Fathi Shaqaqi as a follower in 1979, it is still being received by those who believe in Shaqaqi's ideological discourse in spite of current sectarian divisions in the region.

At the same time, Iran continues to consolidate its strong ties with Islamic Jihad. Islamic Jihad's leadership routinely visits Tehran, and its delegates are received warmly by high ranking authorities. In May 2016, Ramadan Abdullah and his accompanying delegation visited Tehran and met with the Supreme Leader. During the meeting, Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted that "supporting Palestine is an obligation Iran will fulfill."⁸⁴⁴ Thanking the Iranian authorities for their support, Ramadan Abdullah reiterated Islamic Jihad's commitment to resistance and clarified the position of Islamic Jihad towards regional developments

Americans and the countries that follow them are after presenting an unreal image of the Islamic Republic of Iran and of the Zionist regime – that has been consigned to an afterthought. They are also after disintegrating the region through provoking a war between Shia and Sunni. This is why pressures on Lebanese Hezbollah have increased, but Islamic Jihad of Palestine has insisted on supporting Hezbollah and resisting America and the Zionist regime by having a correct understanding about regional developments.⁸⁴⁵

Concluding this section, a conversation with Nasser Abu-Sharif – High Representative of Islamic Jihad – is worthy of attention. Abu Sharif sheds a light on the situation in Gaza, explaining that

⁸⁴⁴ Supporting Palestine is an Obligation Iran will Fulfill', Official Website of Ayatollah Khamenei, 1 May 2016, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/3730/Supporting-Palestine-is-an-obligation-Iran-will-fulfill-Ayatollah> [Accessed 19 May 2016]

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

there are a number of Salafi groups in Gaza and West Bank that are supported by some Arab states that follow their own political sectarian agenda. To this end they promote sectarian and anti-Iranian ideas. Before, they [Salafi groups] had little opportunities to promote their agenda in Palestine. However, since the eruption of the Syrian crisis, the Salafi groups gained a momentum to amplify their sectarian discourse against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite of all this propaganda, Iran is appreciated by many people in Palestine. The followers of the Islamic Jihad always appreciate Iran for its historical pro-Palestinian stance. Such sectarian propaganda advocated by the Salafi groups will have no negative impacts on our relations with Iran. We are the followers of Fathi-Shiqaqi and we remember Iran's historical pro-Palestinian stance.⁸⁴⁶

Indeed, Israel's policies in Gaza have united Iran's political factions. All sides of the political spectrum in Iran have emphasised their uncompromising commitment to the Islamic revolutionary ideas, which encompass support for the Palestinians and opposition to Israel. The wars in Gaza in 2012 and 2014 acted as a litmus tests for Iran's revolutionary commitment towards the Palestinian cause. As I have argued in this chapter, the war in Gaza in 2014 occurred at the time that the Iranian regime and Hamas were deeply at odds over the Syrian crisis. At the time of writing, the Islamic Republic and Hamas have yet to reach a consensus over the Syrian conflict, and Tehran's disagreements with Riyadh and other Sunni Arab states such as Qatar are yet to be resolved in other areas (such as over Yemen and Lebanon). Nevertheless, Iran has maintained and sought to improve its relations with Palestinian Islamic factions, particularly Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

Many commentators would expect Iran to sever its ties with Hamas following the Arab Spring after the latter turned its back on its traditional allies (Iran and Syria).

⁸⁴⁶ Interviewed in Tehran on 5 April 2014.

However, Iranian society and government both unanimously voiced their support for Muslim resistance groups in Palestine during the Gaza war. During the Gaza War of 2014, Iranians once again demonstrated their support for the people of Gaza. Although Iranians had been following the Iranian nuclear negotiations anxiously, the situation in Gaza during this conflict continued to be central to the discourse of the state, its ideational self-image and policies. Gaza is viewed in Iran as the symbol of ‘resistance against global arrogance’. For the Iranian political establishment, the importance of the Palestinian cause largely transcends internal politics and external sectarian conflicts. If we return to the conceptual framework that tried to sustain throughout the thesis, we may safely conclude that the Iranian regime continues to stick to its support to the Palestinian cause. The discussion in this chapter and throughout the thesis is therefore compatible with Alexander Wendt and Michael Barnett's arguments concerning identity. Iran's reaction to the wars in Gaza after the Arab Spring proves that states shape their actions according to their beliefs and interests. It also proves that identity potentially signals whom to balance against, and whom to bandwagon with. I have suggested in this thesis that the Islamic Republic of Iran acted in solidarity with various Palestinian Islamic actors committed to resistance against Israel on the basis of ideological consideration or reasons of state as well as a genuine sense of identification with them. For this reason, it is likely that the Islamic Republic of Iran will continue to demonstrate strong solidarity with the Palestinian cause. Iran's commitment to Palestine is thus inseparable from the Islamic Republic's ideological fabric.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The Trajectory of Iran's pro-Palestinian Stance

Our politics is the same as our religion, and our religion is the same as our politics.

Ayatollah Seyed Hassan Modarres (1870-1937)

The subject of this study has been to give a history of the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with Palestinian resistance groups, and the question of what drives Iran's support for the Palestinians. The history of Iran's relations with Palestine is, in turn, relevant to the broader methodological question concerning the best way of approaching the Palestinian cause in Iran's foreign policies after the Islamic revolution. The preceding chapters aimed at responding to these questions within a case study that covered sequential periods in the history of Iranian relations with Palestine. As the analyses in the preceding chapters shows, this study has offered a discursive interpretation of Iran's approach towards the Palestinian cause in the post-Revolutionary era. To this end, the study – following from Alexander Wendt and Michael Barnett's emphasis on identity politics – treated state-identity as the cardinal framework for shaping strategic interests. In itemising the theoretical skeleton of this study, notions of Islamic and revolutionary solidarity, and religious and revolutionary values, were deployed and explored in order to better characterise the depth of the history of Iranian support for the Palestinian cause. I have shown that the strategic interests of the Islamic Republic are influenced by these values and ideas.

Chapter One analysed the discursive construction of Iran's pro-Palestinian ideas that were shaped and championed by revolutionary Iranians during the pre-Revolutionary era. It was argued that decades prior to the triumph of the Islamic revolution, Iranian revolutionaries (including prominent left-wing activists) showed solidarity with the people of Palestine. It was also argued that Iranian revolutionaries reached an informal consensus on the necessity to support the Palestinian cause. The empirical evidence surveyed in this chapter demonstrated that prominent Iranian clerics were among the first figures to voice their strong support towards the Palestinians from the very beginning of the Occupation. The depth of the ideological commitment of Iranian revolutionaries towards the Palestinian cause is captured in Ayatollah Mottahari's expression of the duty of Shias with regard to the Palestinian question:

What would the holy prophet do if he was alive today? [...] The problem that would fill Imam Hussein's heart with sorrow today is this [Palestine] issue [...] was Imam Hussein present today, he would say if you people would want to mourn for me today [...] your slogan must be Palestine [...] Shmr of 1300 years ago is dead, he is gone. Get to know your Shmr today [...] It is a shame to call ourselves Sh'as of Imam Ali. The same Ali when he heard that Muslims were attacked said; I swear by God I have heard the enemy has ravaged our fellow Muslim lands and murdered and imprisoned their men and violated their women [...] The same Ali to whom we offer our respect and obedience towards him says; if a Muslim hears these and dies out of sorrow, he is not to be blamed. Are they not Muslims? Don't they have loved ones? Who in the world today can deny the fact that Palestinians have rights to return home? [...] By God it is compulsory, just like our prayers, just like fasting, it is a compulsory infaq.⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁷ Ayatollah Morteza Motahari's speech on the Palestinian question, Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SxOUMlFX7c> [accessed 2 May 2016]

Along with the primary research conducted for this research, chapter one attempted to demonstrate that the Iranian revolutionaries regarded the Palestinian cause as almost 'sacrosanct'. Support for Palestine and opposition to imperialism and Israel became a unifying principles which guided opposition to the Shah's pro-Western regime. The sacredness of such ideas was especially emphasised by the most prominent leaders of the revolution, including Ayatollah Khomeini, Ayatollah Taleqani and Ayatollah Mottahari. Calls to support the Palestinians were received warmly by many disfranchised Iranians due to their sense of Islamic solidarity, shared history of battling against colonialism and imperialism, as well as common religious values.

Chapter Two covered the post-Revolutionary era under Ayatollah Khomeini and analysed the institutionalisation of these beliefs as indispensable mainstays of Iran's strategic preferences. Prior to the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini emphasised the dual, interlinked obligations to liberate Muslim states and Third-World countries from imperialism. After the revolution, one of the first moves of the new government in Iran was to institutionalise its anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian discourse through replacing the Israeli mission in Tehran with a Palestinian embassy. Symbolically, the first part of Israeli territory ceded to the Palestinians was transferred during the heydays of the revolution in Tehran. Ayatollah Khomeini embarked upon the process of 'Islamising' the Palestinian cause by symbolically declaring the last day of every Ramadan as Quds Day, and calling on Muslims around the world to exhibit solidarity. The pan-Islamic ideas of Khomeini reiterated that the Islamic regime had an obligation to protect Muslims wherever they resided, but particularly the people of Palestine against the state of Israel.

Chapter Three demonstrated the importance of identity and the role of Iran's Islamic values in influencing the hearts and minds of Palestinian activists, with a main

focus on the founder of Islamic Jihad (Fathi Shiqaqi). It was suggested that Ayatollah Khomeini's definition of common Islamic values were warmly received by some Palestinian activists, and ultimately turned a new page in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Shiqaqi was ideologically motivated by the Islamic revolution in Iran, and his movement changed the course of the Palestinian struggle by re-activating the discourse of Jihad and armed resistance in the struggle against Israel. Up until this point, pan-Arab ideas had monopolised the Palestinian political field. This chapter also emphasised that though ideologically inspired by the Islamic revolution in Iran, Islamic Jihad remains an independent movement. Subsequently, based on ideological solidarity, the Islamic Republic of Iran has re-formulated its alliances with the Palestinian factions and found natural allies in Palestine amongst Islamic movements, particularly after its disagreements with the PLO. This chapter further supported Michael Barnett's argument that identity represents a potential source of alliance formation.⁸⁴⁸

Chapters Four and Five provided a comprehensive account of Iran's relations with Hamas since it was first established by Sheikh Yassin. One of the major impacts of the Islamic revolution on Palestinian political life was the emergence of Islamic Jihad, and this factor galvanised the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood to engage in armed struggle and establish what became known as Hamas. The establishment of Hamas coincided with two historical developments: the Palestinian Intifada, and the PLO's rapprochement with Israel. Relations between Iran and Hamas flourished after Hamas' political cadre were sent into exile in south Lebanon, where they were free to enjoy support from Iran and Hizbullah. Hamas's anti-Zionist ideology and popular support on the Palestinian streets inevitably meant that it would be perceived by the

⁸⁴⁸ Michael Barnett, in Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 403.

Islamic Republic as a reliable and powerful ally against Israel. The impact on the Arab Spring on Iran's relations with Hamas was also examined. It was highlighted that although Hamas' support for the opposition to Assad challenged its position within the so called 'Axis of Resistance', the wars in Gaza proved that Iran would be unwavering in its support for the Palestinians.

This study has supported various arguments put forth by Wendt and Barnett concerning identity politics. I agreed with Wendt's argument that without identities, interests have no direction and without interests, identities have no motivational force.⁸⁴⁹ I also agree that ideas determine the meaning and content of power, the strategies by which states pursue their interests, and interests themselves.⁸⁵⁰ My analysis of the Islamic Republic's support towards Muslim resistance groups in Palestine likewise echoed Barnett's arguments that "identity not only provides some leverage over the choice of an alliance partner, but it also proposes that maintenance of that alliance can be dependent on the parties' mutual identification."⁸⁵¹ In other words, Islamic and revolutionary values of the Islamic Republic determined the interests, identity, and policies attainable to the Islamic Republic's leadership in ways that impacted its alliances.

The Islamic Republic's Projection of Power and Influence – the Dream of Leading the Islamic Ummah

It is perhaps stating the obvious that the Islamic Republic of Iran is a state underpinned and infused by revolutionary values and Islamist politics. Anti-Zionism,

⁸⁴⁹ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, p. 231.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 309.

⁸⁵¹ Michael Barnett, in Peter Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1996, p. 410.

suspicion towards the United States, and the Ummah-centric approach of Iran sit comfortably alongside the Islamic Republic's strategic interests and ideological outlook. In other words, strategic interests compliment the identity of the state. I would add however that the primary reason for why Iranian revolutionaries from diverse political backgrounds have comfortably reached a consensus on supporting the Palestinian cause is the universal acceptance of the need to defend what is perceived to be a just cause. The depth of this was registered during the Islamic revolution with the introduction of the words *mastazaafeen* (oppressed) and *mostakbemeen* (oppressors).

At the same time, this study has suggested one must add that like all states, the Islamic Republic of Iran aims to expand its political and ideological hegemony throughout the region. In this regard, the Islamic Republic perceives that it has the right and the might to lead the Islamic Ummah in its ideological struggle against so called global arrogance, a term routinely used to refer to the United States. Support for Palestine serves Iran's strategic interests of projecting power and expanding its ideological and political influence throughout the Muslim world. In other words, the expansion of influence and struggle for hegemony within the region complements the Islamic Republic's beliefs about leading the Ummah. By amplifying its pro-Palestinian rhetoric, the Islamic Republic attempts to extend its reach into the Arab world in order to maintain its position within the Ummah as its 'leader'.

Hence, the Palestinian cause has become strategically advantageous for the Islamic Republic in the sense that it has allowed Iran to convey its political discourse of resistance and emancipation throughout the region, which in turn has given Iran power and influence in the region. Various factions in the Islamic republic underline the Islamic revolution's ideas in an attempt to boost Iran's credibility as a 'leader' of the Islamic Ummah. Iran's leadership has likewise constructed the Palestinian cause as a

yardstick for quantifying Muslim resistance against 'global arrogance.' This logic is echoed by Yvette Hovsepian-Bearce, who argues that

The Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei perceives Iran to be the leader of the Muslim World and foster parent of Palestine. As such, he regards Palestine's and Iran's interests as one. According to the leader, Iran's ability to export its cultural revolution and vigorously fight as Palestine's champion against Israel is part of Iran's global appeal to oppressed nations. He will continue to assert this militant stance against all internal and external criticism of Iran's support of the Palestinian cause.⁸⁵²

While the Islamic Republic does not credit itself with having solely ushered in the Muslim resistance groups of Palestine, it does regard Palestine as the main frontline against Zionism and imperialism. Although the emancipation of Palestinian land is respected first and foremost as a Palestinian obligation, the Islamic Republic has remained a major supporter of the Palestinian resistance within the convenient legitimating framework of 'Islam'. Since the Islamic revolution, the Iranian leadership seems determined to avoid bargaining over its commitment towards its principled support for Palestine and resistance against Zionism.

For the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Palestinian cause transcends geography and thus sits comfortably with its strategic objectives due to the ease with which it reflects its revolutionary ideological values. The trajectory of Iran's pro-Palestinian position provides a number of vital analytical lessons. First, ideological principles – such as the desire for independence, resistance against the hegemony of superpowers, or solidarity – are not simply imaginary constructs, but strategic preferences which appeared and materialised due to Iran's contemporary history. Second, ideology and

⁸⁵² Yvette Hovsepian-Bearce, *The Political Ideology of Ayatollah Khamenei: Out of the Mouth of the Supreme Leader of Iran*, London: Routledge, 2015, p. 354.

national interests can be conjoined. In the Islamic Republic's discursive fabric, revolutionary values are synchronised and conciliated with the state's national interests and therefore can be mutually reinforcing. This approach helps us to understand Iran's aims to widen its outreach towards the Arab world, and particularly towards the Levant. Some of the Islamic Republic's strategic aims – particularly those related to Palestine and the Ummah – can be complex for some to comprehend unless we are able to position them within a proper ideological context. The decisive objectives of the Islamic Republic are the renunciation of Zionism, and the rejection of dependency on foreign powers. If we return to the conceptual framework followed in this study, we can safely deduce that there is a continuity in how Iran expresses its pro-Palestinian stance, and its actual policies. Iran's policy towards Palestine did not, however, simply develop only after the Islamic revolution. The pre-revolutionary era demonstrates that many opponents of the Shah's regime also expressed solidarity with the people of Palestine. Hence, this study has also suggested that Iran's relations with Palestine cannot be simply reduced to opportunism or a desire to exploit the Arab world for material benefit. While some in the Western world and even within Arab states may regard Iran's pro-Palestinian stance as solely opportunistic, such analyses overlook six decades of solidarity demonstrated by Iranian activists – including those with left-wing ideological tendencies – towards the Palestinian cause.

At the same time this study has highlighted the fluctuations of the discourse about Palestine within the Iranian state. Radical confrontation was repeatedly subdued to achieve major diplomatic openings. As indicated, the state in Iran has the ambition to become a regional power with deep strategic access to the Arab-world. Palestine became increasingly important to that end, as long as it did not jeopardise Iran's other strategic preferences. This is best exemplified in

the negotiations which lead up to the JCPOA nuclear agreement. It is worth noting that the Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif used a more pragmatic tone in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the nuclear negotiations. For instance in an interview on 2 February 2014 in Berlin following his attendance at the Munich Security Summit, Zarif stated "it was up to the Palestinians to determine if they were satisfied with the agreement, and that Iran would not interfere".⁸⁵³ In response to a question about what would happen if Palestinians reach an agreement with Israel, Zarif said

If the Palestinians are happy with the solution, then nobody, nobody outside Palestine, could prevent that from taking place. The problem for the past 60 years is that the Palestinians have not been happy. The Palestinians have not been satisfied. And they have every right not to be satisfied, because their most basic rights continue to be violated and people are not ready to redress those.⁸⁵⁴

A few hours after Zarif and Federica Mogherini, announced the nuclear agreement with the world powers on 13 July 2015, concluding a 13-year standoff over Iran's nuclear program, Zarif stated "I believe that this deal will remove a smokescreen [behind] which Israel was standing and hiding its criminal activities against the people of Lebanon and the people of Palestine".⁸⁵⁵ In responding to why Israel opposes the nuclear deal, Zarif said

⁸⁵³ Laura Rosen, Al-Monitor, "What Iran's Foreign Minister told German TV about Israel, Iran", 6 February 2014,

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/en/originals/2014/07/iran-zarif-palestine-israel-phoenix-netanyahu-recognize.amp.html> [Accessed 02 October 2017]

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid

⁸⁵⁵ Al-Monitor, "Zarif after deal: The world has changed", 13 July 2015

<https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/07/mohammad-javad-zarif-interview-post-deal-balconey.html> [Accessed 29 September 2017]

Unfortunately, they need crisis and wars to continue to hide their aggressions and their inhumane policies against the people of Lebanon, Palestine and the people of the region, so peace is an existential threat to them.⁸⁵⁶

Addressing the Fifth Extraordinary OIC (Organisation of Islamic Cooperation) Summit on Palestine and Al-Quds in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta in March 2016, Zarif stated that Iran will not abandon the policy of supporting the Palestinian cause against Israel, even though the country has been subjected to nearly four decades of western pressure.⁸⁵⁷ Hence, the discourse switched to a rather more confrontational language when the nuclear agreement was reached. Undoubtedly, there are fluctuations in Iran's references to Palestine in accordance with the international context which does not mean, however, that there has been a wholesale sacrifice of the strategic preferences of the state.

In a similar vein, during the Sixth International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Intifada (Uprising) in Tehran on 22 February 2017, President Hassan Rouhani stated that the Islamic Republic believes the Palestinian crisis is the biggest problem facing the Muslim world, adding that the Tehran conference shows "the unbreakable will" of Iranians in supporting the Palestinian cause.⁸⁵⁸ He also stated that "The Iranian people have paid a huge cost for backing Palestinians and opposing the Zionist regime, but they will definitely continue their support."⁸⁵⁹ A very difficult path lies ahead for Muslims to restore the rights

⁸⁵⁶ Ibid

⁸⁵⁷ Financial Tribune, "Support for Palestine to Continue Despite Pressures", 8 March 2016, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/national/37923/support-for-palestine-to-continue-despite-pressures> [Accessed 05 October 2017]

⁸⁵⁸ Financial Tribune, "Rouhani Receives Dignitaries Attending Palestine Confab" 23 February 2017, <https://financialtribune.com/articles/national/60218/rouhani-receives-dignitaries-attending-palestine-confab> [Accessed 20 September 2017]

⁸⁵⁹ Ibid

of Palestine, but a nation that pursues jihad to defend its rights will prevail," Rouhani expressed in typical language

Moreover, these proclamations came at a time when Iran was vying for regional suzerainty with Saudi Arabia and must be read in conjunction with the proxy war of two countries in Syria, Yemen and Iraq. Indeed, those proclamations were made amid reports that the Trump administration, a major supporter of Israel, is discussing the Palestine conflict with four Arab countries, namely Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and the UAE, aiming to settle their differences with Israel and form a united front against Iran.

In other words, it can be safely argued that the revolutionary rhetoric changed to something more pragmatic whenever necessary especially during the presidencies of Khatami and Rouhani. This is because for the reformers and their ambition to open up Iran's international relations, it was not conducive to be radical about the issue of Palestine. The constructive language during the nuclear agreement by Rouhani demonstrates that the Iranian state is capable of changing the discourse towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in accordance with international events.

At the same time during my research, I observed that the revolutionary culture of 'permeating the issue of Palestine is inscribed even in the very linguistic fabric of Iranian cities. Today, there is no major urban area without at least one street or boulevard bearing the names Quds or Palestine. The rejection of Zionism and resistance against the occupation of Palestine are likewise now embedded in the dictionary of contemporary Iran. In this regard, stripping the pro-Palestinian and anti-hegemonic discourses from the dictionary of the Islamic republic would require a revolutionary change of state identity, and therefore a change of regime. In other words, support for

the Palestinians represents a crucial part of the Islamic Republic's DNA, in spite of the fluctuations in the discourse that I have highlighted.

Finally, I would like to add that I am aware of the limitations of this study. It was stated at the outset that my analysis was not intended to be a theoretical excavation of Iranian-Palestinian relations. I used applied theory on the basis of social constructivist concepts. One additional restriction of the study was that it could not cover Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia, Egypt or Jordan in detail. Furthermore, the thesis was not able to provide a detailed analysis of Hizbullah's military and financial relations with the Palestinian movements.

Future research could choose to investigate Palestinian relations with Iran, and how the Palestinian public, particularly the younger generation, perceives the Islamic Republic of Iran. Another fascinating area of research would be to investigate how the sectarian discourse in the region has affected the Palestinian struggle, and how the Saudi-Iranian Cold War interacts with the internal politics and external policies of the PA. Yet another fascinating area of research would be to examine the leadership of the Iraqi Shias approach towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Hopefully, this study provided a small step towards those directions.

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