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# Mediating Identity Conflicts Potential and Challenges of Engaging with Hamas

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**Carolin Goerzig:**

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# Prologue

Armed resistance/liberation movements have become key actors in contemporary conflicts, and as such, they also represent major stakeholders in the transition towards peaceful and just societies, and should be included as primary parties in any conflict transformation process.

These were some of the guiding assumptions behind a recent Berghof-coordinated project, “Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transitions to Politics”, which has sought to provide an opportunity for such actors to conduct some self-reflection on their past or ongoing experience in war-to-peace transitions, i.e. on their goals and aspirations, options and strategies for conflict transformation, and/or on the outcomes of such transition processes.

The analysis and findings presented in this paper do not stem directly from this particular Berghof project, but were investigated in the context of a separate PhD research project. Nevertheless, we have decided to publish them as part of our Berghof Occasional Paper series, since they rest on similar guiding assumptions on war-to-peace transitions, namely, that protracted violent conflicts – especially identity-based conflicts – cannot be transformed without the direct participation of their key stakeholders, and that lending such actors a voice with which they can express their grievances, but also their hopes and visions for a constructive path to “just peace”, might generate creative peacemaking options – in this case, opportunities for a mediated settlement.

Indeed, this paper offers some astute insights into the dynamics of one of the most protracted conflicts of the past century, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from the specific perspective of its most controversial, but also most crucial stakeholder, whose voice is very often excluded or demonised, that of the Hamas movement. Through her so-called “scenario interviews” with several Hamas members in Syria, the author offers some valuable clues into the movement’s understanding of resistance, identity, radicalism, but also its readiness to accept third-party mediation efforts in order to explore possible resolution options. Most crucially, it shows that while demands for de-radicalisation as a pre-condition to talks can be futile and counter-productive, engaging with Hamas through the toolbox of mediation might well turn out to be the most effective strategy to encourage its path towards strategic moderation.

A draft version of this report was circulated to the interviewees, who have approved its content as an accurate representation of their movement’s perspective, with a request to publish an accompanying response, which we have added in the annex. We are thus very pleased to be able to publish this paper as a complement to our recent series of publications written by, or in close cooperation with, members of other resistance/liberation movements around the globe (see Berghof Transitions Series).

Berlin, November 2009

Véronique Dudouet

# 1. Introduction

According to ripeness theory,<sup>1</sup> the prospects of reaching peace without first experiencing the futility of violence are poor. Matters become more complicated when identity conflicts<sup>2</sup> turn this sentence on its head. Resorting to violence after experiencing the futility of peace is an idea that starts to dominate the logic of protracted conflicts, whose zero-sum character<sup>3</sup> defies being ripe to win and let win. Reaching for peace when peace itself has become a source of conflict does not only mean that its prospects are poor. It also means that it risks turning into a weapon of war itself. For example, when the Palestinian Hamas frankly admits that it “makes peace with Israel to show the world that Israel does not want peace”,<sup>4</sup> it merely aims to point out that Israel in turn is exploiting the agreements. In this light, negotiations themselves become pointless at most, a ‘blame game’ at best, or the scapegoat at worst.

Where negotiations are hijacked by zero-sum identity conflicts, the need for mediation<sup>5</sup> is plain to see. Yet it remains a thankless task. Especially when the conflicting sides define themselves solely in negative terms, for example that they only know who they are when they know who they are against, vicious circles of revenge can prevent anyone from ‘breaking the ice’. When asked what would make them recognise Israel, Hamas members emphasise that doing so would mean that their movement ceases to exist. When asked what would happen to Hamas if Palestine were liberated, interviewees paused. Clearly, the organisation gains its strength by capitalising on a unifying enemy image. Israelis are demonised to serve the cause of liberation by any means. Even when asked whether Hamas would compromise its violent means if not its goals, the answer is straight: “You say violence. I say resistance”. One grain of hope persists – interviewed members of the group stress that though they are not willing to talk directly to the enemy, indirect dialogue remains possible. This is where mediation comes in.

According to their self-description, “Hamas started where Fatah ended”. Where, thus the question arises, will Hamas end, and how can an external actor help to accompany a process that will hopefully end in mutual accommodation? What is clear is when Hamas started. It started when it turned Fatah’s peace attempts into a weapon of war. When – during the Oslo Accords – Fatah lost support by recognising Israel without gaining substantial concessions in return, Hamas seized the chance to mobilise support for its continued struggle for a Palestine within the borders of 1948. Hamas abused the “peace” when the “peace” itself turned abusive: “The first Intifada. We wished in those days that there would be peace negotiations. But [through negotiations] things only got worse... you can not go anywhere... how many houses are destroyed... how many people are arrested... how many people are killed... and this is the peace.”

<sup>1</sup> Ripeness theory focuses on the timing of negotiations, claiming that parties only resolve a conflict when they are ready to do so, thus the moment is ripe to look for a way out of a costly conflict. See for example William Zartman (1989).

<sup>2</sup> In identity conflicts, groups feel that their identity (the sense of oneself) is threatened. It is commonly argued that identity conflicts are especially hard to resolve because identity is not negotiable, whereas interests are. Identity conflicts are therefore often described as ‘protracted zero-sum’ situations (see footnote 3 below).

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to a negative sum (or lose-lose) situation and a positive sum (or win-win) situation, a zero-sum situation describes a win-lose constellation in which a gain on one side implies a loss for the other side, such as for example cutting a cake.

<sup>4</sup> The direct quotes in this paper refer to interviews conducted with five Hamas members in Syria in summer 2008. The interviewees have asked to remain anonymous and therefore the quotes will not be attributed to their respective authors. The interviewees have approved the publication of this report and its content as an accurate representation of their movement’s perspective.

<sup>5</sup> Mediation refers to third-party involvement in conflict resolution with the goal of facilitating a negotiated settlement of conflict issues. It can be perceived as a form of indirect negotiation.

This paper aims at deriving lessons for mediating identity conflicts from scenario interviews conducted with Hamas members and leadership in Syria in July 2008.<sup>6</sup> Using scenario interviews is a method of asking hypothetical questions - in this context about possible solutions to the conflict. Typical examples include: what would make you recognise Israel? What would make a major change in the situation possible? Or: how can mediation attempts be improved?

The technique of asking *would*, *could* or *should* questions was applied in order to draw lessons for mediation and answer three crucial questions: who should be the partners addressed to take part? When should mediation set in? And what should the content of mediation be? These questions are as crucial as they are challenging.

The first question asks which partners to address. Should we talk to the more moderate factions or rather to those who are more radical but maybe have stronger support? Which groups can guarantee the implementation of a ceasefire? Which ones cannot? The second question addresses the right timing of mediation. Should an external actor intervene early on in order to save every life possible or could exactly this be clashing with the purpose of long-term conflict resolution, and it would hence be better to wait for the right moment of intervention? The third question is about the content of mediation efforts. Should the mediator focus on symptoms or causes, on political system design or attitude changes? In short: what should the talking be about?

In order to answer these questions, this paper is structured into three parts. After first elaborating on the necessity of external intervention by depicting the zero-sum character of the current Israel-Hamas constellation, the second part investigates the conditions and parameters of this zero-sum situation, in order to eventually derive some lessons for mediation in the third and final part.

## 2. The Necessity of Mediation

In contrast to conflicts of a simpler nature, e.g. economic ones, identity conflicts evoke zero-sum positioning, greater levels of emotion and more complex dynamics (Zartman and Anstey 2008). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a case in point, where Hamas' actions and reactions are no exception. Accordingly, this section will elaborate on the group's zero-sum positioning, heightened emotions and the conflict's complex dynamics, in that order.

### 2.1 Zero-sum positioning

Firstly, the movement clearly rejects the possibility of a win-win process, not least because recent attempts are perceived as having been win-lose: "Don't ask me to recognise those who killed my father, my son, the tree...! I cannot give you my house. People come, steal my house and make it into an internet café. And then you ask me to sit at the same table and talk with you. Would you do it? Could you do it? Could you?" Peace has become tantamount to surrender and loss. From their perspective it has become impossible. "Maybe 30 years ago." Now it is all or nothing: "We must defend ourselves or

<sup>6</sup> Establishing contacts with Hamas members in Syria proved to be somewhat of a feat. During the first interviews in particular, the interviewees ensured that the questions asked were not of a journalistic or even intelligence-gathering nature. Hamas members were initially suspicious of the interviews' purpose. But once these obstacles had been overcome by emphasizing that the research goal is to present the group's point of view, members of the movement were eager to talk and facilitated further contacts.

we will be destroyed.” And with the room for accommodation getting smaller, the movement’s members emphasise, “this is our country. We must have it complete. No centimetre will be left to anyone.” ‘Room’ plays a key role in Hamas’ thinking. Several members emphasise the right to their room, their home. They identify with the lost territory and space becomes crucial. What this means for the peace negotiations becomes even clearer with the following exclamation: “You can not steal my house and then offer me a small room”. Hamas members stress that the movement will remain as long as their ‘house’ is occupied.<sup>7</sup> Recognising Israel would not only foil the entire self-understanding of the organisation. It would also mean that the movement “ceases to exist. It becomes a different Hamas.” And “Hamas does not change, it progresses.” Progress thereby equates to advancing towards liberation. When asked about the future of Hamas in the event of achieving liberation, members perceive this as being “another story.”

Hamas is not only the product of a protracted zero-sum conflict, it also defines itself and hence the conflict dynamics in terms of all or nothing. The group does not accept any form of coexistence with the occupier.<sup>8</sup> Since reaching an agreement through negotiation is ruled out, resistance becomes the main parameter of the group’s *raison d’être*: “Land can not be liberated only through politics, talks, negotiations and pens. It can only be returned through resistance.” Conclusively, the movement demands recognition of its right to resist, referring to the UN Security Council and international law.<sup>9</sup> This self-perception as a group exercising rightful self-defence clearly clashes with its Western label as a terrorist group – unsurprisingly a thorn in Hamas’ side. When asked what resistance and terrorism have in common, members agree that the result is the same: killing and blood. Yet, a metaphor serves to justify their acts:

“Imagine, you have a cup of tea. You go and buy a cup of tea or you take a cup of tea. It is the same thing, you have a cup of tea. And with resistance and terrorism the result is the same: killing, the result is blood. But either you buy it with money or you steal it. The result is the same. But one is legal and one is illegal.”

## 2.2 Greater emotion

Along with the inability to think in more positive terms comes the inability to feel for one another. Clearly, the interviewees were far from empathetic with their enemy. When asked to try to imagine walking in the Israelis’ shoes, Hamas members rejected this as not being their problem. Identity conflicts therefore secondly evoke heightened emotions, adding to the zero-sum character. Concerning zero-sum positioning at its most extreme, one group member summarised his reluctance with: “I would prefer to die than to take food from Israel.” The interviews were thus highly emotionalised, full of anger, hate and despair: “When a person sees how his house is destroyed – it is not about the money, money is not everything – it is about emotions, memories.” References to emotional matters make it far less likely that a ‘simple’ tit for tat exchange will provide a way out of the conflict: “Is materialism everything? What comes after materialism?” Turning to needs which are far harder to rationalise or to realise, one interviewee aptly sums it up: “There is no way that we can negotiate about land. We can not negotiate about our identity!”

Losing touch with reality, with what is actually possible, group members become too impatient to wait for change through negotiated settlement, adding that they are not ready to wait 1000 years to solve the problem, and are eager to point out that decades of negotiating have resulted in nothing. Maybe the interviewed members did see that their goals are near to impossible: “Fiction means you imagine. It is the same with resistance – it is fictitious.” Yet they are equally quick to turn the unreal into the heroic:

<sup>7</sup> “Hamas will remain as long as there is occupation, and will take part with God’s permission in building a nation”.

<sup>8</sup> “There can never be a peace agreement under occupation. We do not accept any coexistence with the occupier. The word ‘peace’ is a wrong word, but it is more like ‘surrendering’. This peace is unjust and suppressive of our rights.”

<sup>9</sup> “But go to the law. In the [UN] Security Council every nation has a right to resist occupation”.

“In our beliefs the true life is in paradise.” A hero often needs an enemy, usually demonised as incarnated evil.<sup>10</sup> Needless to say, Israelis are demonised: “Israel does not understand the language of human rights, or any human language.” Along with demonisation come conspiracy theories: “The Jew is very materialist. The Jew will do bad and will arise politically in the world.” Demonising the foes and emphasising the sense of belonging to the heroes mobilises support. The need to belong and to conform, as pointed out by Zartman and Anstey (2008), results in obedience – sometimes leading to acts that would commonly not be acceptable. When asked why people decide to die in suicide bombings, interviewees pointed to this connection between heroism and belonging to a group: “Because he defends his family, his house, his land”.

### 2.3 Complex conflict dynamics

Thirdly, identity conflicts involve complex dynamics. Oversimplified notions of ‘black and white’, ‘good and bad’, ‘foe and friend’ are a reaction to complex dynamics inherent in the process of shaping identities and identity conflicts. Thus, the structural nature of identity conflicts is often characterised by asymmetry. The weaker side can thereby capitalise on a stronger show of commitment to balance the forces of the stronger side. As a case in point, Hamas stressed that “if you compare our forces to Israeli forces, there is no comparison. But the belief of the Palestinian people will stop the occupation”. Adding asymmetries to this complexity of power and commitment, vicious circles of revenge are inherently escalatory. It was hence noteworthy that the concept of revenge was not explicitly taken up by the interviewees, who emphasised that they are not looking to punish their enemies once these comply with their demands.<sup>11</sup> Implicitly, the notion of getting justice, with reference to killed relatives and other losses, did express feelings and wishes for revenge. Yet, in their self-perception, the notion of self-defence takes a deeper root. “What is terrorism? Who controls terrorism?” Those were the questions heard from Hamas members full of mistrust and disappointment.

Complex conflict dynamics and a lack of understanding for a world seen as unjust and hostile come together with a feeling of lack of control. Oversimplifying and categorising the world into ‘black and white’, ‘good and bad’, ‘friend and foe’ can be seen as an attempt to regain control. The interviews further testified to the connection between control and religion:

“Islamic rules control one’s life. We are the same before God and the belief that is acceptable is the one that comes from yourself. Because you have a mind, you are not a machine. Other creatures do not have any control. The human being has a mind, control.”

Complex dynamics and the need to regain control and simplify the world into clear friend-enemy structures go hand in hand. In doing so, Hamas fuses the political and the religious: “There are a lot of statements in the Koran which say that the Jew is very bad.” It thus answers the need for a unifying, overarching identity which suppresses multiple identities of sister- or brotherhood, neighbourhood or suchlike.<sup>12</sup> One identity based on opposition becomes used to put life in order where order is lost. It unifies and makes sense of what goes wrong and why.

<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, Hamas is conscious that they themselves are demonised in the West: “And look what is freedom in the USA. If you are praying, you are a terrorist.”

<sup>11</sup> When asked whether Palestinians are able to forgive, one interviewee replied as follows: “The prophet – his family imprison him and do not good for him. So he goes out to Medina. After 10 years he comes back to Mekka and liberates Mekka without any blood, without any killers – and then people in Mekka come and ask the same question: ‘What will you do with us?’ and what did he say? He said: ‘Go, you are free. Freedom for you. We are brothers or sons of a brother’. ‘And what will the Palestinians do the Jews?’ ‘Nothing, go free, but you must go out’. And they could visit their holy places.”

<sup>12</sup> For example some Palestinian families are split over supporting Fatah versus Hamas. The opposition can then sometimes become stronger than family ties.



Under these conditions of zero-sum positioning, strong emotions and complex dynamics, negotiations are predestined to fail: “Every deal that calls for living with Zionists will fail because it is against God’s will.” And from there on, roadmaps to peace agreements contain nothing but dead ends. Almost as if he was giving a warning, one Hamas member said: “You will never see on any TV Hamas face to face with Israel. Don’t wait! Don’t wait!”

Does this mean that all peace attempts are futile? Are identity conflicts necessarily zero-sum? Are they primordial? Huntington (1998) might say so. And Jerrold Post (2008) claims in a recent article that hatred is bred in the bone. Interestingly, one interviewee commented that “any student, any baby, believe me, throws stones when he sees these soldiers”. And I asked them: “Why do you do that and are you not afraid that they will kill you?” And they replied, “I dislike soldiers. I can’t stand the sight of them. No, I am not afraid!”<sup>13</sup> Certainly, the roots of identity conflicts grow deep; hence the futility of negotiation does too. Yet, not all different ethnic groups in the world live in hostility. There must be certain conditions which prompt identity conflicts to arise (Zartman and Anstey 2008). In short, identity is malleable. And if this is the case, identity conflicts can arise and cease just as identity can become radicalised or become more moderate.

The chance for moderation is clearly felt in the interviews: “Hamas is not a radical movement. Believe me. Hamas is not that radical”, or: “Our message to the world and to the Jew himself is: We are brothers, but you have stolen my house, I can not give it to you.” And finally: “We are not terrorists. We like life as you like life and we want life as you want life.” This chance for moderation must be taken. And according to scenario interviews with Hamas, it is best taken through mediation. This, for now, is the only step the movement is willing to take.

### 3. The Challenge of Mediation

When asked why Hamas is so successful, members refer to the organisation as being exclusive: “Our behaviour is ruled by Islamic principles. Not everybody who wants to be in Hamas can be. We are elected and selected from society.” The strong in-group identification of the movement is telling: “Unity is very important for us.” In contrast to Fatah, Hamas rejoices in mass support. The ultimate expression of current frustration, resistance until the enemy “will spill the last of its blood” frames an identity that marks a generation tired of pointless peace attempts. Ever since “Fatah ran away from here”,<sup>14</sup> Hamas is seen as an “Islamic movement that defends a great religion”. But “what utility is there for mobilising under ethnic or identity markers?” (Zartman and Anstey 2008). This question is crucial. It determines what prompts identity conflicts and, as a result, whether mediation should focus on symptoms or causes. Rather than disentangling symptoms and causes to decide either in favour of system design or attitude change, fruitful mediation follows a holistic approach and combines attempts at tackling political reforms and perceptions in equal measure. In doing so, it addresses the fact that policy design and issues of perception carry and mutually reinforce one another. It answers to a process in which both go hand in hand in triggering identification with the in-group through identification against the out-group – a process of losing multiple identities – a process of radicalisation (Sen 2006). Unravelling this process of radicalisation is pivotal to deriving lessons for mediation. Therein lies the challenge of holistic mediation – a challenge this subsection takes up.

<sup>13</sup> This anecdote prompted my interviewee to comment further: “Is this baby a terrorist and is the soldier a resistance man?”

<sup>14</sup> Graffiti in a Palestinian refugee camp in Homs, Syria.

### 3.1 Radicalisation

The debate on whether radicalisation is politically or religiously driven is heated. Robert Pape (2005), for example, explains that suicide missions are politically ambitious, aiming at gaining territory. Similarly, Diego Gambetta introduces his edited “Making Sense of Suicide Missions”, remarking that most suicide missions are carried out by secular and not religious organisations. Several chapters in the book then go on to ascertain whether religious beliefs actually “serve as a language in which to clothe political grievances effectively” (2005: ix). And in fact, a statistical survey by Alan Krueger on the causes and consequences of international terrorism confirms that occupation – rather than religion – correlates with suicide attacks. Interestingly, his findings verify that a religious difference between perpetrator and target, and not simply the religiousness of the perpetrators, is most prevalent for suicide attacks.<sup>15</sup> A conclusive explanation for this finding can be found in Robert Pape’s book “Dying to Win”, in which he describes the special commitment which the territory that national groups perceive as the birthplace of their community evokes. The lost territory is mythologised. This process, in turn, is intensified when the alien occupiers value a different religion to that of the occupied: “The harder the boundary between groups – the more exclusive are membership rules – the more extreme is the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy. Religion is normally more exclusive than other national differences under the condition of an occupation and so often becomes the principal defining boundary” (Pape 2005: 87).

### 3.2 Hamas and the process of radicalisation

In the process of Hamas’ radicalisation, religion and resistance are becoming one: “The Koran tells you to be good to any person except those who kill you or throw you out of your house. God orders you not to be good to the person who kills you or throws you out. You must resist.” The success of the group emanates from its ability to offer one all-encompassing identity. It is simple. It is total. It makes sense. The idea that “Hamas is an Islamic Resistance Movement that follows what is written in the holy book and abides by it in every aspect of life – be it political, social or in the relation within the group itself” – makes sense to those followers who urge for an identity where multiple identities have been lost. The statement “I am a political man and a religious man” does not necessarily imply that both roles are dominated by one and the same identity. Yet in the case of Hamas, the right self-description would read: ‘I am a resistance man’. Why the identification against Israel is so strong, and how the process of reinforcing this identification is being accelerated, is explained by a process which can be described as the steady loss of multiple identities.

Radicalisation can be defined as this process of losing identities. While I am not only a sister, but also a daughter, neighbour etc., identity conflicts are characterised by a loss of multiple roles, such that I turn into a resistance fighter and the identities I build up through relations around me are categorised into those who resist with me and those who I have to resist against. Each identity I lose or subordinate to the identity of friend and foe is one step further on the radicalisation ladder.

Hamas members offer many examples and illustrations of this process. And in fact, this process starts early on, meaning that hatred is to some extent bred in the bone. Accordingly, one Hamas member tells us how his father already predicted the holy war: “...I find this belief with my father or grandfather.” The process is taken further during adulthood when the role as a student has to be given up because the school or university gets closed down: “They destroy schools so people cannot go to school so they do not get educated. They closed our school. How to study? I studied in my home. You must see, imagine, feel how the occupation is in Palestine.” And when the young man becomes a father himself, he turns his son

<sup>15</sup> Lionel Robbins Memorial Lecture by Alan Krueger on macro-econometric evidence on causes and consequences of international terrorism at the London School of Economics (21st - 23rd February 2006).

into a resistance man: “Leaders of Hamas are examples of how a person should be. They put their own sons in the front lines of the resistance movement for the sake of jihad. I have eleven children and will do everything so they join the movement.” When interviewing Hamas members in their offices in Damascus, one room was full of children who are being educated by the movement. And even daughters become part of the liberation struggle: “A girl must usually ask her father or brother or her husband whether she can go out, for example to the market. There is only one condition that she can go out without asking: if the enemy invades your country. She can go out alone to fight and resist.” This exemplifies the loss of identities. This loss becomes especially apparent when conflict lines cut through Palestinian families, splitting them into Fatah and Hamas followers. Family roles are lost to the resistance.

All interview partners had something in common: a high degree of education. Yet education is also subordinated to resistance: “Hamas is a university.” And in fact, the members describe the main body of the movement as coming from an educated background: “We are engineers or students from universities.” When asked why an educated young man decides to become a suicide bomber, the answer reads as follows:

“I am an engineer. I asked my movement many times to do this. I am ready for this. Look, this is a belief. Life is not everything. The material world is not everything. The other days are more important than these days. Everyone believes that his life must end. Whose life will not stop? A great man wants to stop his life by a great part. Our belief is that if you resist an occupation and defend your family and society, that this is a great thing. When my movement needs to resist, I am ready for that. This is what makes these students do this.”

Education, the role of a student, an engineer – a great man becomes defined in terms of resistance. Multiple roles become subordinated under one purpose. And even the entire world is divided into friends and foes: “There are weak Arab governments, as well as European governments who claim to champion human rights and democracy, but they turn a blind eye to Palestinian suffering.” With the danger of polarising society along identity lines (Zartman and Anstey 2008), the manifestation of the clash of civilisations turns into a self-fulfilling prophecy. It is also a self-serving prophecy taken up by those who are eager to capitalise on radicalisation, eager to divide the world into clear conflict structures. Along with the loss of identities comes despair: “I am as lonely as a person in the sea.” Resistance becomes the purpose of life. The result is violence: “Any human being or even animal - if you push him into the corner, attacks.”

Several counterproductive policies have contributed to this loss of identities. Divide-and-rule policies, for example, foster polarisation. And this is how Palestinians feel – divided. They refer to British colonial rule and its subsequent division of the land.<sup>16</sup> They refer to the US as arbitrarily dividing them into Hamas and Fatah. And they refer to Oslo, which “divided the land and the people themselves.”

A further element driving radicalisation is punishment, especially when it comes to the punishment of relatives: “My wife has a Jordanian Passport. She cannot go to Palestine because I am a resistance man. This is the story about the Palestinians.” Punishment by proxy pushes both the directly and indirectly punished into a corner. It fuels hate. Equally often felt during the interviews was a feeling of humiliation and its twin, pride: “I think it is better to die than to be weak and to cry to the Jewish ‘don’t kill me’.” Territorial conflicts in particular eliminate control and autonomy and lead to the subordination of the occupied.

But the most direct source of a forced loss of identities and thereby of radicalisation, is violence itself. Because “if those people killed were a relative of yours, if your brother, sister, father or mother was

<sup>16</sup> “British occupation divided Arab countries into parts. Maybe because of the religious background, maybe they think Arab countries are dangerous. So it must be divided to control and weaken them. You know that unity is strong and divided it will be weak. So the big question is why British occupation divided these countries. Maybe there are borders, rivers, different nations. But we are Arabs, the same nation, the same language, the same belief, no borders, no rivers, no seas, no mountains, it is the same.”

killed and you could kill those responsible, would you do it?” Sarcastically, one interviewee burst out with hate and repulsion: “If anyone kills my father, I cannot smile at him and say thank you.”

Instead, young students turn into suicide bombers and “smile when they go to their death”. Because he who kills himself becomes “a hero in the other life”. That means he will get “a high regard in paradise, the same regard as a prophet”. Asking further what that means, an interviewee brings up a simple analogy: “If somebody offers you one million dollars in two years but 100 million dollars in five years, what would you say? If you compare the other life to this life, there is no relation”. But why, the question arises, is the “other life” so much more important than this life? The interviewee answers by pointing out that every pleasure must end. “But in the other life the pleasure does not end, it will grow. In our beliefs, paradise is the true life.” He goes on to describe how the pleasures of being rich, having a nice car or being with a beautiful girl are only of limited duration and how they are not satisfactory: “In spite of being rich, one feels no pleasure.” When identities get lost, sense gets lost. What is left is hope for the next life: “Because the other life will be nicer than this life.” The logical conclusion is to accelerate movement towards the next life. The final identity determines everything: “Resistance is like the head on a body. Without the head, the body is meaningless and loses its soul.” Resistance becomes the meaning of life and life becomes tantamount to the ‘other life’. The interviewees considered that the conflict will not be there in the next life. Poignantly, one of them summarises the hope and desperation of one last identity: “After the Palestinian issue is solved, everything will be ended.”

Yet, the process of losing identities must be reversible. Clearly, Palestinians long for their identities to be restored:

“Where is my mother? Where is my brother? I am lonely. I am lonely here. And I am one of millions of Palestinians. Is it hard or not? Life has no value. I want to see my mother. I want to see my father. I want to see my school. Can this be solved by money? Money is not everything. I am lonely like a person in the sea. Money is not the matter. I am very rich. I want to see my family, my old mosque, my street. I want to see the storm, the earth, everything. Money is not worth anything.”

He, just like many others, wants his identities back. And this is the challenge for mediation: how to encourage the re-establishment of multiple identities, how to liberate multiple roles of sister- or brotherhood, neighbourhood or otherwise from this one overarching identity of hate?

## 4. The Opportunity of Mediation

Mediators who face the challenge of re-establishing multiple identities also face multiple risks. One risk for an external actor lies in the danger of becoming integrated into the conflict structure, of becoming a part of the zero-sum game itself.

One Hamas interviewee stated that it was better to die than to be weak. Negotiation is seen as a form of weakness or surrender. In consequence, Hamas considers force to be the necessary complement of any negotiations. In fact, they perceive force as being necessary to pressure Israel into signing a ceasefire in the first place: “They cannot understand any civilised language except the language of weapons. Only through that language can the occupier sit down at the table so as to sign a ceasefire agreement with the Palestinian people.” Ironically enough, and at the same time telling, the movement perceives its terrorism

label as a tool used by the US and Europe to pressure them into recognising Israel.<sup>17</sup> Pressure is certainly not helpful. It fosters polarisation and the closing of windows of opportunity. As a result, negotiation and mediation attempts turn into a conflict tool. Thus, Hamas stops the violence in order “to tell all the world that Israel does not want peace”. And there is more. When being asked about the strategy dominating Hamas’ interests in mediation, the group is frank: “We cannot liberate Palestine completely all at once.” It intends to push Israel back incrementally. Any results of (indirect) negotiations are seen as temporary solutions: “Our long term goal is the return of all Palestinians to where they belong.” Jimmy Carter’s visit<sup>18</sup> was therefore seen as helping their purpose: “His visit was very beneficial to this movement and to the Palestinian people.”

Where there is risk, there is opportunity. And mediation is opportune when it is able to go beyond the boundaries of negotiation. As elaborated briefly in the introduction, (at least) three major questions arise: who should the mediation address? When is the right time for mediation? What should the content of the mediation be? Let’s go step by step.

#### 4.1 Who should the mediation address?

The first answer is simple: mediation should address a negotiation partner with whom mediation is necessary. There is still abundant debate on whether radicals can and want to be negotiation partners, whether the respective group can guarantee the implementation of agreements or whether addressing the wrong parties implies giving them recognition.

With Hamas, mediation is necessary. As shown above, negotiation without the help of an external actor is no longer possible. The group insists that there is no direct dialogue between Hamas and Israel, “only indirectly”. The advantage of mediation – talking without talking – optimally addresses those who cannot talk directly to the adversary without the risk of losing their final identity, which is their purpose of resistance. If a group is actually left with one and only one cause, it cannot suddenly change. It cannot take the risk of recognising the enemy directly, which in a zero-sum constellation would be tantamount to negating itself. Clearly with Hamas, mediation is necessary.

But is the group too radical to engage with? Hamas has made it clear that it is willing to accept mediation offers. Therefore it is not too radical to reject external intervention. In fact, this is a move of moderation, which is signalled by the group’s willingness to engage. Thus, Hamas is starting to accept a reality which is no longer solely determined by its own total vision. It depends upon achieving a ceasefire with Israel: “The ceasefire (*houdna*)<sup>19</sup> was in the interest of the Palestinian people. *Houdna* is permitted and encouraged in our religion so people can take a break from violence, to reorganise.”

Obviously, the idea that Hamas should use the truce to reorganise is not encouraging. Yet making moderation the precondition for talks – as with the recognition of Israel or giving up on violence – could in fact be counterproductive. This becomes especially apparent if we try to walk in Hamas’ shoes. From the perspective of Hamas, depicting *houdna* as the first step on the liberation ladder is surely essential. When group members state that “our issue with Jews is one of existence, and not borders”, it becomes clear that for Hamas, its survival as a political force is at stake and that this survival is what matters to the movement. If “Hamas started where Fatah ended”, one wonders whether Hamas might take the same trajectory and end where Fatah has done. After all, Fatah did not do itself any favours in terms of electoral support when it recognised Israel without receiving substantial concessions in return. However, since

<sup>17</sup> “What is the point of labeling someone a terrorist in today’s situation? It is just a tool of the US and Europe to pressure Hamas into recognising Israel”.

<sup>18</sup> Jimmy Carter visited Damascus in April 2008, where he met with the Syrian President as well as with Hamas’ exiled leader Khaled Meshal.

<sup>19</sup> The *houdna* was offered by Hamas in 2008. For more see for example Wright (2008).

Hamas is keen to avoid suffering the same fate as Fatah, any move towards moderation can only be a result of concessions and not a precondition for negotiations. Khaled Hroub (2006: 156) is absolutely right when stating that Hamas would lose a great deal if it compromised its main position regarding the recognition of Israel without a guarantee of substantive gains for the Palestinians. Such a compromise would become tantamount to political suicide. And not only this could be the outcome. If Hamas cedes grounds to Israel without gaining respective concessions, new groups would emerge capitalising on the 'sell out'. If Hamas actually comes to end where Fatah did, the question is what will start next. Clearly, the vicious circle of de-radicalisation and (re-)radicalisation would unfold as a never-ending story. The respective worst-case scenario, according to Hroub, is the instigation of a civil war. Up to now, the non-recognition of Israel thus also remains a strategic ace, which can only be played in case of an emergency. But before that happens, Hamas will not put its cards on the table.

The group is very well aware of the asymmetry of forces between the two antagonists: "No Arab country has weapons like Israel". Considering this asymmetry, members replied to the question of what would be a realistic solution as follows: "We are dealing with the reality of Palestinian plight. Without giving up on our rights and values, we are very realistic with the whole meaning of the world. But most of the world does not understand our reality." Addressing misunderstandings and hostile perceptions is a task for the mediation process, and the more this process can allow space for multiple identities to grow, the greater its potential for re-constructing a common understanding. Pressuring a group into talking, e.g. through labelling it a terrorist group and thus warning that it is too radical, is just as counterproductive as Hamas' attempts to pressure Israel. The reaction to pressure is defiance, self-victimisation or simply resignation. In an e-mail discussion with a Hamas member all three elements of this reaction could be felt. When asked to brainstorm about ideas for conflict resolution, he replied that "it is good to be immovable for good goals and I appreciate your constancy for seeing world peace, although it is an ideal perspective, right? Sister, it is not our fault." And later on: "When I negotiate with the occupying authorities, I give them a legal right to stay in my country. This is dangerous". That it is dangerous for Hamas to do this is explained in part by the above-mentioned dynamic of defining oneself in terms of opposition. But what explains this dynamic more closely? In the case of Hamas, not recognising Israel has literally become the basis of existence. And this is also due to Israel's pressure. Hamas could capitalise on this pressure, unleashing a dynamic of radicalisation. Thus, a member of the movement sees "no climate of moderation in world policies nowadays" and asks "why should we be moderate, when we are the victims?" Hamas perceives the reality of an asymmetrical conflict. Yet it rejects the idea of halting the struggle: "Just because somebody is stronger does not mean that we will stop fighting!" The group is very well aware that it can capitalise on a strong commitment and on deploying the weapons of the weak: "Israel is not invincible. I remember as a kid that once Israeli soldiers came to our street, carrying big weapons. One of my friends took a rock and threw it at one of them and hit him on his leg. And suddenly they started running away." Similarly, interviewees recapture with delight stories in which heroes of the past achieved victories against superior forces. Clearly, the support of the population is a great asset for Hamas:

"Any liberation movement depends on the power of the people who were expelled from homes and farms, who want to go back to their properties, while the occupying side depends on soldiers brought from here and there, taking salaries. So no force can defeat the power of the people and their existence. This is primary in our dogma. People's force is like water. In water, there is the particle of hydrogen that can be more dangerous than the nuclear bomb. This is the balance that we see."

But even an asset like this can turn into an Achilles' heel. Because the population is becoming more and more resistant, facing pressure and shortages of goods and freedoms, Hamas cannot cede any ground to Israel: "If we give up on our homeland, then our children and the generations to come will not forgive

us". For its supporters, a movement that sits at the same table with those who are responsible for the pressure and shortages cannot be perceived as legitimate any longer, but is then seen as corruptible. As a case in point, Fatah has paid the price for selling out the cause. And as this price is too high for Hamas, the challenge for them is to use mediation as a tool to improve the conditions for Palestinians while simultaneously insisting that this is not coupled with recognising Israel. Accordingly, when asked about the reasons for calling the ceasefire in 2008, Hamas members state that the goal was not only to ease the suffering, but also to rearm and reorganise. And they take it even further and sell the *houdna* as a victory – as a result of their struggle: "We can say the resistance obliged the occupation to withdraw its troops from Gaza and this is what made the government of Olmert sign the truce."

In fact, the most direct result that emerged from the scenario interviews was that Hamas members simply cannot see, nor even imagine, a peaceful solution. But does this mean giving up on peaceful approach altogether? No, on the very contrary, this is what makes mediation necessary. And these more radical movements are the groups with whom mediation is necessary. Because steps towards moderation, as this section has elaborated upon, can only be the result of concessions, not vice versa. But naturally the situation is more complex. Israel is obviously in the same position. If its government compromises too much, it is equally threatened by internal dissent. Ironically, the mutual pressure on both sides turns the spiral of violence into a game of chicken, in which neither side can be the one who gives in first. Yet, neither side can empathise with the other side, as becomes apparent for Hamas in the following interview excerpt:

“Q: The Israelis expelled the Palestinians. But at some time they were expelled themselves in Europe.

A: But this is not my problem! If they are victims as they believe, it is not my problem.

Q: So you think the Jews should go back to where they were killed?

A: Already 1,000,000 Israeli people returned.

Q: So they should go back to where they were slaughtered and gassed?

A: It's not my problem. You ask me to solve the German problem!”

Where moderation and mutual empathy are already a given, mediation might not be necessary. Where empathy is missing, mediation has to build it. The fact that a group is not too radical for mediation, if it is willing to accept it, does not yet mean that it can implement possible agreements, such as a ceasefire. Still, Hamas has shown that it enjoys a large amount of support among Palestinian people. Palestinian refugee camps are full of posters, graffiti and other symbols of support for Hamas. The group's strong election results are equally telling. It is because the group is comparatively radical and offers a simple logic of resistance that it ensures support, which the more moderate Fatah – infamous for being corrupt and giving in to fruitless peace agreements – has lost. When asked whether the movement could guarantee a ceasefire, one member turns this guarantee into a means of pressure: "Zionist occupation understands that Hamas is not just like other resistance movements that will easily agree to any offer. If Zionists break their agreement, our people are ready to react and due to the strength of resistance, Hamas can guarantee such a reaction." Generally, a group that can mobilise more support and is more radical – meaning less willing to compromise on substantial issues – can have a stronger capability to guarantee a ceasefire.

The question remains as to whether choosing a more radical partner implies giving recognition. Jimmy Carter's visit was therefore highly criticised for lending Hamas greater legitimacy. And in fact, Hamas members state how beneficial his visit was to the movement because "he saw that we are moderate, that we appeal to broad audiences". Calmly, the group wants to appeal to broad audiences and more importantly, to be seen as moderate. Giving recognition to small radical factions might indeed undermine the work of more moderate movements. Yet having won the elections, Hamas can no longer be ignored. And as elaborated above, not giving recognition but pressuring the other side instead can result in the

opposite and play directly into the hands of those who gather support for a violent approach. Pressure and misrecognition can surely be neatly used to oppose any peace attempts:

“An election pushed by the USA, Europe, Russia... but the result was contradictory to the interests of the occupation and Western mode, so they refused it, imposed a siege and stopped even humanitarian support. Where is the democracy, so where is the mediation?”

Thus, it was also due to immense pressure that Fatah lost support while Hamas gained it. It was also due to immense pressure that the Palestinian population began turning away from Fatah. Instead, mediation might show a way out by engaging those groups who are too radical to engage in negotiation, but moderate enough to accept mediation. Mediation is necessary with those groups who have enough support to guarantee a ceasefire and enough support not to be ignored, but to be addressed.

#### 4.2 When is the right time for mediation?

The second answer is intuitive: mediation should come in early rather than late. And also follow-up questions arise here: when is it early enough without being too early? Why is earlier better than later? And when is too late?

The timing for mediation might be premature when negotiations themselves are still potentially productive. But mediation is overdue when negotiations are doing more harm than good. What does this mean in the case of Hamas? It means that the point is overdue when “the word ‘peace’ is more like surrendering.” It is overdue when Hamas members demand: “Give me one example anywhere in the world where people were liberated without violence.” And it is overdue when “we stopped the violence for some aims: to tell the entire world that Israel does not want peace.”

Why is earlier better than later? Because every life lost fosters radicalisation and every life saved prevents it. As elaborated above, violence is the most direct source of the loss of identities. This is intuitive enough and has been widely confirmed – violence itself is a cause of violence, war a source of war. But if this is the case, mediators should not wait until the best moment for long-term conflict resolution to come. This moment may never come. It is especially unlikely to come when mediation itself is supposed to be the main catalyst of this moment. It is especially unlikely to come when violence has reached a point of no return.

A point of no return is close when mediation itself becomes a conflict tool. This is the case when the mediating actor is perceived as a part of the conflict itself, when polarisation is becoming a global matter, when there is no neutral actor left because the world is already entirely split along conflict lines. As a case in point, Al Qaeda justifies its acts by holding everybody responsible. Citizens in the US become part of the conflict because they pay taxes to the US government, which supports Israel. Literally everyone becomes part of the struggle. From the near enemy (Israel to Hamas) to the far enemy (the US or European citizen to Al Qaeda), radicalisation reaches the point of no return. Has Hamas reached a point of no return? Is the group merely exploiting Egypt’s or Jimmy Carter’s mediation efforts? As mentioned above, the group accepts the mediation also because it realises the necessity of a ceasefire. Therefore mediation can be a productive tool for bringing a conflicting party ‘back to reality’. And when a party accepts a mediation offer, it accepts confronting reality. Even if it was taken into serious consideration, and blending out all the pragmatic impossibilities, mediating between Al Qaeda and the rest of the world is something that Al Qaeda would probably never take into consideration. Hamas in turn clearly rejects Al Qaeda’s stance:



“Another thing is that Hamas is not isolated from other parts of Palestine. It is related to all Islamic movements, except Al Qaeda. Attacking civilians in Europe is not good, it is not Islamic. If a foreigner occupies you – it is resistance. But not to go and attack in Madrid or Germany. That is not part of our principles. Every day we advise them: This is not our behaviour. This is not good. It is not Islam to attack civilians.”

Still, Hamas cannot be said to spare civilians from its attacks. Violence is clearly ranking high on the movement’s agenda. And they also sell this violence as a reaction to the various peace attempts:

“All liberation movements act in two ways – military and peaceful. They cannot go to the second path without crossing the first one. Palestinians’ resistance by the two paths is known. The second pathway has lasted two decades up till now and nothing has been achieved by it.”

This is exactly the right moment for mediation: when negotiations are doing more harm than good, when they are contributing to violence, not peace, when they are becoming the source of radicalisation.<sup>20</sup> And this becomes especially apparent when negotiations result in the emergence of splinter groups or new radical movements, to which the history of Hamas itself testifies. (Re-)radicalisation with the emergence of new violent groups is the clearest indicator that negotiations are doing more harm than good.

Applying the when question to Hamas by asking whether the current moment is right for mediation, or whether it is already too late, opens the question of whether the radicalisation process can be reversed through mediation. This brings us to the next and last question: what should the content of mediation be?

#### 4.3 What should the content of mediation be?

The respective third answer is counter-intuitive: rather than striving for ultimate conflict resolution, mediators should not be too ‘ambitious’. Why? The answer is because they risk becoming a part of the conflict structures themselves. And developing a stake in the zero-sum game prevents them from imaginatively looking for new rules of the game. Of course, a deal should remain beneficial to both sides, thus preventing it from being perceived as mere surrender and guaranteeing a win-win situation. The reason is that “if the mediation is to reward all those occupation practices, the mediation will be a free and silly reward”. In consequence, current peace attempts are not regarded as beneficial:

“What takes place at the moment is not peace. In Islam, ‘just peace’ is when everyone benefits and is happy. What they want us to do is accept defeat and surrender. There is a difference between surrender (*istislam*) and peace (*salam*). In surrender, the enemy rules over you. In peace, you are equal with the enemy. You are free to do what you choose.”

Yet striving for a win-win solution is not only difficult but can create new problems, opening Pandora’s box for further radicalisation processes. Re-establishing multiple identities is a long-term process and cannot happen overnight. This is especially the case in zero-sum identity conflicts, in which the conflicting parties identify themselves by identifying against the opponent. If these parties were to end the conflict at once, they would lose their one and only remaining identity. Recognising the enemy becomes tantamount

<sup>20</sup> “Mahmood Abbas can not go from town to town in the West Bank without permission by Israel, although he is one of the engineers of Oslo and moderate according to their assessment, and that after two decades of peace talks and peace process”.

to neglecting oneself. This is simply too risky and lies at the heart of refusals to negotiate. Mediation is exactly opportune because it allows for establishing a relationship with the adversary without the risk of losing the identity of resistance. It enables talking without talking, recognising without recognising, so that a (slow) process of deconstructing hostility and re-constructing common ground can set in.

Recreating multiple identities and 'liberating them' from the one overarching identity of hate means giving space for multiple identities to grow, which is a slow process, a process of shifting perceptions. Daily issues are carriers of perceptions and identities. In consequence, changing practical matters, e.g. through political system design, will bring about a change in perception. Mediators should hence address these daily issues. Otherwise they risk being hijacked by the zero-sum identity conflict as well. The art, it seems, is to mediate between radicals without turning radical oneself and, more importantly, without turning into a source of radicalisation either.

Matters are more complicated when an abrupt change takes place in such a way that one cannot follow. If hatred is really bred in the bone, it does not suddenly wear off, even if a political solution has been reached. In this context it is easier to understand the slow and indecisive reaction from Hamas when asked what would happen in case of liberation. And when mediation becomes a part or, worse, a tool of the conflict, finding new imaginative ways out will become harder and harder. The conflicting parties will instead be confronted with frustrated hopes, feelings of betrayal and humiliation. For now, Hamas still perceives mediation as being beneficial (in contrast to negotiations). This window of opportunity should not be closed. Identities have to be differentiated and re-developed. After all, identity cannot be negotiated. It can only be transformed – step by step. And what such steps could be and what is beyond negotiation for Hamas is well summarised in the following quote by a movement member:

“We can negotiate about daily issues (electricity, water, fuel). We can negotiate about temporary ceasefire. We can negotiate about terms of release of captured soldiers. We can negotiate about little details here and there, but there is no way that we can negotiate about land. Land to us is part of our origin, our religion. We cannot negotiate about our identity. We cannot negotiate about our principles. We absolutely cannot negotiate about the rights of Palestinian people, which are land, holy places, the right of return, the right of resistance. Under no circumstances shall we negotiate about any of our principles.”

Another interviewee makes exactly the same point, stressing that “Hamas will only talk about daily issues.” Yet only a little later, the same person asks: “How can one speak of peace without talking about borders and statehood?” It becomes apparent that members of Hamas are torn. Obviously, peace is also a struggle. But instead of addressing one big conflict based on one overarching identity, many small day-to-day conflicts should be discussed and lived out in the open. Conflicts are also identity-shaping experiences. And this might be the clue to establishing multiple identities: instead of structuring life around one separating border, many small frontiers should be confronted. Because “the more we confront them”, so, the most encouraging sentence heard in the interviews, “the more human they look to us”.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper argues strongly in favour of engaging with Hamas using the toolbox of mediation. In order to optimise respective conflict resolution attempts, scenario interviews were conducted with Hamas members with the goal of deriving lessons for the ‘who, when and what questions’ of mediation. Based on field interviews, the findings can be summarised as follows: firstly, mediation should address a negotiation partner with whom mediation is necessary. Secondly, mediation should come in early rather than late. And thirdly, mediators should not be too ambitious. All three answers suggest the need to engage with Hamas, to do so soon, and not to expect too much.

The perspective adopted is a result of talking with Hamas members and therefore reflects these interviewees’ views and positions to a certain extent. Although the interviews did not always make it possible to paint a very optimistic picture, this paper nonetheless retains a firm belief in a positive outcome of engagement.

Here, Israel’s position is not taken into account to the same extent and any promising conflict resolution attempts should consider that, naturally, it takes two to tango. This paper might be limited by a certain bias that comes along with conducting interviews. In fact, some argue that interviewing groups such as Hamas and giving them a voice implies buying into their self-serving discourse and becoming a mouthpiece for their propaganda.

However, the agenda driving the research at hand is rather more explicit: this paper looks for insights into conflict resolution emerging from talking to Hamas members. It attempts to give a possibility of expression to otherwise excluded voices, which is why the reaction of one interviewee to this paper is printed below.

The goal of the scenario interviews conducted for this paper was to search for the potential of turning the disappointed and disillusioned remark “and this is the peace” into ideas on what the peace *could* be. In fact ideas did emerge, leading to the more moderate remarks that “we respect that Jerusalem is a world city” or “the resistance cannot be narrowed down just to suicide bombings.”

Where there is a turning shift towards moderation and towards accepting a different reality, this opportunity has to be seized. And mediation does this when it capitalises on the possibility of ‘talking without talking’. There is a possibility of establishing new identities without immediately compromising the one and only identity of resistance. Neighbourhood relationships can be re-established, for instance. Daughters or sons can be educated for purposes other than resistance. Religion can be taught for purposes other than resistance. Admittedly, the space between upholding a hostile identity and the growing of new identities is small. But the complicated balancing act would be worth it. Zero-sum conflicts are not primordial. We do not always know who we are only when we know who we are against. What if the very opposite were the case?

Maybe Hamas feels that identity based on confrontation cannot last forever. Maybe the movement has this in mind when claiming it would cease to exist upon recognising Israel. And maybe it wants to shake off this overarching identity of hate when it states that: “our God tells us fighting is not good, it is imposed. We must do it to defend ourselves or we will be destroyed.”

One interviewee told me that a clever person is advised by others, that a clever person advises himself from others’ faults. Yet Hamas justifies its violence with Israel’s violence and requests with insistence: “Give me one example anywhere in the world where people were liberated without resistance!” It uses violence to show “the entire world what the Jewish occupation does with Palestine.” And it also uses the peace to show the world that Israel does not want peace. But what a surprise it would be to Hamas if it was to be shown that Israel does want peace after all.

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# Annex 1: Reply to Carolin Goerzig's article by Ing. Yaser Kasem, Hamas Political Official

- The real peace that stands on good will of the two struggling sides can not be a tool of war and violence. We waited for Israel and the West for two decades to fulfill the promises of peace, but the conclusion is more settlements and more killing of Palestinian citizens.
- Hamas takes its legitimacy from the Palestinian people who see the Israeli soldier as an occupier. That is why it took the lion's share of the elections in 2006. Hamas' principles are not different from the people's ones.

So the recognition of Israel does not end Hamas because Hamas does not take its legitimacy from Israel, but by doing this it contradicts the ambitions and dreams of people, such as establishing the state of Palestine, return of refugees, etc.

- The coexistence with the non-Muslim is not prohibited in Islam. The prohibited thing is coexisting with the occupier, which is considered a shame and dishonor.

Umar ibn al-Khattāb, after liberating Palestine from the Romans, reluctantly agreed to the Christians prohibiting Jews from residing in Jerusalem.

During the time of liberating the Arab world from the Roman occupation or during the spread of the principles of Islam in the non-Arab areas, non-militants were protected by Muslims themselves. Most non-Arab people embraced Islam without wars. After the end of the Islamic rule there, people continued their lives as Muslims. They did not deviate.

On the other hand, during the Western conquest of the Arab world, and recently in occupying Iraq, for example, thousands of civilians were massacred and slaughtered.

In the last few months, the Israeli army bombed populated areas in Gaza Strip with prohibited weapons, and the Western community did nothing.

In history the Jews lived alongside Muslims with dignity and peace. When the Christians dominated Spain and expelled the Muslims, the Jews freely followed the Muslims to Morocco.

Now, Islam is accused of terror and violence. When a Palestinian carries out an operation against the occupiers in Palestine, he is called a terrorist in the Western media.

- Yes, Hamas is very different to Al-Qaeda. Hamas considers killing non-militants a sin. The battlefield of Hamas is on the occupied land of Palestine.

Hamas hates the occupying Jew in Palestine not because he is a Jew, but because he is an occupier of land, expeller of citizens, confiscator of land, rooter up of trees, racist, refuter of rights, etc.

Hebron, September 2009