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Hamas – They’re not bad, they’re just drawn that way

By [Mary Rizzo](#) • Oct 19th, 2009 at 16:24 • Category: [Counter-terrorism](#), [No thanks!](#), [Culture and Heritage](#), [Hasbara Deconstruction Site](#), [Israel](#), [Newswire](#), [Palestine](#), [Religion](#), [Resistance](#), [War](#), [Zionism](#)



WRITTEN BY MARY RIZZO

In many parts of the West, certain political parties or movements are treated as if they come from the Moon or are alien to any body politic. Their existence among the people is always scrutinised as negative, transitory and something created in a boardroom or a backroom, imposed upon an unsophisticated public that is unable to differentiate a true political programme from empty and simplistic rhetoric. These parties or movements are depicted as if they only address the margins of society who are disenfranchised from any “normal” democratic bodies, and thus, are ramshackle bands that represent a minority constituency. Given their oppositional nature to pre-existing parties, they are outfitted with the label that will serve to keep them isolated from the structures that are already in operation. All of this is to destroy the party or movement by propaganda work rather than analysis of reality.

An entire mythology has been built around the Palestinian resistance movement (which morphed into a party) Hamas. This construct has actually taken on more legitimacy as a factual interpretation of Hamas than the facts themselves. In most of the Western media, no matter if it is on the right or the left, and in some of the “moderate” media in Arab countries, the very name of the party is coupled with terms such as “fundamentalist”, “radical” or “terrorist”. Clearly, this serves to create a **fear trigger** that will remove the word from being critically and honestly evaluated. The listener will immediately identify Hamas with a negative connotation and is removed from responsibility for understanding that this is a manipulation of reality. The listener is expected to accept the claims that Hamas is “anti-democratic” and “fanatical”. It is child’s play to then convince the listener that Hamas is Bad, that it is the Enemy of all We represent (in our own eyes, tolerance, democracy, Goodness itself). It is possible to then extend that reading to the belief that action must be taken against them, that they are a **“cancer that must be gotten rid of”**, as quoted by the institutional peacenik, [Noa](#). How does one eradicate a cancer, once it has been diagnosed? By extirpation or bombardment. With cancer treatment, one “bombards” even the healthy parts of the body with toxic agents, waiting to see if after the battle there were enough healthy parts remaining to allow the

organism to continue to exist. Once you have set into the minds of millions of people the idea that destruction is good, because the enemy is just so damaging and evil if allowed to exist, the risk of bringing the entire organism to its grave by weakening it dramatically is taken as a viable risk to run. This is a way to make them justify actions that their own eyes don't see as therapeutic, but are pure horror and evil.

How did it work that the world was so fooled and allowed Israel to destroy Gaza to "get rid of Hamas"? It was quite simple, and it's always the same answer: Israel and its allies keep people disinformed. Those who actually will go slightly below the screaming headlines of the newspapers might find out a few facts buried that that will contradict the spin, but not that many people will go that far, given that they are exposed to something with an element of truth buried deep within. If that were not problematic enough, even the "progressives" have done meritorious services to rendering Hamas untouchable. They might accept them as a "resistance movement" but they won't allow their personal ideological bias to see Hamas as a progressive force for their own people's advancement. This may be out of conviction, convenience or even lack of research or a blindspot that does not allow variations on the theme of the class struggle, where everything is "international" and the same type of rules and ideals should be considered applicable and necessary for all, going so far in some cases to "import democracy" under various more or less aggressive forms.

These people, many of whom are armed with good intentions, have chewed, swallowed, and are spitting back quite a few of the outright lies and distortions that are part of the mythology created by opponents of Hamas, created in Israel and the West, primarily.

What are the components of that mythology?

- 1) Hamas was created by the Israeli Mossad.
- 2) Hamas represents a marginal portion of the Palestinians.
- 3) Hamas turned democratic enough just to be able to obtain some legitimacy to later take over and turn the Palestinian Territories into an Islamic State.
- 4) Their victory in the polls was nothing more than a protest vote against the corruption of Fatah.
- 5) Hamas is comprised of a bunch of illiterates and their electors are sucked in by their own ignorance.
- 6) Hamas is a fundamentalist group and therefore inflexible and incapable of any modification or evolution. The oft cited Charter is used against them to stress that they are simply a radical, destructive group poised for Holy War.
- 7) Hamas does not seek any kind of compromise with other Palestinian political parties or factions, and are therefore the divisionary element that prohibits of the unity of the people.
- 8) Hamas operates to indoctrinate their people with hate propaganda in order to utilise them as cannon fodder.
- 9) Hamas is a terrorist group that exists only thanks to financing by "fundamentalist regimes".

That Hamas is merely a resistance movement has been thoroughly disproved by the elections, but this seems to be the safe place that activists can cluster in order to allow themselves to be able to tolerate Hamas, while wishing for their quick demise. They are not viewed then as having a true heritage as a political party that can be compared to those of "democratic nations" of the "international community", and thus, analysis of them can remain at an elementary level, lending itself to hasty generalisations.

I ask my readers to kindly forgive all the inverted quotation marks, but these words do become ironic and empty of true meaning when they are applied to the objects indicated by the spin doctors, whose task it is to do the bidding of the hegemonic powers. How can a minority of a handful of nations that always pits itself against the will of the remainder of the world community in the UN be considered as the "international community"? It's a boy's club that excludes practically everyone. How can a country that puts in office the candidate who obtains the lesser amount of votes be called a "democracy"? It is when we start to question our own foundations that we can detect that there is a lot of convenience in presenting any opposition as being an enemy and outside of paradigms that we consider to be core to our expectations of how to establish a just and equitable world.

It's time to debunk a few of these myths with facts.

1) **Hamas was not created by Mossad.** Although Israel does like to claim credit for many things, this one is not their doing. Political Islam in Palestine has had a presence since the early 40s in Mandate Palestine, and Hamas was born as part of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan*), with many of its early leaders formally affiliated. It was the experience of refugeehood that turned Hamas into a more autonomous element with a

particular nationalist basis to it, a natural result of the urgent and real human situation of displacement and loss of their cultural and national identity.

There were close relations of this group with the Egyptian base, and the first offices of the *Ikhwan* in Palestine were created in Gaza in 1945, led by a member of one of the most important families of the zone, Sheykh Zafer al Shawwa. During the first Arab-Israeli war, Islamist volunteers reinforced the ranks, coming primarily from Jordan and Syria, and this support showed the refugees that the *Ikhwan* had the courage to defend itself, even during the “Israeli War of Independence”. The growing number of refugees gave a stronger identity and sense of purpose to the Islamist movement in Palestine. Therefore, in the civil society and in the population in general, a motivation from any other source was not required to be able to pledge: “I promise to be a good Muslim in defending Islam and the lost land of Palestine. I promise to be a good example for the community and for others.” These were the words spoken by those who swore their loyalty to the *Ikhwan* in Palestine (source: Beverly Milton Edwards, “Islamic Politics in Palestine”, p. 43). The local *Ikhwan* had its own agenda, defending its lost land. It didn’t require fanaticism, outside influence or even propaganda. The refugees themselves were living proof of the horrors of deportation and suffering. The identification as part of an international movement was concomitant with the recognition of the particularity of the Palestinian experience. The official foundation, dating 9 December 1987, was only the culmination of an organisation in the works for decades. Organised Islamic resistance was further utilised when the situation precipitated dramatically in 1967 and a new generation was born as refugees. For this generation, a return to Islam was considered as a necessity for the moral and political future of a people that was being literally destroyed. The cause of the Nakba was seen by many as the result of the distancing from a normal society, the Palestinian one, in which the ethical, religious, cultural and traditional values had been devastated by the occupation, and the descent into further degradation, poverty, disenfranchisement and social instability was seen not only as the result of the occupation, but part of its cause.

The “international community” would not come to the rescue of these people, the rest of the *Ummah* was not caught up in their national struggle, largely because they were not directly involved or were even prohibited from involvement. The extreme pain and disgrace of losing one’s land at that time was a new element to the area, where previous colonisation avoided expelling the indigenous inhabitants, and throwing off the usurpers was not complicated with the total loss of roots and a base. The basis for the formal dimension of Hamas was thus present for decades prior to its official birth. In order to operate, being under the thumb of the occupation, these organised groups that existed had established charities and benefit organisations for their people. These institutions were tolerated by Israel in the Occupied Territories. Israel conceded some operating space through granting of licenses. As General Yitzhak Sager said in an interview to the *International Herald Tribune* in 1981, the Israeli government “...gave money that the military governor allocated to the mosques [...] the sums were used both by the mosques and the religious schools, with the purpose of reinforcing a subject that would contrast that of the Left that was in favour of the PLO.” If there was some motivation for Israel to be involved, it was really as an act of ‘divide and rule’, a bit of tolerance, a bit of economic support to the various religious associations in order to see if an opposition to the nationalists of the PLO could develop. They really were only looking for a way to see the weakening of the PLO, which was gaining some support in the West, and they did not found, provide major financing or in any way influence a movement that they would in some way infiltrate or control. That is pure mythology. Why give Israel credit where none is due?

2) That Hamas represents only a marginal portion of Palestinians is another myth to debunk. It is indeed true that all Palestinians are not refugees, and it is also true that virtually all of the leaders of Hamas were born in exile or at some point were subjected to the experience of expulsion and loss of their homes and possessions. This is a core Palestinian experience, and it is true that even those (few) Palestinians who were not uprooted can identify with the loss of their cultural and national identity, and all of them know that their national aspirations and cohesion as a group have been destroyed by Israel. Thus, even a movement or party that has its own identity in the refugee camps and in exile or in religious roots, is recognised as an intrinsic, legitimate and natural representative of Palestinians as a whole. They even obtained the majority vote in areas of the West Bank that were not considered as Hamas strongholds, as well as obtaining votes from many Christian areas.

3) The myth that Hamas turned “democratic enough” just to get its foot in the door as the first step of forcing an Islamic State upon the entirety of Palestine is a very widespread one, especially in the progressive circles that do not recognise the popularity of the movement or who have an ideological prejudice against any religious movement. There is much to be said in favour of separation of church and state, but this of course is something that cannot be imposed from afar, and furthermore, there are many

levels of separation to take into consideration. Those who subscribe to this position of “ Hamas buying time before introducing the Sharia ” tend to deny that a democracy has certain characteristics, and it is not necessarily a synonym of “ secularism ”. When the word “ democracy ” is applied correctly, it has certain characteristics, and Hamas meets these. Hamas has popular consensus. It has an internal structure that is autonomous and recognised as legitimate by its constituency. It follows the rules of elections, meeting the requirements for participation. Once elected, it assumes its role within the existing system, not having overthrown or staged coups against established structures. It is a political movement with several factions (some of them armed, as is true of many parties in areas under occupation, Fatah included) with a history and an organisation. There is widespread discussion among its constituencies, including those who are political prisoners, prior to making decisions, and the majority decides the actions to be undertaken. If one thing must be said about it to set it apart from parties that Westerners are familiar with, highest level leaders generally do not assume the governing roles. This is understandable in a party where a great quantity of the leaders are routinely assassinated by Israel. That the current political director, Khaled Meshaal, must live in exile after having once been victim of an attempted assassination says more about this anomalous situation than a thousand words can.



Palestinians wave Hamas flags during a celebration rally in Gaza
June 15, 2007. (Suhail Salem/Reuters)

4) That Hamas’s victory in the Legislative Council election was nothing more than a protest vote (another pet theory of the left) was brilliantly illustrated as false by Paola Caridi in her very good book (despite the sensationalist subtitle) “ Hamas, What it is and what the Radical Palestinian Movement Wants ”, published by Feltrinelli and only available in Italian at this time. I am translating a few paragraphs that deal with this question.

“ There is a precise political reason for which the majority of Palestinians voted for Hamas. It is a reason that concerns the decision made by the Islamist movement formally on 23 January 2005. (translator’s note, a year prior to the Legislative elections): a unilateral truce, reached together with the Islamic Jihad (that had instead broken it on several occasions), which had turned words into facts: that there would be the end of the season of terrorist attacks made by Hamas inside Israel as indicated within the confines of the 1949 armistice, the Israel within the Green Line, in other words. The ending of suicide attacks in Israeli cities, substantially bringing an end to the Intifada as well as (Hamas’s) participative choice is interpreted by the Palestinian population as a precise political proposal: an alternative to those who had governed and controlled them, holding the hegemony up to that moment. A proposal that poses at the same time new de facto limits to Hamas’s resistance strategy. The Islamist movement has not been, therefore, chosen only as a protest against the corruption, patronage and inefficiency of Fatah, which as a party is often confused with the PA. Corruption, patronage and inefficiency that are related, at least from a temporal point of view, with the failure of the Oslo Accords and the “ facts on the ground ” realised by the Israelis.

“ The people of Hamas were considered people who are serious, who did not enrich themselves at the expense of the population, in fact, they continued to live in normal neighbourhoods and in the refugee camps. ” (Caridi, p. 171).

5) An extremely offensive smear, oft repeated, is that Hamas’s followers and its leaders are a “ bunch of illiterates ” or “ religious fanatics ”. Almost all the leaders are (or were, given the number of assassinations within their ranks, the past tense is de rigueur) university graduates in fields ranging from medicine and physics to jurisprudence, economics and theology, is testament itself that this smear is

merely to throw dirt on them and paint them as having read only religious texts and therefore “under-developed” when compared to other movements. Education has always been one of the pillars of Hamas and its charity work. The people of Palestine don’t need to be told this, it is a reality for them, where in many cases without this foundation, Palestinians would be left wanting in this area.

6) The inflexibility of Hamas is another myth, especially yanked out when speaking of the 1988 Charter (*Mithaq*). Shiekh Hamed Bitauri, “religious authority of Nablus, president of the Union of the Palestinian *Ulemas*, known for his radical positions had no problem confirming that ‘the Charter is not the *Qu’ran*. We can change it. It is only the synthesis of the positions of the Islamist movement in its relations with the other factions, and its politics.’ Aziz Dweik, founder of the Department of Geography of the University of Nablus, later to become the spokesman of the Palestinian Parliament after the 2006 elections, and imprisoned in Israeli jails since the summer of that year, went even further, declaring the political and pragmatic necessity of distancing from the *Mithaq* of 1988 to Khalid Amayreh, Palestinian journalist that is sensitive to Islamist positions, he said that ‘Hamas would not remain as a hostage to rhetorical slogans of the past like those of the ‘destruction of Israel.’” (Khalid Amayreh, *Hamas Debates the Future: Palestine’s Islamic Resistance Movement Attempts to Reconcile Ideological Purity and Political Realism*, in “Conflicts Forum”, Nov. 2007, p.4) (Caridi p. 90).

Haniyeh has mentioned on many occasions that the Charter has been surpassed in its substance by the other official documents, the most important of which, the Electoral Programme of the Reform and Change List (the list in which Hamas ran for office). This programme is structured like a document that goes far beyond the needs of a political campaign, according to the leader of Hamas, and it indicates the policy of the movement. It was not written in the heat of the revolution of the Intifada, and reflects the evolution of the party. The changes present are not ideological so much as ones of a strategic and political nature. The positions have been reiterated so many times in interviews and public interventions, it seems incredible that the complexity and maturity of Hamas should by now not be apparent to everyone. It is clear that they are still dedicated to the liberation of Palestine, but they are attempting to achieve it through reaffirmation of the rights of the people, knowing full well that as a party, Hamas is not equipped to overthrow the occupation in any practical way or to destroy what they recognise as a reality.

Many of us who follow events in the Middle East hope that they do not surrender to pragmatism so far as to recognise Israel not only as a reality, but as a “Jewish State”, however, we must watch from the sidelines and evaluate facts. The people of Palestine will be vigil about what rights are being surrendered, if any, and many of us believe that backs to the wall, they will not capitulate and lose what they know is theirs for reasons of political expediency. Hamas too is aware of this fact.

7) Hamas has been far less divisionary than its principle counterpart, Fatah. The Gaza “coup” that shocked and saddened the world was actually a preventive measure to the thwart the planned takeover by the Fatah forces faithful to Dahlan (in collaboration with Israel). That Hamas was the party that was awarded victory by its own people has never been recognised by the “international community” that nevertheless pushed for elections and insisted that this was the necessity for Palestinians, because this would mean that the resistance had been granted legitimacy and would become policy within the governing body, the rejection of negotiations as sub-alternates with Israel, which was Fatah policy, had been officially sanctioned by the populace and it would only be a matter of time before the programme would become policy. So, any steps by the Fatah “Security Forces” to overtake Gaza would actually have been the coup. But in the backwards way of viewing events, fuelled by disinformation, the tragic bloodbath between Palestinians prevented the real overthrow of democracy that would have taken place had Dahlan had the chance. Again and again, Hamas has sought to work together with the opposition party, and this is something they would not tolerate in the vain hope that their economic advantage and political *nulla osta* from the boy’s club would allow them to command even in absence of the popular mandate to do so.

8) It’s not necessary to use propaganda to show to Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and in exile, and even to many within Israel, the ongoing destruction of the Palestinian civilisation and people. Blockades, bombardments, assassinations, war, checkpoint humiliations, restrictions, separation of families, imprisonment and further abuses are not isolated incidents, but they are the daily bread and water of Palestinian life. No one needs to invent a rage over a phantasmagoric enemy. There is a real one that is subjecting the people of all ages and conditions to humiliation, deprivation and death. Showing a man in a mouse costume to insist that children are being indoctrinated in hate might go down well with the uninformed masses, but a glimpse into the reality makes Farfur look like the sweetest kind of way for a child to assimilate and tolerate that he or she is a prisoner doomed for life to suffer in the most atrocious

way for being born as a lesser being in the oppressors' eyes.

9) The worst smear against Hamas is the one to keep them as the symbol of evil: that they are a terrorist group, financed by “rogue States in the axis of evil”. Bearing in mind that their financing is abysmally inferior to the gigantic economic and “military aid” package given to Israel by America, Canada and many other nations in the “international community” in an official way, why should the claim of foreign financing be considered as unacceptable when it is simply the way that Israel keeps afloat through billions of dollars annually, up front, and heaven only knows what other financing comes in through the thousands of “charities” that are really little more than fronts for mass immigration to Israel to curtail Arab growth? If Zionism and its charities are considered as legitimate and noble, why are Islamic ones put on blacklists and the donors treated as if they are financing terrorism? There is a double standard here.

That Hamas has rejected terror operations against civilians and did its best to do so in the service of achieving a realistic improvement for the life conditions of its people is an authenticated fact, corroborated by none other than the *USA Congressional Research Service*, a Think Tank that basically presents its conservative and Israel-friendly positions to the Congress so that they become policy. In fact, in the document coordinated by Jim Zanotti <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40101.pdf> *Israel and Hamas, Conflict in Gaza (2008-2009)*, we see that the quoted “reason” for the onslaught of Gaza to “cleanse it of Hamas”, the rockets fired into Israeli territory, was nothing but an excuse that the West drank down with gusto as if it were cherry juice. The extremely rudimentary rockets were recognised as NOT having been launched by Hamas, and not only that, Hamas was viewed as being able and willing to suppress the attacks. It is significant that the first victims of the Israeli attacks in Gaza were the regular police forces who had just been trained, perhaps also for this purpose. Zanotti writes:

For the first five months, the cease-fire held relatively well. Some rockets were fired into Israel, but most were attributed to non-Hamas militant groups, and, progressively, Hamas appeared increasingly able and willing to suppress even these attacks. No Israeli deaths were reported (although there were injuries and property damage), and Israel refrained from retaliation.

Nevertheless, each party felt as though the other was violating the terms of the unwritten ceasefire. Hamas demanded—unsuccessfully—that Israel lift its economic blockade of Gaza, while Israel demanded—also unsuccessfully—a full end to rocket fire and progress on the release of Israeli corporal Gilad Shalit from Hamas’s captivity.

Israel cited the sporadic rocket fire as justification for keeping the border crossings and Gaza’s seaport closed to nearly everything but basic humanitarian supplies. Hamas, other Arab leaders, and some international and non-governmental organizations involved in aiding Gazan civilians complained that Israel was reneging on its promises under the unwritten cease-fire agreement.

If that were not enough, the author, certainly not sympathetic in any way to Hamas, makes statements about the aftermath of the war where even Israel admits that Hamas was not responsible for the rockets:

Since Israel’s unilateral ceasefire began on January 18, 2009, there have been about 40 sporadic rocket launches into southern Israel, far fewer than occurred on average per day just before Operation Cast Lead. Moreover, Israeli officials believe that smaller militant groups, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades, and not Hamas, have fired the rockets, as they did during the cease-fire (although it is possible that Hamas is enabling or acquiescing to these attacks while preserving deniability).

So, Israel used the excuse of Hamas rocket launches to justify the elimination of Hamas (by means of destruction of the entirety of Gaza) through what they call “military operations” but the rest of humanity knows is war, while they were aware that Hamas was neither the author nor the facilitator of the rockets, any kind of excuse they pull out of the magic hat to justify their actions should fall on deaf ears. Complaints about arms smuggling through the most rudimentary of tunnels should stink to high heaven when we see the Defense Budget Appropriations for US-Israeli Missile Defense Programs in that same Congressional Report. Iron Dome, David’s Sling and other “military aid” costing the American people billions of dollars are described briefly. For every five ineffective bottle rockets that are smuggled through a tunnel, the USA is flying in full cargoes of arms and cases of cash to be spent by Israel for their military “needs”. The double standards here also draw innocent blood in violation of international law at the expense of your hard-

earned money. Again, from the Congressional report:

Israel may have used weapons platforms and munitions purchased from the United States in its military operations in Gaza, reportedly including, among others, F-15 and F-16 aircraft, Apache helicopters, and, according to Israeli press reports, GBU-39 small diameter guided bombs approved for sale by the 110th Congress following notification in September 2008.

Additionally, all unilateral truces between Israel and Hamas (called by Hamas, not by Israel) were broken in every case by Israel. In many cases, making incursions into the Occupied Territories, which legally they are prohibited from doing, as civilian populations under occupation (even if the “settlers” have left, Gaza is kept under siege by Israel) are required to be protected by the occupier, not attacked. Israel, using weapons and planes supplied for them by the good graces of the people of the United States, bombarded streets where their targets (politicians and clerics that Israel terms as “militants” if not worse) were located, killing in an indiscriminate way anyone in the range, children included. If that’s not terrorism, the word has no meaning.

These are only a few of the myths in circulation. They represent just a portion of the lies, disinformation and hasbara that circulates about one of the major Palestinian parties, born from within, developing as all parties do, from below, and legitimised by fair and legal elections. Debunking these lies is a duty. One doesn’t need to agree to the entire programme of Hamas, but one is obligated to recognise that they are entirely different from the image that they have been straightjacketed into. What Jessica Rabbit said in the film, “Who Framed Roger Rabbit” could very well apply to Hamas: **“I’m not bad, they just draw me that way.”**

This article is part of the Palestine Think Tank and Tlaxcala initiative *The First Word War against Disinformation*. If you would like to contribute your own original articles to this initiative, send them to contact@palestinethinktank.com or to tlaxcala@tlaxcala.es

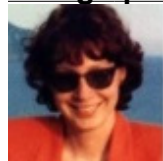
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3 Responses »

1. [nahida](#) on [October 19th, 2009 at 17:07](#):

Mary dearest

Thank you for such an honest, insightful and brave article
