



**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center  
at the Center for Special Studies (C.S.S)**

October 9, 2005

The socio-political makeup of “Hamastan” (a Palestinian radical Islamist state, ruled by Hamas), as described in interviews granted by Mahmoud al-Zahar, a senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip. An alternative to the Palestinian Authority, the agenda presented by Mahmoud al-Zahar is based on strict enforcement of radical Islamic codes in politics, society, and culture. “Hamastan”, according to Al-Zahar, will become an inseparable part of the global radical Islamic effort spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood.



**Mahmoud al-Zahar:** striving to establish “Hamastan”, a Palestinian state of Islamic nature imposing on its residents strict Islamic codes in all the walks of life (Photo: Al-Jazeera Television, September 2005).

■ As part of the Hamas-run propaganda campaign for the coming Legislative Council elections (January 2006), Hamas spokesmen are asked on the issue of the **makeup of the Palestinian Authority and the political, social, and cultural agenda** that Hamas offers its voters, beyond its military activity. In several interviews recently granted by Mahmoud al-Zahar, a senior Hamas figure in the Gaza Strip, he exposed Hamas' socio-political worldview, which the movement intends to impose on the Palestinian population should it win the elections and attain a position of influence.

■ In interviews granted by **Mahmoud al-Zahar** to the Ilaf<sup>1</sup> website (October 1, 2), he addressed, among other things, the makeup of the Islamist Palestinian state according to Hamas' worldview, brushing aside accusations made against Hamas by its opponents. **What follows are the main themes addressed by Mahmoud al-Zahar.**

- **The establishment of a moral Islamist Palestinian state, as opposed to the corrupt West.** According to Al-Zahar, should Hamas win the elections, it will establish a state **based on the principles of Islamic religious law that will become part of the Arab and Muslim nation** (“why should a nation with one culture, one language, one religion, and one history not come together under a single banner?”) The Palestinian state, based on religious law, will forbid men and women from dancing with each other (“a man holding the hand of a woman and dancing with her in front of the people—is that the way to serve the national

---

<sup>1</sup> An inter-Arab online news website with an Egyptian bent, unaffiliated with any official elements. The website, considered trustworthy, occasionally features reports on the Palestinian issue.

interest?") Homosexuals' rights will be denied ("a minority of mental and moral perverts"). In Al-Zahar's view (similar to the views spread by other radical Islamic elements worldwide), permissiveness and intermingling of sexes, combined with the decadence and the growing number of homeless, are to blame for the corruption that prevails in the government structures. "The men [of the West] are interested in turning the family into a swamp of corruption and decadence and they spread profanity and terminal diseases in the name of absolute liberty [i.e., permissiveness]." In the Islamist Palestinian state, every citizen will be required to act in accordance with the codes of Islamic religious law, already instated, as he says, in the Palestinian Authority administered territories, in which matters of constitution, marriage, inheritance, acquisition, and selling are based on Islamic laws.

- **Criticism over the corruption and permissiveness that prevail in Western countries.** Throughout the entire interview, Mahmoud al-Zahar stressed that the Hamas movement had Islamic ideology and culture and that the Islamist Palestinian state would have no interest in holding contacts with Christianity or Western countries, where corruption runs rampant. Within this context, he criticized the permissiveness that prevails in Western countries (bringing up the permissiveness in Sweden as a negative example).<sup>2</sup> Western democracies are presented by Mahmoud al-Zahar as countries ruled by "the law of the jungle, anarchy, AIDS, and the homeless." In the political aspect, however, he considers the European community a **positive example** of a region that succeeded in uniting politically,

---

<sup>2</sup> "Three months ago, [Sweden] approved a marriage of a man to a man and a woman to a woman. Is that the democracy we want?"

economically, and constitutionally, despite the many wars it endured throughout its history.<sup>3</sup>

●  **Hamas’ view of the Taliban.** Mahmoud al-Zahar rejected the claim that the Hamas movement was willing to reenact the Taliban’s experience in Afghanistan, saying it was a false claim raised by Israel and the US. Speaking in a condescending tone, Al-Zahar said that the Hamas movement was not a replica of the Taliban but rather **its superior**. According to Al-Zahar, the level of education of Hamas women is higher, the movement has social and political institutions, and women in the Hamas movement hold positions as well.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, he **speaks in the Taliban’s defense**, claiming they should not be blamed for things that should be blamed on the West. Furthermore, Al-Zahar’s words reveal **his sympathy for the Taliban** and his clear reservations of the US occupation of Afghanistan and making Karzai the country’s president (“the spy brought in by the Americans”).

● **The corrupt nature of the Palestinian Authority as opposed to the virtuous nature of Hamas’ worldview.** The way Mahmoud al-Zahar described Hamas’ political platform presents an obvious antithesis to the Palestinian Authority. It is, according to Al-Zahar, a corrupt Authority, cooperating with the (Israeli) “enemy”. He considers the corruption to

---

<sup>3</sup> Echoes of Al-Zahar’s Islamist view, disqualifying Western secularism (primarily in its social aspects) can be found in an essay published by Ayman al-Zawahiri, Al-Qaeda’s second-in-command, in early 2005. See: Ayman al-Zawahiri, *Tahta Rayat al-Quran: Tahrir al-Insan wal-Awtan Tahta Rayat al-Quran* (Under the Banner of Quran: The Liberation of Men and Countries under the Banner of Quran), Al-Sahab Publishing, January 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Zahar’s statement can be seen as an attempt to appeal to Western public by a positive reference to educated women. On the other hand, his statements against homosexuals, the AIDS disease, and the homeless will be perceived negatively by a liberal Western public.

be widespread among the Palestinian society as well, where in recent years favoritism, bribe, and prostitution are becoming more common. Mahmoud al-Zahar presents Hamas as a pure movement striving to root out corruption both in the political and in the social sphere, **knowing that a platform of war against corruption will strike a cord with the Palestinian public.**

- **Total avoidance of cooperation with Israel and termination of expressions of normalization with it.** The Islamist Palestinian state will **totally avoid cooperating with Israel in the fields of security, politics, or economy** (“is it conceivable that our weak economy be connected with Israel’s economy, to which the US provides at least 3 billion dollars a year?”). According to Al-Zahar, **“terminating the cooperation with Israel in each and every field is a national interest.”** However, he is aware of the difficulties inherent to the implementation of such a policy, and therefore does not present a clear course of action with regard to severing the existing ties (“all at once or as a gradual process”).
- **Presenting Hamas as an organization that cares for the wellbeing of the population and praising the civilian infrastructure (*da’wah*) it formed.** Mahmoud al-Zahar rejects claims that Hamas’ rise to political power will prove detrimental to the wellbeing of the population. As an example of Hamas’ care for the citizens’ wellbeing, he brings up the social and educational institutions (*i.e., da’wah*) established by Hamas, which serve **the families of martyrs and detainees. Mahmoud al-Zahar therefore admits of (and even takes pride in) establishing the “charity associations” and other civilian infrastructure institutions**

by Hamas, which provide assistance, among other things, to those killed (i.e. shahids) and detained in the course of the confrontation and comprise a significant component of the terrorist-supportive infrastructure.

- **The economic policy of the Islamist Palestinian state.** According to Al-Zahar, the Islamist Palestinian state will **open its gates to investments from Arab countries**, so that it **does not need investments and donations from Western countries**. The reason he cited was that in exchange for the investments, Western countries will intervene in the Palestinian state's decision making and dictate its policy ("we do not extend our hand for projects from the West"). It is therefore another expression of a radical Islamic worldview that can also be seen in other extremist Islamic movements.

- **Vagueness with regard to integrating Hamas' military infrastructure into the security apparatuses of the future Palestinian Authority.** In the future, said Al-Zahar, a formula will be found that will allow both sides to cooperate for the sake of the "national interest". However, he refused to specify how, in his opinion, Hamas' military infrastructure will be integrated into the Palestinian Authority's security apparatuses. **Leaving the issue unclear**, he stressed that "there is no reason to talk about it" before the election results were known.

- **Blaming the Palestinian Authority for the anarchy while making it clear that Hamas will refuse to disarm, even if it enters the Legislative Council.** In response to an accusation that Hamas is responsible for the atmosphere of violence that prevails in Palestinian society, Mahmoud al-Zahar lays the blame at the Palestinian Authority's door, accusing it of **losing control of its security apparatuses**. According to his (false) claim, Hamas' arms were never aimed at Palestinian civilians, and the claims spread about Hamas regarding this issue originate in "the Devil's advocate". **However, when asked whether Hamas' entry into the Legislative Council would oblige the movement to surrender its arms and turn to political activity, he replied, "this is a shallow, simplistic claim, since the sole purpose of the guided weapon (*al-silah al-murshad*) is to actively oppose the enemy. Therefore, entering the Legislative Council cannot be contingent on such a stipulation."**

- **The continuation of the violent confrontation against Israel until its annihilation.**

- ❖ Mahmoud al-Zahar attributes to the Zionist movement the desire to take over the region between the Euphrates and the Nile and expresses a radical worldview seeking to **establish an Islamic Palestinian state across the entire territory of Palestine, including the territory of the State of Israel.**

- ❖ Hamas intends to turn the arms in the Palestinian Authority administered territories into “**combat arms**” that would defend the state’s borders in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. **These arms are also needed to establish a Palestinian state in the 1948 territories.**
  
- ❖ Al-Zahar **denies the Oslo Accords** and lashes out against Abu Mazen’s concept that denies “the intifada’s militarization”. He claims that this concept failed when a defeated Israel left the Gaza Strip **as a result of the armed struggle spearheaded by Hamas.**
  
- ❖ Within this context, it should be mentioned that in an interview granted to Newsweek (August 30, 2005), even though he tried to present Hamas as a moderate movement, Al-Zahar stressed that **the continuation of the armed struggle against Israel was the right choice and that Hamas had no intention to embrace a policy of holding negotiations with it.**

■ Mahmoud al-Zahar’s statements were made following Israel’s disengagement from the Gaza Strip and **prior to the Legislative Council elections**, a transition period characterized by **significant tension between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The Hamas movement, attempting to poise itself as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority, presents a radical Islamic worldview of the image of the future Palestinian state, fundamentally different than that of the secular state led**

by the **Palestinian Authority**, having its source in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist movements.

■ This worldview **might appeal to significant parts of Palestinian society**, particularly when it is set against the backdrop of Fatah's lack of a clear, unified political agenda. At the same time, however, it **distances Hamas from other sectors** that do not support the movement's radical Islamic views (more so in the West Bank than in the Gaza Strip).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it **intensifies already existing concerns in the international community over its integration into the establishmentarian political system.**

■ **In summary, Hamas' worldview with regard to the makeup of the Palestinian state**, as it is reflected in Al-Zahar's interviews, is as follows: A Palestinian state of **radical Islamic character**, an extension of the **radical Islamic stream led by the Muslim Brotherhood**, which holds close contacts with Islamic Arab countries. It is a state where secular and non-Islamic (Christian) elements will be forced to **embrace radical Islamist codes in all walks of life**; it is a state that **does not cooperate and severs its ties with Israel and Western countries**, holds close contacts with other Islamic Arab countries (obviously, with radical Islamic movements as well), and **embraces a strategy of armed struggle (i.e., terrorism) against Israel until its annihilation. Such a state would be, in fact, of a radical Islamic nature. It will be run by Hamas, the state of "Hamastan"**. Indeed, when asked by a Newsweek reporter (August 30, 2005) whether the Gaza Strip would become "Hamastan", Mahmoud al-Zahar responded: **"It should be Hamastan."**

---

<sup>5</sup> Hamas is stronger in the Gaza Strip, a region of homogenous Islamic population characterized by more conservatism and traditionalism compared to the West Bank.