Unstable Axes:

Hamas, Syria, and the resistance of `Abd Allah `Azzam

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Introduction

The scene was surreal from several angles. Rif`at al-Asad (1937-2026), the exiled brother of the recently deceased Syrian president, was praying by himself on the twelfth floor of Saudi Arabia's opulent hotel overlooking Mecca's Grand Mosque, quietly, scornfully observed by another important guest of the Kingdom. Having been ousted from his native Syria after an abortive coup-attempt against his brother, Hafiz al-Asad (1930-2000), in 1984, the oligarchic paramilitary leader had maintained a considerable network of supporters in the Ba`th Party while in exile, particularly in the mountainous northwestern region that the Asad brothers hailed from originally. In fact, Rif`at maintained the title of vice-president throughout most of his exile. His very presence in the hotel, the reserve of Saudi Arabia's diplomatic guests and patrons of the Kingdom's political and financial support, betrayed his enduring influence in Syrian politics, as he was fervently jockeying for power in the wake of Hafiz's death.[1]

Another recipient of Saudi hospitality at the elite hotel, Ibrahim Ghosheh (1936-2021), did his best to avoid Asad's attention. Having been a member of the Muslim Brotherhood since his youth in the 1930s, Ghosheh had many comrades who participated and became "martyrs" in the Islamist cause against the Asad regime during the 1970s and 1980s. As spokesperson for Hamas, Ghosheh was accustomed to uncomfortable, awkward interpersonal exchanges undertaken for the sake of politics. He had plenty of experience with Rif`at's brother, who had directed Rif`at to undertake his scorched earth tactics, but Ghosheh could not stomach even a

[1] Alan Philips, "Brother Claims He Is Assad Heir," *The Telegraph*, June 13, 2000, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/1342671/Brother-claims-he-is-Assad-heir.html.

brief interaction with the exiled Syrian, praying across the room oblivious to his Palestinian-Jordanian observer.[2]

"[While praying], I saw from a distance a person I never wanted to see because of his role in the 1982 massacre in the Syrian city of Hama namely Rif`at al-Assad. Of course, I tried my best to avoid seeing him or allow myself to be seen."[3] Recalling this near encounter nearly a decade after the fact in 2007, Ghosheh, though apparently retired from his leadership position in Hamas as the result of an agreement with the Jordanian government that secured his reunification with his family in Amman, displayed unique candor towards the Ba`th regime's violent repression of Islamist dissidents and rebels in the northern city of Hama in 1982. A foundational figure in the movement's early history, Ghosheh undoubtedly sought consent from the movement's leadership, his former comrades, for publishing a memoir with potentially incendiary effects on the sensitive Hamas-Ba`thist dynamic in Syria. The same year that saw reports circulate in Israeli media that Tel Aviv and Damascus were engaged in talks to exchange the restoration of most of the Golan Heights to Syria in return for the Asad government's cessation of military support for Hamas and Hizballah.[4] Among the reported terms for this potential agreement would be the expulsion of Khaled Mish`al, leader of Hamas's Political Bureau. Despite the distance of Rif`at from the halls of power in Syria, Ghosheh's inclusion of the anecdote nonetheless carried inherent risk in its characterization of the razing of Hama as a massacre, as this implicated the current regime's leadership alongside Rif`at as an individual.

At the time of the encounter in 2000, the succession process for Rif`at's brother, Hafez al-Asad (1930-2000), was underway, but Rif`at himself expected to leverage his support among the

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[2] Ibrahim Ghosheh, *The Red Minaret: Memoirs of Ibrahim Ghosheh (Ex-Spokesman of Hamas)*, trans. Hassan Ibrahim and Salma al-Houry (al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations, 2013), 250.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Akiva Eldar, "Israeli, Syrian Representatives Reach Secret Understandings," *Haaretz*, January 7, 2007.

`Alawite-dominated security institutions in Syria along with his allies in the Gulf states to gain a footing in the new regime, perhaps achieving a head start in potential elections. Ghosheh's apparent disgust at the thought of facetime with a potential power-player in the uncertain terrain of Syria under new leadership attests to the fundamental tension at the heart of his movement's relationship to the Ba`th regime that hosted its leadership from 2000 until 2011. The Hamas-Syria partnership defined what later came to be known as the "Axis of Resistance" alliance between Iran, Ba`thi Syria, and nonstate Lebanese Hizballah and Palestinian militant factions, yet the relationship necessitated an intentional amnesia by both Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brothers, and the Ba`thist regime. Both sides had to "forget" the acrimony between Hamas's heritage organization and the Syrian government throughout their partnership. Their dynamic became impossible to reconcile once the uprising against the Ba`thist regime in 2011 brought memories of Hama and previous Islamist resistance to the fore, forcing a reckoning between the strange bedfellows. After Hamas' exit from Syria in 2011-2012, the Axis of Resistance shifted its locus away from the conflict with Israel towards the Syrian arena, staying there until events in 2023 would once again radically shift the dynamics of the alliance.

The Axis of Resistance, from the term's origin in Iranian and Arab press in response to US President George W. Bush's 2002 spurious labeling of Iraq, North Korea, and the Islamic Republic of Iran as an "axis of evil"[5] until the 2020's, (prior to 2024) comprised the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Arab nationalist Ba`thist regime in Syria, Hizballah, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad (henceforth referred to as PIJ). Similarly, the expansion of ties between the Zaidi Shi`i Islamist movement in Yemen—Ansarallah, which seized wide swaths of the country's north

[5] Ana Soage, "The Conservative-Resistance Camp: The Axis of Resistance," in *The Regional Order in the Gulf Region and the Middle East: Regional Rivalries and Security Alliances*, ed. Philipp Amour, Regional Rivalries and Security Alliances (Springer International Publishing, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-45465-4_4.

after the onset of the Arab Spring—and the various actors of "the resistance front" has cemented a definitive Yemeni role in the Axis.[6]

Tracing the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood's development from a transnational-institutional perspective that privileges Hamas' *ikhwani* continuities, I argue, reveals fundamental differences in epistemological, geopolitical, and ideological goals between Hamas and its erstwhile cohorts in the Axis of Resistance. The instability of this alliance was apparent in the early tensions between Damascus and Tehran in their marriage of convenience, particularly apparent in the disagreements over Iran's level of support for Hizballah in Lebanon. During this same general period, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Syrian branch of the Brotherhood waged a campaign of armed struggle against the Syrian government. Despite both the solidarity of future Hamas figures with the Ba`th, including Ghosheh, and the reticence of the Palestinian Brothers to work with a regime that its members and comrades considered un-Islamic and even tyrannical, the Syrian Ikhwan was invoked throughout Hamas's ideological material. The protagonists of the Syrian and the later anti-Soviet Afghan *jihad*s became figures for admiration and study within Hamas's educational incubators.

Beyond the divergence in ideology and proximity to Islamist political expression between the Islamist political actors in the Axis and the Syrian Ba`th, a fundamental distinction and tension between Hamas (and Hizballah to a lesser degree) and its state allies due to the *antisystemic* nature of the militant nonstate groups in the Axis of Resistance political community. Antisystemic movements, per the World-Systems Analysis (WSA) definition, describe the institutionalized, continuing organizations dedicated to specific goals of transforming the

[6] Helen Lackner, "Yemen's Ansar Allah," *Middle East Report* Winter 2024, no. 313 (2025), https://www.merip.org/2025/01/yemens-ansar-allah/.

political/economic/social structure of their "zone" of the world economy.[7] As these movements gained state power, tensions between what WSA scholars termed the "old" and "new" guards of the "opposition movements ot the world-system" fomented into eventual political conflict. The 1968 global protest movements exemplify the moment of rupture between the "old" and "new" antisystemic movements on the left. In a similar vein, the split between Hamas on the one hand and Syria on the other represented a disjuncture between antisystemic priorities of Hamas as a nationalist group with an Islamist ethos and the survivalist priorities of Syria as a state power facing revolutionary tumult.

The tensions that undergirded the relationship between state and nonstate actors in the Axis can be traced to the violent "War of the Camps" and "War of the Brothers" episodes[8]—wherein the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hizballah separately squared off against the Lebanese Shi`i Amal militia and the Syrian Arab Army (SAA)—during Syria's occupation of the Cedar State, but the ultimate strain on the concept of a resistance network between the militant, Islamist national liberation groups in the Levant and their state allies came after the onset of the Arab Spring. The onset of the Syrian uprising caught Hamas' leadership between opposite poles: its host government, the embattled Asad regime, on the one hand, and its popular base in both Syria and Palestine on the other, reared in the movement's educational centers and popular incubators to support the Islamic revolutionary rhetoric of the Syrian opposition. As figures 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate, Hamas's 29th anniversary march in Gaza, coinciding with the final days of the Ba`thist government's assault on the Syrian city of Aleppo,

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Giovanni Arrighi et al., *Antisystemic Movements* (Verso, 1989), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/993535?sid=75326432

[8] For an accounting of Syria and Amal's assaults on PLO-led camps in Lebanon during the eighties, as well as the intra-Shi'a strife of the late-stage Lebanese civil war, see "Omri Nir, "A Fight for Survival: Leading Amal and the Sh`ites in the Jungle of the Civil War," in *Nabih Berri and Lebanese Politics* (Springer, 2011).

was replete with solidarity signs held by both its civilian supporters and militia members. The latter constituency eventually won out, as Hamas' initial "neutrality" in the Syrian war amounted to a tacit support for the opposition. This thesis will argue that until a litany of factors compelled the Hamas political bureau to pursue rapprochement with Syria in the late 2010s and early 2020s, both the military and civilian leaderships allowed individual movement members to contribute considerable support to the anti-Asad effort. The presence of influential wings within Hamas that preferred continued pragmatic relations with the Axis of Resistance regimes did not prevent these *hamsawi*s[9] from joining the Syrian revolt.



Figure 1 Gaza City, 2016: two members of Hamas's armed wing pose with a placard reading "Aleppo is being exterminated, #We_are_all_Aleppo". Sultana Oman Al-Azzima (@AlGlnda) "#Omanis_condemn_the_destruction_of_Aleppo To those sympathizing with the oppressive regime, do you support the men of honor and glory in Hamas, or do you support the tyrant Bashar?" ("#`Omaniyun_nidin_abadah_halab ila al-mut`aatafin m`a al-nizam alghasham hal

[9] Arabic term for Hamas member/supporter.

tafadlun rijal al-`az wa al-nakhuh hamas am tafadlun al-taghiat bashar?") X (formerly Twitter), December 16, 2016, https://x.com/AlGlnda/status/809821387342966784/photo/1.



Figure 2 Marching for the 29th anniversary, supporters of Hamas hoist a sign reading "#We_are_all_Aleppo" above their heads amidst a sea of green flags. ..Al-Basil (@Q012020) "#picture of the celebrations #Gaza's people and resistance fighters to commemorate the founding of the Islamic Resistance Movement #Hamas #Aleppo_is_burning #We_are_all_Aleppo" ("#sura min ihjtalat ahli wa muqawimi #ghaza bidhakra intalaqa harakat al-muqawamat al-islamiya #hamas #halab_tahtaraq #kulna_halab), X (formerly Twitter), December 15, 2016. https://x.com/Q012020/status/809441988370165760



Figure 3 Amidst the 29th anniversary's military parade, two Al-Qassam Brigade members pose with a sign reading "#Aleppo_is_burning Oh God, take revenge on the tyrant of Damascus Bashar Al-Asad and his thugs." Al-Basil (@Q012020) "#picture of the celebrations #Gaza's

people and resistance fighters to commemorate the founding of the Islamic Resistance Movement #Hamas #Aleppo_is_burning #We_are_all_Aleppo" ("#sura min ihjtalat ahli wa muqawimi #ghaza bidhakra intalaqa harakat al-muqawamat al-islamiya #hamas #halab_tahtaraq #kulna_halab), X (formerly Twitter), December 15, 2016. https://x.com/Q012020/status/809441988370165760

The Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, as will be argued, formed a node of an Islamist axis that facilitated militant international solidarity through Brotherhood channels. From the Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna's call for volunteers, both local and international, to resist Zionist paramilitaries during the Palestine War of 1948 and concurrent Nakba, to the cross-border guerrilla operations performed by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)-allied cells of *ikhwanji*s from 1968-1970, the Muslim Brotherhood offered a vehicle for resisting Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands. Further, the Brotherhood formed the venue by which Islamists cultivated international support and solidarity during the *ikhwani* armed campaign against the Ba`thist regime in Syria.

No figure exemplifies this transnational tendency more than Sheikh `Abd Allah `Azzam (1941-1989), a Palestinian-born *ikhwanji* and shari`a scholar who became the archetype of the "jihadist foreign fighter" due to his fervent solidarity activism with the Afghan *mujahidin* at war with the socialist government and the Soviet Union.[10] A comrade and confidante of Ghosheh, `Azzam loomed large as an Islamist figure in Jordan and beyond, influencing a generation of young Islamist activists across the globe to take up arms in Afghanistan against the Soviets. `Azzam's centrality in the *ikhwani* and wider Islamist circles is evident in the ubiquity of his intellectual work in the Muslim Brotherhood's pedagogy as well as the various Islamist

[10] Darryl Li, *The Universal Enemy: Jihad, Empire, and the Challenge of Solidarity*, Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures (Stanford University Press, 2019), 84-85 https://www.sup.org/books/middle-east-studies/universal-enemy.

movements that developed out of the political milieu he helped to cultivate in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and beyond.

Despite his doctrinaire attitude toward political matters, passionately decrying political quietism and consistently agitating for *jihadi* militancy, a multitude of Islamist groups have adopted `Azzam as spiritual and political influence, from the maximalist *salafiyya*[11] of the contemporaries of his Peshawar-based Services Bureau[12]—who inherited much of the support from the "Afghan Arabs" who were swayed by the Islamist call—to the nationalist-cum-Islamist Ikhwan offshoot Hamas. The veneration of Pan-Islamist solidarity and insistence on jihad's necessity, prominent in `Azzam's message, are central to Hamas's ethos as a social, political, and religious actor. His brief association with the group before his death in 1989 has led scholars and observers to posit that the infamous *mithaq* ("charter") that Hamas published the year before was written by `Azzam himself. While some of his confidants and friends deny this idea, the sheikh's widow claimed that `Azzam contributed to the charter's introduction and gave editing notes on the document.[13] . In any case, the social proximity of `Azzam to Ghosheh and other Hamas leaders throughout decades of political organizing, along with the presence of the sheikh across

[11] Taken from the term *as-salaf al-salih* ("the pious ancestors"), Salafism/*salafiyya* refers to two distinct modern Islamic movements, one that describes a theological creed (*`aqida*) and political movement espousing a "puritan" version of Islam associated with the medieval Syrian Sunni scholar Taqi ad-Din ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) which requires a close reading of the Qur'an and *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and his Companions), and another that is associated with the nineteenth century reformist scholar at the Egyptian Al-Azhar University who promoted a vision of "modernist Islam." The former tendency is often collocated with the term "jihadism", while the latter tendency is rarely associated with contemporary *jihadi* movements. For an account of the former, see Roel Meijer, "Salafism: Diversity, Doctrine and Practice," in *Political Islam: Context Versus Ideology*, ed. Khalid Haroub (Saqi, 2012). For a history of the nineteenth century reformist "*salafi*" Al-Azhar scholars, see Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 27-59.

[12] `Azzam's *maktab al-khidimat* ("Services Bureau") originated as a vehicle for recruitment of international volunteers for the Afghan Jihad, particularly from Arab countries. After his mysterious demise in 1989, the mantle of Islamist action was quickly seized by `Azzam's contemporaries in the Arab Afghan movement: Usama Bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri. See Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 161-162.

[13] Hegghammer, *the Caravan*, 430-431.

ikhwani/*jihadi* spaces in Afghanistan/Pakistan, positions the so-called "godfather of jihadism" link of sorts between the Islamist rebels of Hama and the partisans of the Hamas movement.

By tracing the influence of `Azzam on the ideology of Hamas—at both a grassroots and elite level—this study hopes to demarcate a "pre-history" of the Axis of Resistance, alongside the inherent conceptual tensions that led to the collapse of the partnership between its "backbone" in the Asad regime and its most significant Palestinian component: Hamas. The unlikely partnership between Syria and Hamas is the focal point of this study, as that bilateral relation provided the conceptual context[14] for the wider Axis of Resistance alliance. As such, the following analysis will center the dynamic between Palestinian Islamists and the Syrian Ba`th within the Axis of Resistance political community, while attending to the important influences Hizballah and Iran have exerted, in both direct and indirect forms, over that relationship.

Contribution

This thesis balances discursive and material analysis to understand the political and ideological lineage of Hamas from the Islamist *fida`iyin* to the *jihadi* writings of Brotherhood idealogues in the seventies and eighties. Understanding the trajectory of Hamas from its roots in the same milieu that produced the anti-Ba`th campaign of the Syrian Brotherhood to an organization based in Asad's Damascus requires an interrogation of the nature of Hamas's ideological and pedagogical roots in the thought of Sayyid Qutb and his ideological descendants within the *ikhwani* political community. Utilizing WSA's "antisystemic dilemma" alongside Schmitt's theory of the partisan to understand Hamas's trajectory as an organization elucidates its dynamic relationship with the Syrian Ba`th.

[14] As noted by Soage, the usage of the term "Axis of Resistance" began in earnest amidst Israel's assaults on Gaza throughout the 2000s. See Soage, "The Conservative Resistance Camp," 95.

Research Questions

This study poses the following questions. What are sources of the epistemic/ideological overlaps and gaps between the actors in the Axis? What transnational solidarity networks prefigured the Axis concept? How did Islamist solidarity color the Palestinian/Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood's concepts of regional Arab regimes? Following the "theory of the partisan", how does the "absolute enmity" within Hamas's ideology conflict with its "telluric partisan" character? How did the bilateral conflict between Syria and Hamas affected the wider universe of relations in the Axis? What role did "absolute enmity" towards secular regimes play in Islamist spaces play in Axis relations? How did Hamas/Palestinian Ikhwan drift from a movement legitimated by Qutbist ideology to one nationalist in character?

To answer these queries, I exploit the wealth of secondary literature available on the actors comprising the Axis, with a primary focus on the histories of Hamas, Hizballah, and the Syria Ba`th. Arabic and English journalistic coverage also forms a bulk of my primary sources in the form of interviews, press conferences, speeches, op-eds, blogs and news articles. Think-tank reports, primarily from institutions connected to the U.S. defense sector, provide valuable analyses of military behavior of the various actors involved. Social media posts represent an essential form of political communication for the militant movements involved in this study. Finally, fiction, authored by important individuals within relevant organizations or subjects of the polities in this study, forms another primary source.

Methodology

The "sociotheological" approaches of Roland Robertson, Mark Juergensmayer and Mona Kanwal Sheikh are utilized in this project to elucidate the relevant actors' social and structural environments. Simply expressed as "looking at social reality…through religious eyes," sociotheology aims at "recovering the internal logic of [an epistemic worldview] and placing it within its social milieu."[15] Sheikh and Juergensmeyer encourages researchers to ask interview subjects not *why* they participate in a particular action, but *how they viewed* society and the world in a manner that brought logic to these actions.[16] Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* provides another reference point for understanding epistemic construction as a variable, non-fixed socialization process that generates structured practices.[17] Following Abed Kanaaneh's use of the Gramscian concepts in his study of Hizballah[18], I attempt to understand the "organic intellectuals" of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood and their relation to the hegemonic projects vying for dominance in Palestine and Syria.

Drawing on the ideas of world-systems analysis (WSA), I consider the "antisystemic" character of this study's relevant social movements—Islamists in Syria and Palestine, as well as Ba`thism/Arab socialism—as means of elucidating their dynamics within the context of US-dominated world politics and economy. Antisystemic movements were typified by WSA's pioneering authors as national-liberation or social, typically class-based movements that

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[15] Mona Kanwal Sheikh and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Entering Religious Minds: The Social Study of Worldviews* (Routledge, 2019), 117 https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429468810.

[16] Mark Juergensmeyer and Mona Kanwal Sheikh, "A Sociotheological Approach to Understanding Religious Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence*, ed. Michael Jerryson et al. (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199759996.013.0040.

[17] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology ; 16 (Cambridge University Press, 1977), 167 https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/154081?sid=75343115. See also, Richard K. Harker et al., "The Basic Theoretical Position," in *An Introduction to the Work of Pierre Bourdieu: The Practice of Theory* (St. Martin's Press, 1990), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/1156140?sid=75663761.

[18] Abed T. Kanaaneh, *Understanding Hezbollah: The Hegemony of Resistance*, First edition, Contemporary Issues in the Middle East (Syracuse University Press, 2021), https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=2d4253e5-9aa5-33a2-a951-b32a5b405100.

challenge the prevailing hierarchies of global capitalism.[19] This definition was expanded by Mohammad Tamdgidi to account for the anti-hegemonic tendencies of "identity-based" and certain religious movements under the "antisystemic" rubric.[20]

Resistance, as argued by Michel Foucault, is fundamental to all power dynamics. [21] Anti-fascist irregular groups in World War II have historically been associated with the resistance moniker, especially in countries that experienced German occupation. Nazi legal theorist Carl Schmitt attempted in *Theory of the Partisan* (1963; 2007)[22] to understand the global phenomenon of the irregular fighter—the *partisan* of class war or anti-colonial struggle—as a challenge to "the sovereign," a term Schmitt used to refer to the state as a source of the law that resides as an authority beyond legality. My use of Schmitt's partisan schema to understand the actors of the Axis of Resistance is not to rehabilitate Schmitt's ideological position or personal role in German fascism, but rather to use a proponent of empire's analysis as a reference point for thinkers like Wallerstein, whose solidarity with the global Left was well known. As pointed out by Darryl Li, the value of Schmitt's "candor and incisiveness" is a product of his status as one of the "runner-up colonizers" of the twentieth century.[23]

For Schmitt, the novelty of the class-war partisan fighter was the "absolutization of the party" as the sovereign authority, a type of allegiance distinct from the norm under the modern state.[24] Schmitt's resistance fighter does not ascribe to the sovereign's authority, holding it in

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[19] Giovanni Arrighi et al., *Antisystemic Movements* (Verso, 1989), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/993535?sid=75326432.
[20] Mohammad H. Tamdgidi, "Open the Antisystemic Movements: The Book, the Concept, and the Reality," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 24, no. 2 (2001): 301–38.
[21] Foucault once wrote "If there was no resistance there would be no relations of power," as quoted in Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 8 https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12868970?sid=75663899.
[22] Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Intermediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political*, Archive (New York : Telos Press Pub., 2007).
[23] See, Li, *The Universal Enemy*.
[24] Ibid, 93.

either *real* or *absolute enmity*, which differs from his concept of *conventional enmity*[25] espoused by the state to delineate its supporters from malcontents, in other words, the distinction between "friends" and "enemies". The partisan's *real enmity* categorizes the "enemy" as the internal authority, be it a foreign occupation or a domestic government facing civil war. *Absolute enmity*, in contrast, is not fixed to a particular political episode, be it occupation; instead it refers to *universal enemies*, often abstracted through the valence of class, ideological categorization, or religious difference. From a subaltern perspective, Frantz Fanon's exploration of anti-colonial violence's ontological origins in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961; 2001)[26] offers an insight into Schmitt's real and absolute enmities by interpreting violent subjectivities of the colonized as psychological attempts to develop "necessary [capacities] to resist."[27]

Plotting the Literature

Within the existing scholarship, the Axis of Resistance has primarily been explored in the field of security studies, whose scholars either portray the grouping as a loose coalition of autonomous actors or as a coherent military-political entity directed by Tehran. Security scholarship has been criticized not only for its Eurocentric intellectual biases but also for a potentially morally hazardous proximity to war-making institutions in the West, especially since the onset of the "Global War on Terror" (GWOT) in the new millennium.[28] Still, empirical work on so-called "terror-groups" in West Asia by security scholars is worth mentioning for its

[25] Ibid, 11-12.
[26] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2001).
[27] See section on Fanon in Caygill, "Resistant Subjectivities," in *On Resistance*.
[28] See Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1r270k.

contribution to the research. Daniel Sobelman, author of *Axis of Resistance: asymmetric deterrence and rules of the game in contemporary Middle East conflicts* (2025), has primarily been concerned with the strategic value of the "hybrid war" tactics utilized by the members of the Axis that Hizballah initially developed in its conflict with Israel and its proxy militia in South Lebanon.[29]. Hudson Institute researcher Nibras Kazimi's work on Syrian Islamists and the Ba`thi regime in Damascus[30] combines political cultural analysis of the Asad regime with valuable field-work and historical narrative. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy's chief expert on armed nonstate actors, Matthew Levitt's monograph on Hamas's extensive social services provides valuable research on the movement's societal impact.[31] Ayman Jawad al-Tammimi's research, hosted on his personal blog, provides translations of vital primary source material related to the Syrian Ba`th and Muslim Brotherhood. Thomas Hegghammer's work on Palestinian *jihadi*-internationalist `Abd Allah `Azzam, which began under the auspices of his research for the Norwegian armed forces[32], provides a comprehensive account of `Azzam's trajectory from scholar to fighter with exhaustive empirical detail.

Structuralist approaches to the study of militant nonstate actors and anti-Western regimes are replete within the field. Bassam Haddad's *Business Networks in Syria* (2012), following in the footsteps of Hanna Batutu's magisterial work on Syrian political economy[33], traces Bashar al-Asad's mercantile-military support-base that he inherited from his father Hafez. Abed Kanaaneh's work on Hizballah's quest for political hegemony in Lebanon utilizes Gramscian

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[29] Daniel Sobelman, "Rules of the Game in Asymmetric Conflicts," *Security Studies* 34, no. 2 (2025): 261–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2025.2497969.
[30] Nibras Kazimi, *Syria through Jihadist Eyes: A Perfect Enemy* (Hoover Institution Press, 2010).
[31] Matthew Levitt, *Hamas : Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (Yale University Press, 2006), 187919, https://research.ebsco.com/linkprocessor/plink?id=b0f98c75-74d6-3ba7-8df8-7f8c7168a9d6.
[32] See "Acknowledgements" in Hegghammer, *The Caravan*.
[33] Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

approaches to analyze the Party of God.[34] Other works blend discursive and materialist analyses to understand the various actors of the resistance axis, including Lisa Wedeen's excellent works on the Asad regime[35], Erik Skare's treatment of Palestinian Islamist movements[36], Paola Caridi's account of Hamas's rise to power in Gaza[37], and Ana Belén Soage's work on the Muslim Brotherhood and the Axis of Resistance.[38]

A wealth of material has been written by scholars on Syria under the rule of the Asads. Patrick Seale's seminal *Asad: the Struggle for the Middle East* (University of California, 1988), Nikolaus van Dam's *The Struggle for Power in Syria* (I.B. Tauris, 2011), Raymond Hinnebusch's *Syria: revolution from above* (Routledge, 2001) stand out as oft-cited accounts of the regime due to their empirical weight. Also worth noting is Line Khatib's valuable dissertation-turned-book on Ba`thi-Islamist tensions in Syria.[39]

Finally, bilateral ties between the various members of the Axis of Resistance have been explored in several works. A good deal of has been written utilizing subject interviews with important members of Hamas that explore the group's foreign policy and ties with regional

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[34] Kanaaneh, *Understanding Hezbollah*.

[35] See Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria: With a New Preface* (The University of Chicago Press, 2015), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12315718?sid=75330940. Also, for Wedeen's analysis of the post-uprising survival tactics of the Asad regime, see Lisa Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria*, Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning (The University of Chicago Press, 2019), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11913378?sid=75330940.

[36] For Skare's recent work on the intersections and tensions between Hamas and PIJ, see Erik Skare, *Road to October 7: A Brief History of Palestinian Islamism* (Verso, 2025), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/14344573?sid=75231455.

[37] Caridi, *Hamas*. See also Imad Alsoos's analysis of Hamas's discursive evolution, Imad Alsoos, "From Jihad to Resistance: The Evolution of Hamas's Discourse in the Framework of Mobilization," *Middle Eastern Studies* 57, no. 5 (2021): 833–56, https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2021.1897006.

[38] Soage, "the Conservative Resistance Camp". See also, Ana Belén Soage, "Islamism and Modernity: The Political Thought of Sayyid Qutb," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10, no. 2 (2009): 189–203, https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760903119092, as well as Ana Belén Soage, "Ḥasan al-Bannā or the Politicisation of Islam," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9, no. 1 (2008): 21–42, https://doi.org/10.1080/14690760701856374.

[39] Khatib, *Islamic revivalism in Syria*.

movements. These titles include Daud Abduallah's *Engaging the World: The Making of Hamas's Foreign Policy* (AMEC, 2020), Leila Seurat's *The Foreign Policy of Hamas: ideology, decision-making, and political supremacy* (I.B. Tauris, 2022), Khaled Haroub's *Hamas: Political Thought and Practice* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2000), and Abdalhakim Aziz Hanaini's *Hamas' foreign policy: Syria as a case study 2000-2015* (Zaytouna Center for Publishing, 2018).

Historical Context

The object of my study is the epistemic, material, and ideological continuities between the transnational *ikhwani* network that grew out of the Islamist *fida`iyin* camps of Jordan from 1968-1970 and its descendants in Syria and Palestine. Understanding the transnational solidarities that mediated Hamas's early ideological history is essential to understanding the waning cohesion of the Axis of Resistance concept at the outset of the Syrian uprising in 2011. Ideological conflict in the Axis cannot be understood without centering its actors that found themselves on opposite sides of the Syrian tragedy: Hamas and the Syrian Ba`th.

Islamism has been an integral seam of the Palestinian nationalist fabric since the 1920s. Spurred by the British Mandate's abetting of rural dispossession amidst increasing Jewish immigration and the expansion of Zionist settlements throughout Palestine, an itinerant Syrian *`alim* (Islamic scholar) who had gained a reputation for his religious and labor activism in Mandatory Palestine named `Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (1882-1935) led an underground cell of fighters against British authorities in a series of raids. His martyrdom by colonial forces was the direct incitement to the 1936-1939 Arab revolt in Palestine.[40] Inspired by ideas associated with the Salafism (*as-salafiyya*) of al-Azhar University's modernist scholars, al-Qassam gained a

[40] Joas Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood: Ideology, History, Descendants* (Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 111 https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12775059?sid=69239531#toc.

following not only for his sermons but more so by extolling the virtues of *jihad* (struggle) against both the British occupation and Zionist movement.[41]

1936 saw another consequential development for Palestinian Islamism: the arrival of *jama`at al-ikhwan al-muslimin* (Society of the Muslim Brothers) to Jerusalem by way of Cairo.[42] The Society, better known as the Muslim Brotherhood/Ikhwan, was an organization dedicated to the revival of Islamic civilization along modernist lines, criticizing the contemporary religious establishment (‘*ulama*) of the prestigious Cairene al-Azhar University for its lack of rationalism, as well as its lack of social, moral, and political intervention into what it considered a decaying *umma*.[43] “Islam is the solution” became the signature phrase of the movement, which advocated societal application of the Shari`a.[44] Disagreement emerged in the organization over the question of engaging in secular politics in order to achieve its aims[45], but the Palestinian branch was largely able to avoid the question after 1948 (prior to the Palestinian *nakba* [“catastrophe”] the Ikhwan had organized arms-training camps for the local population as a means of self-defense).[46] Split into separate units—one in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank and the other in the newly created Gaza Strip enclave governed by Egypt—the Palestinian Ikhwan began developing on separate tracks determined by the political regimes they organized under.

The 1948 Nakba was a major turning point for the Muslim Brotherhood. Not only did the ethnic cleansing and partition of Mandatory Palestine geographically separate a vital branch of

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[41] See “Workers and Villagers” in Mark Sanagan, *Lighting through the Clouds: ʿIzz al-Din al-Qassam and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (University of Texas Press, 2020).
[42] Wagemakers, *the Muslim Brotherhood*, 40-49, 60-61.
[43] *Umma* means “nation” in Arabic but carries connotations in Islam that identify the entire community of believers in the religion with the term.
[44]Commonly defined as “Islamic law”, the Shari`a has also been described as an ethical paradigm and novel body of jurisprudence and moral reasoning derived from the Qur`an in the premodern era. See Wael B. Hallaq, “Introduction,” *Sharīʿa: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[45] Wagemakers, *the Muslim Brotherhood,* 53-66.
[46] Ibid 112.

the organization into two parts (one in the newly created, Egyptian-administered Gaza Strip where it attended to a densely concentrated refugee population, and another in the Jordanian-controlled West Bank), the Brotherhood was faced with an uncertain political environment across nearly all the states it operated in. Within a matter of two years between 1952 and 1954, Ikhwan branches in Syria, Egypt and Gaza had all been banned by military governments that came to power via coup amidst the failure of traditional parties to rally an increasingly radicalizing populace after the defeat of 1948.[47]

As refugees in Gaza, Palestinians who joined the Ikhwan in 1948 formed the nucleus of what would eventually become the premier nationalist organization in Palestine: Fatah (*fatah*) (reverse acronym for "Movement for Palestinian National Liberation"). Association in the Muslim Brotherhood during the 1948 war and after brought together Khalili al-Wazir, Salah Khalaf, and even Yasir `Arafat, who was drawn to *ikhwani* activism during his days at Cairo University.[48] Under the guidance of the Egyptian Brotherhood, the Palestinian Ikhwan faced considerable repression under the regime of Arab nationalist Free Officers and Gamal `abd al-Nasir (1952-1970), and did not consider itself prepared for armed struggle, instead focusing on the preservation and revival of Islamic ethics and practice amongst the enclave's recently-displaced population.[49] After backing the rival of the military *junta*'s leading figure, Gamal `abd al-Nasir, the Brotherhood soon found itself on the brunt end of the military regime's wrath once Nasir consolidated solid control of the state apparatus in 1954. That same year, the organization was banned after an assassination attempt on al-Nasir in Alexandria implicated the Brotherhood;

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[47] For the banning of the Syrian Brotherhood in 1952, see Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (Oxford University Press, 1965), 120-122. For the Egyptian case, see Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 75-76.

[48] Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Clarendon Press, 1997), 80-81.

[49] Wagemakers, *the Muslim Brotherhood*, 112.

several of the most prominent *ikhwani* figures were arrested, sending most of its remaining membership into exile, underground activity, or political quietism.[50] Throughout the early 1950s, Wazir and his comrades took action themselves, organizing covert cells of *fida'iyyun*[51] to carry out small-scale raids and sabotage operations along the boundary between the Gaza enclave and the new state of Israel.[52] Fatah emerged from these cells as after the tripartite invasion of Nasir's Egypt in 1956. That year saw Israel's first occupation of the Gaza strip, which allowed them to deport any suspect *fida'i* to the surrounding Arab states.[53] Armed Palestinian groups in those arenas were tightly monitored by the state, especially in the short-lived union between Syria and Egypt (1958-1961), where Fatah solidified itself as an independent pole for Palestinian refugees.

The story of Fatah's emergence as a vehicle for independent Palestinian aspirations amidst Nasir's political monopoly within the Egypt-Syria union parallels that of the Syrian Ba`th.[54] The Arab Socialist Ba`th Party formed in 1953 as a merger of the Pan-Arab nationalist Ba`th Party formed by Damascene intellectuals and the Hama-based, peasant-mobilizing Arab Socialist Party.[55] Amidst the intense political struggle between the Ba`th, the political left, other nationalist groupings, and the parties of Syrian notables that defined Syria's tumultuous parliamentary era (1950-51, 1954-1958), the Ba`th fervently campaigned for a political union

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[50] Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 75-76.
[51] "Fida'iyyun" translates literally to "those who self-sacrifice." Since the mid-twentieth century it has been associated with armed Palestinian militant groups engaged in asymmetric conflict with Israel.
[52] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 82.
[53] Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, Second edition. (Cambridge University Press, 2006) 163.
[54] "*Ba` th*" translates to "renaissance", "awakening", or "rebirth." Both before and after its merger, the party espoused a commitment to realizing Arab unity in the form of unified political sovereignty across the Arab world, or in other words, the creation of a single Pan-Arab state. For an exposition on the old guard of the Ba` th prior and after its merger with Hourani's party, see Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton University Press, 1999), 133-143, https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/3904724?sid=75339087.
[55] Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (University of California Press, 1988) 27-48.

with Egypt as part of its wider ideological commitment to Pan-Arab sovereign unity.[56] In practice, the United Arab Republic saw Cairo monopolize governing decisions and political power, prompting resistance from all quarters of Syrian political life, including a group of military officers loyal to the Ba`th. At the center of this "Military Committee" that sought to restore Syrian political autonomy from Nasirist Egypt's suffocating atmosphere was a young air force captain named Hafez al-Asad.[57] Hailing from Syria's predominantly `Alawi[58], underdeveloped northern coastal region, Hafez and his other officers formed the clandestine group to reconstitute the Syrian Ba`th, which, like all political parties, was sent underground under al-Nasir. September 1961 saw a right-wing coup, backed by the business community and Syria's traditional parties, splinter Syria's government from the Egyptian union.[59] The Ba`thi Military Committee did not participate in the anti-Nasir coup, but it certainly took advantage of the ensuing political chaos, which saw a series of flailing governments cycle through the seat of power between 1961 and 1963.

Taking power in March 1963 via its own military coup, the Syrian Ba`th followed quickly in the footsteps of its Iraqi Ba`th comrades, who dislodged their own regime in a violent seizure of power just a month prior. The Syrian Ba`th immediately went about rooting out its rivals in the pro-Nasir camp and traditional political parties.[60] The new regime went about

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[56] Ibid, 49-56.
[57] Ibid, 60-70.
[58] `Alawism (*al-`alawiyya*) is a religious community primarily populated in Syria's northwestern region and its main cities. A syncretic religious group originating an offshoot of Shi`i Islam led by a self-proclaimned *bab* (gateway) to the eleventh Shi`i Imam, the `Alawi were referred to as *nusayriyyun* (Nusayris) for most of their existence, named for their ninth century founder Muhammad ibn Nusayr al Bakri. In the twentieth century, the `Alawi began emphasizing their attachment to Shi`i Islam against accusations of apostasy by asserting their name as *al-`alawiyyun* ("the followers of 'Ali"). See Aslam Farouk-Alli, "The Genesis of Syria's Alawi Community," in Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin, eds., *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant*, Urban Conflicts, Divided Societies (Oxford University Press, 2015), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/10368884?sid=75597994.
[59] Seale, *Asad*, 67.
[60] Ibid, 72-

implementing an ambitious yet contentious agenda of populist social reforms, including major expropriations of industries and land reform programs[61] that rewarded the party's growing rural base. The Syrian Ba`th drew their support from Syria's rural working and middle-classes, especially peasants and their descendants who had established themselves as officers and members of the national army during and after the French withdrawal. Predominantly `Alawi and Druze soldiers, with considerable numbers from rural Sunnis hailing from the southern and eastern countryside, made up the Ba`th's formidable base in the military.[62] After the Ba`th returned to organizing publicly in Syria following the collapse of the Syrian-Egyptian union, it rapidly sought to increase its civilian ranks, quintupling its number in the two years succeeding the 1963 coup.[63] Regional party leaders filled their branches with "relatives, friends, and acquaintances," often through kinship/tribal networks. Sectarian and regional blocs began to form within the Ba`th apparatus, though this did not imply that cross-sectarian alliances did not exist among the various blocs. The best example seen in Sunni officer Mustafa Talas's (1932-2017) alliance with the `Alawi leftist faction of Salah Jadid (1926-1993) and Asad.

An intra-party coup in 1966 further empowered the Ba`th's radical wing, which carried out extensive purges of the armed forces, replacing experienced personnel with politically amenable, but untested officers. Chief among the regionally transgressive endeavors undertaken by the Ba`th government was its partnership with Palestinian *fida`iyyin* groups. One of Fatah's cofounders, Faruq al-Qaddumi (better known by his *nom de guerre*, Abu Lutf), credited this support as essential to the early movement's survival.[64] While offering the militant Fatah a base

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[61] See Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "The Ba`th revolution from above" in *Syria: Revolution from Above*, The Contemporary Middle East (Routledge, 2001), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/4526429?sid=75598488.
[62] Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren."
[63] Ibid.
[64] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, 288.

for training, political organization, and recruitment in Syria, the Ba`th regime took precautions to regulate the *fida`iyyin*'s use of Syrian territory to stage attacks on Israel. Amidst increasing brinksmanship between Israel and its neighbors, the Syrian Ba`th regime and Nasir government mended fences in 1966, establishing a "progressive axis"[65] against their common foe.

However, the radical wave that had swept up Syria's government crashed on the rocks of an Israeli offensive in 1967 that ended in disaster for the Arab coalition. The defeat, dubbed by Arab governments as "*al-naksa*" (the setback), saw the remainder of Palestine (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) occupied by Israel, along with Syria's Quneitra province and the Egyptian Sinai. The *naksa* exposed deep rifts within the Ba`thi camp, pitting an entrenched radical faction against a "pragmatic" nationalist counterpart led by Hafez al-Asad.[66] Aiming to reach a consensus with not only the domestic Sunni mercantile bourgeoisie in Damascus, but also with regional Arab governments that the radicals had alienated (conservative monarchies in Jordan and the Gulf as well as Iraq), Hafez built support among those dissatisfied with the "adventurism" of the dominant party clique, arguing for a retreat from the radical posture of his rival Salah Jadid's ruling faction. In 1970 his faction seized power and immediately moved to repress its radical Ba`thi opponents via imprisonment or exile.[67] Support for Palestinian militancy was drastically reduced from its initial high-tide, with the Syrian regime tightly controlling the arms, movement, and political activities of armed groups in the Palestinian camps. The lack of breathing room in Syria under Hafez, coupled with Fatah and its allies' crippling 1970 defeat in Jordan, prompted the Palestinian militants to expand their base elsewhere, namely in Lebanon.[68]The expanding civil war in Lebanon prompted Syrian

[65] Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from above*, 55.
[66] Ibid. Also, see Seale, "The Fight to the Top" in *Asad*.
[67] Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry*, 171-175.
[68] Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for a State*, 288-292

intervention against the PLO-supported leftist-Muslim coalition vying to dislodge the hegemony of the Maronite political parties.[69] Hafez sent tens of thousands of Syrian soldiers to invade Lebanon on June 1, 1976,[70] routing the Palestinian militias and their Lebanese allies in a series of brutal confrontations that culminated in the ruthless joint Maronite-Syrian siege on the Tal al-Za`tar refugee camp in August.[71] Instead of preventing an Israeli invasion to support the Maronites, Asad's entrance into Lebanon critically weakened the anti-Zionist bloc in the Cedar State while shoring up the Maronites' position.

Concurrent with Syria's entrance into the expanding civil war in Lebanon was a growing domestic challenge to Ba`thi rule in the form of Sunni Islamist political mobilization. Doubtlessly, the initial beneficiaries of Hafez's counter-revolution were the merchant-bourgeoisie that ran Damascus's bazaars, as well as middle-class traders and producers. However, a low-simmering sectarian, ideological, and social conflict between one section of the urban, Sunni middle-class and the Ba`th would eventually develop into a full-blown insurgency in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Drawn from a more elitist, middle-class milieu than its Palestinian and Egyptian counterparts[72], the Syrian Muslim Brethren rejected the Ba`th as much for its socialist-turned-populist economic policies as they detested its secular political approach and leftist cultural disposition. Still reeling from a 1973 incident when a proposed constitutional change removing the requirement of the Syrian president to be Muslim was met with popular protests, many Sunni Syrians saw the 1976 invasion of Lebanon as a deliberate sectarian affront

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[69] David Hirst, *Beware of Small States: Lebanon, Battleground of the Middle East* (Nation Books, 2010), 112-113.
[70] Seale, *Asad*, 283.
[71] Hirst, *Beware of Small States*, 114.
[72] Wagemakers, *the Muslim Brotherhood*, 82-83. See also, Hanna Batatu, "Syria's Muslim Brethren," *MERIP Reports* November/December 1982, no. 110 (n.d.), accessed December 6, 2025, https://www.merip.org/1982/11/syrias-muslim-brethren/.

by the `Alawi Ba`th leader against the Sunni Palestinians.[73] A Syrian Ikhwan member named Marwan Hadid (1934-1976), an imam based in the northern city of Hama, began in the 1960s to cultivate an Islamist opposition movement to the Ba`th via a series of anti-secular protests in the country's north.[74] Hadid, along with the Syrian Ikhwan's chief ideologue, Sa`id Hawwa (1935-1989), mobilized the ideas of Egyptian Brother Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966)[75] to argue the necessity of fighting a regime they considered heretical.[76] Eventually, under the aegis of the "Fighting Vanguard" of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hadid established an offshoot of the Syrian Ikhwan that engaged in a series of escalating attacks on Ba`thi political offices and military barracks.[77]

In the following section, the writings of Palestinian *ikhwanis* are explored to understand the nexus of Qutb-inspired *jihadi* activists and intellectuals that formed the basis of Hamas's pedagogical content. The works of Ibrahim Ghohsheh, `Abd Allah `Azzam, and `Abd Allah Yusuf Al-Laddawi attests to the centrality of `Azzam's Qutbist milieu in Hamas's ideological reproduction, with prominent anti-Ba`thist *jihadi* writers and *munshidin* (singers of hymns, or *anashed*) figuring prominently in the movement's educational, political, and festive activities.

Axis of Jihad: transnational *ikhwani* solidarity, 1967-1991

Sayyid Qutb was the most prominent member of the massive *ikhwani* prison population, having been initially sentenced to fifteen years. In prison, the intellectual continued to produce material extolling the need to establish an Islamic state based on the *shari`a* as an absolute

[73] Raphael Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama: The Muslim Brotherhood in Syria* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 72.
[74] Ibid, 43-51, 91-95.
[75] Qutb's writings on the necessity of *jihad* against disbelief (*jahiliyya*) were widely popular in the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist circles. See Wagemakers, *the Muslim Brotherhood*, 60-64.
[76] Line Khatib, *Islamic Revivalism in Syria: The Rise and Fall of Ba'thist Secularism*, Routledge Studies in Political Islam 7 (Routledge, 2011), https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/8452744?sid=75492449.
[77] Ibid.

system that invests sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*) solely in God.[78] His vision was one of global polarization between the *jahili* world of man-made laws and the authentic Islamic world governed by *shari`a*. The prison writings of Qutb reflect the distance that had established between the Islamists of his era and their predecessors at the turn of the twentieth century; whereas the figurehead of the later Salafists of al-Azhar University, Rashid Rida (1865-1935), was supportive of the Arab nationalist movement that resisted Ottoman sovereignty during the First World War,[79] Qutb rejected the nation-state unless it was founded on Islam, citing the Prophet Muhammad's call to reject the "dead things" consisting of "tribe and nation, and race and color and region, are residues of the primitive state of man." [80] This rejection of the non-Islamic nation-state was consistent with prior *salafi* thinkers, particularly Muhammad `Abduh (1849-1905), who said that "The nationality of the Muslims is only their religion."[81]

Deriving his ideas of *jihad* and *takfir* (excommunication of purported unbelievers) from the thirteenth-century Islamic scholar Ibn Taymiyya, Qutb endorses the idea that *jihad* against regimes that do not recognize the sovereignty of God by failing to implement the *shari`a,* going as far as to say any state that fails this implementation is a state of disbelief (*kufr*) that resides in the world of ignorance (*jahiliyya*).[82] Through bisecting the world into spheres of faith and ignorance, Qutb expresses the Schmittian concept of *absolute enmity* through his sanctioning of *jihad* against all regimes that oppress the sovereignty of God. Qutb's call to arms against the *jahili* (ignorant) regimes of the world bears resonance to the partisan's drive towards social

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[78] Ibid, 55.
[79] John M. Willis, "Debating the Caliphate: Islam and Nation in the Work of Rashid Rida and Abul Kalam Azad," *International History Review* 32 iv (January 2010): 711–32, ICHA935059, https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2010.534609.
[80] Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones (Ma` alim Fi` l-Tareeq)*, ed. A. B. al-Mehri (Maktabah Booksellers and Publishers, 2006).
[81] `Abduh quoted in Sayed Khatab, "Arabism and Islamism in Sayyid Qutb's Thought on Nationalism," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 2 (2004): 217–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2004.00049.x.
[82] Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 55-56.

revolution or "global civil war" in Schmitt's schema.[83] Indeed, despite Qutb's reference points being essentially premodern, his project rested upon a fundamentally modernist conceit of reconstructing the modern state in the image of the Shari`a. Achieving martyr status within the Brotherhood after his 1966 execution, Qutb's writings and ideas would inspire *jihadi* movements from Syria to Palestine in the near term, in the form of the radical wing of the Syrian Brotherhood and the Palestinian Shari`a scholar and oft-cited "godfather" of jihadism in the 1970s and 1980s, `Abd Allah `Azzam.

Qutb's rejection of *da'wa* as the sole means of achieving an Islamic state and pious society was a departure from Hasan al-Banna's original emphasis on building a mass base through education. Despite the wide influence of Qutb's writings as the pedagogical material of the Brotherhood throughout the sixties, *ikhwani* organizations in Gaza, Jordan (unified in many ways with the West Bank branch), and Syria largely continued the organization's path of social activism instead of *jihad*. This had led to notable successes in Syria, as the Ikhwan held enough sway via its parliamentary representatives to enshrine Islam as the head of state's official religion in Syria's first post-independence 1950 constitution, although this was a compromise from their original demand of establishing Islam as the "state religion" in the document.[84] In Gaza and the West Bank, the political tracks of the splintered Palestinian Ikhwan were largely determined by their dynamic with their host regime. In the Jordan-controlled West Bank, the Ikhwan forged a pragmatic relationship with the Hashemite Kingdom, accepting the authority of Amman while enjoying status as one of the country's few legal political organizations.[85] Of course, the Brotherhood would not escape the repressive arm of King Hussein and his successors, but

[83] Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan*, 93.
[84] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 31-32.
[85] Caridi, *Hamas*, 52-53.

compared to the bloody suppression of Palestinian left-wingers and *fathawi*s in the violence of Black September, the West Bank Ikhwan could hardly complain. Similarly, the Jordanian-West Bank Brotherhood appeared to get off easy when compared to the fate of the Gaza-based Brotherhood, which was forced into clandestine status under the Nasir regime.

In Syria, the Ikhwan's pragmatic parliamentary maneuvers around the 1950 constitution precipitated a rift between the Damascene *ulama*, which previously threw its weight behind the Ikhwan's political bloc, and the Brethren. The real tribulations for the organization began with Syria's series of military coups beginning in 1949, when the party was outlawed by the brief regime of military regime Husni az-Zaim, after which it briefly returned to parliament until it was again repressed and outlawed by Colonel Adib Shishlaki from 1952 until 1954. After the return to parliamentary politics in 1954, the Ikhwan decided to forgo contesting elections and opted instead to focus on *daw`a* and education.

In a weakened state domestically, the Syrian Ikhwan did not consider itself solid enough in its competition with Arab nationalist and leftist rivals to offer a robust critique of al-Nasir's government. Although the Brothers offered rhetorical solidarity to comrades being imprisoned and executed in Egypt, the organization found itself following the tide of popular sentiment when it tacitly supported the merger of Egypt and Syria as the United Arab Republic in 1958.[86] The organization found relief, along with other non-Nasirist political organizations, when the Egypt-Syria merger was ended by a broadly-supported coup in 1963, but it found itself increasingly on the backfoot in its competition with other domestic political forces, especially the Syrian Ba`th. When Syria's traditional political forces were sidelined in a Ba`thist military

[86] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 39-40.

coup in 1963, the religious establishment immediately made its opposition known by calling for civil disobedience against the new government.[87]

Regarding the social character of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, it is necessary to reflect on the class-based aspects of the Ikhwan-Ba'th conflict. Batatu has suggested that despite the populist economic aspects of the Syrian Brotherhood's political program, the Ikhwan represented "the outlook and interests of the urban Sunni trading and manufacturing middle and lower middle classes."[88] Indeed, a good amount of the *ulama*'s ranks hailed from Syria's merchant sector, especially in its northern urban centers in Hama and Aleppo.[89] As Line Khatib has noted, the emergence of the Ikhwan in Syria was in many ways a response of Islamist political actors to the same inputs that produced the Ba`th: Syria's diverse religious makeup, regional crises from the Nakba to confrontations with imperialist powers, and "an unstable economy coupled with high rates of social mobilization."[90]

The rule of the secular-socialist Ba`th proved immediately contentious for the Islamist sectors of Syria, which immediately mobilized an opposition movement against the leftist regime. The spring of 1964 saw the culmination of these tensions during Islamist-led riots in Hama that briefly tested the regime's control over the Sunni-majority city. Qutb's endorsement of *jihad* against *taghut* regimes reflected in the *hamawi*[91] preachers' calls to resist the imposition of secular rule. In the wake of the Brotherhood's official banning by the regime in 1963 following the movement's accusations of Ba`thi atheism[92], the adoption of Qutb's enmities posed itself as a logical escalation for the movement, as legal activism became foreclosed. March and

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[87] Khatib, *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism in Syria*, 41.
[88] Batatu, "Syria's Muslm Brethren"
[89] Khatib, *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism*, 45.
[90] Ibid.
[91] *Hamawi* denotes a resident of Hama.
[92] Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 37.

April saw Ikhwan members lead a general strike in the city that escalated into street fighting between barricaded Islamist protestors and the Ba`thi state. The Damascus University Shari`a scholar, Marwan Hadid (1934-1976), led the Hama Islamist revolt as it fought increasingly long odds, eventually seeking refuge in the city's Sultan Mosque with his rebels, which was shelled by government forces, shattering its edifice and minaret and killing many of Hadid's men.[93] Hadid himself was jailed for a few months, returning to his organizing after his release and building up a militant, Qutbist faction of the Syrian Ikhwan based in Hama.

Sectarian tensions within the Ba`th itself were boldly emphasized in the 1966 coup that brought Jadid and Asad's predominantly `Alawi faction to power in Damascus. Prominent Sunni members of rival Ba`thist factions were purged by the new authority.[94] While neither Asad nor Jadid assumed the position of head of state in 1966, they occupied the premier positions of political authority (Jadid as leader of the Party command and Asad as minister of defense) in Syria as leaders of their own camps within the new ruling clique. When the "Corrective Movement" led by Asad took power in 1970, Asad became Syria's first `Alawi head of state the following year.[95]

Asad's counter-revolution against the radicalism of Jadid's Ba`th certainly had class-based factors influencing its development, as the former defense minister initiated contained economic liberalization to consolidate support among the Damascene (Sunni) mercantile bourgeoisie.[96] Still, as alluded to previously, the issue of confrontation with Israel loomed over Hafiz al-Asad's rise to paramount status in the Syrian political scene. Asad's quest to manage the Syrian-Israeli conflict involved containing what he saw as "adventurist" Palestinian guerrilla

[93] Seale, *Asad*, 93.
[94] Ibid, 39-47
[95] Van Dam, "The Struggle for power within the Alawi community" in *The Struggle for Power in Syria.*.
[96] Khatib, *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism*, 60.

activities undertaken by Fatah and other nationalist and leftist factions of the PLO coupled with the pursual of "strategic parity" with Israeli firepower by cultivating regional and international alliances.

For Qutb-influenced *ikhwani* thought leaders, the *nusayri* (contemporarily derogatory term for `Alawi) Asad regime was a *taghut* authority par excellence, forming the target of many polemical writings by movement members and orbiters. Of course, sectarian animosity informed by the *fatwa*s of Ibn Taymiyya contributed to the absolute enmity of the Brotherhood towards the Ba`th, yet another issue inflamed Islamist ire towards Asad: the perceived acquiescence of Syria to Israeli and Western regional might at the expense of Palestine. The writings of Palestinian *ikhwani* `Abd Allah `Azzam provide a crucial insight into the broader Islamist perception of Arab nationalism's failure to deliver victories in the struggle against Israel and empire more broadly. As a ubiquitous figure in the Palestinian Ikhwan's pedagogical material[97], `Azzam's characterizations of the Asad regime were likely highly influential on not only the students he taught directly as an instructor at Jordan University, but those involved in the Ikhwan's educational activities as well via his published and circulated writings.

Transnational Jihadi Organizing and Revolt in the Levant (1967-1984)

`Abd Allah `Azzam's young academic career took a brief pause after his exile from Palestine began in 1967. `Azzam hailed from the village Sila near Jenin and grew up under Hashemite rule. Having joined the Jenin branch of the Brotherhood in his teenage years, `Azzam

[97] According to Hamas member and al-Qassam Brigade officer ` Abd Allah Yusuf al-Laddawi (1985-2025),` Azzam's writings are taught heavily in the movement's "incubators" (educational centers). See ` Abd Allah Yusuf ` Abd al-Laddawi Yusuf, "'The Seeds of Hamas: A Report on Promoting the Values and Morals of Islam in Palestinian Society' (2025) [Part Four]," trans. Mujamma Haraket, Mujamma Haraket, Substack, February 16, 2026, https://substack.com/@mujammaharaket/p-188108741.

decided to study under the Faculty of Shari`a at Damascus University in 1962, arriving at a university that was known as a stronghold of *ikhwani* supporters, especially in his chosen department's faculty.[98] While `Azzam split his time between Sila and Damascus, he became acquainted with fellow young *ikhwani* activist Sa'id Hawwa, who also became a prominent figure and influenced Hamas's internal pedagogy similarly to `Azzam.[99] The Palestinian *ikhwanji*[100] was also well-acquainted with prominent Hama-based Syrian Brother Marwan Hadid, who had visited the Jenin Brothers in the early or mid-sixties[101]; the pair would meet continually throughout `Azzam's visits to Damascus after his graduation, when Hadid had begun to live clandestinely as he organized Islamist resistance to the Asad regime. `Azzam's association with these figures underscores his proximity to the Qutbist wing of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, dominant in the country's urban northern centers of Hama and Aleppo, as opposed to the Damascene "centrist" faction of the movement, perceived by the more radical wing as passive towards Ba`thi transgressions against Islamic ethical norms and attempts to co-opt the religious establishment.[102] This split was laid bare in the reactions of the various Brotherhood branches in Syria's northern cities and Damascus to an incident in April 1967.

Writing in the leftist tenor standard to the Jadid-led Ba`th, Ibrahim Khalas denounced the "old values" that Arab societies had traditionally sought in Islam and Christianity while extolling the socialist Ba`thist governments attempts to move Syria beyond the ethics derived from "God, religion, feudalism, capitalism, and colonialism…,"[103] sending the religious sectors of the country into an uproar as a result. This article was but the latest in a series of blows the Islamists

[98] Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 36.
[99] Al-Laddawi, "The Seeds of Hamas."
[100] "*Ikhwanji*" denotes a supporter or member of the Muslim Brotherhood.
[101] Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 38.
[102] Wagemakers, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 84.
[103] Khatib, *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism in Syria*, 54.

had endured without major incident since the suppression of the Hama riots in 1964. The state had not truly acted on the 1963 Ba`th Party conference's call to strike religion as a subject from the state schools and secularize the personal status law (i.e., purge it of its Shari`a-based elements), but it did move to consolidate its grip over Islamic institutions by dismissing the country's Grand Mufti and his supporters in the *ulama* and replacing them with compliant supporters.[104] Khalas's article was merely the final spark for long-simmering resentments, and Brotherhood chapters across the country mobilized protests, although with markedly differing tones. Across the northern belt of Syrian cities—Homs, Hama, and Aleppo—the Hadid-influenced Ikhwan were met with a more severe state response than their counterparts in Damascus throughout their mobilizations against the Ba`th.[105]

After this setback, Hadid, frustrated by the continued refusal of the Damascene Brotherhood leadership to embrace his approach to resisting Ba`thi rule through *jihad*, followed the call of armed struggle south of his native Hama to Jordan, where he found an Ikhwan chapter mired in the ongoing frontier struggle of *fida`iyin* groups, then supported by the Jordanian government, against Israel.[106] Hadid, `Azzam, and a few hundred other *ikhwani* cadres were trained alongside thousands of PLO recruits in training camps sanctioned by the Jordanian government after border skirmishes between Palestinian guerrillas, the Jordanian army, and the Israeli military. The Islamist-run camps—known as "the bases of the sheikhs"—sought to establish a *jihadi* equivalent of the Viet Cong to rival the secular PLO. `Abd Allah `Azzam, having returned to Jordan in 1969 from a brief stint teaching in Saudi Arabia, was elected *emir* of the "Jerusalem" base located near the border-town Maru, commanding a few dozen volunteers

[104] Khatib, *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism in Syria*, 54.
[105] See the incident of 300 Ikhwan supporters arrested outside an Aleppine mosque in Ibid.
[106] Khatib, *Islamic and Islamist Revivalism*, 56.

drawn from the ranks of numerous Arab states where the Ikhwan was active. Crucially, the Islamist *fida`iyyin* afforded Palestinian Ikhwan an opportunity to engage in the armed struggle nearly two decades before Hamas announced itself to the world in 1987. Ibrahim Ghosheh was among the future Hamas cadre who trained in the bases of the sheikhs alongside `Azzam.

Ghosheh's biography contrasts well with the humble origins of 'Azzam. Hailing from a small village and an agrarian family, `Azzam was born in a rural village north of Jenin that saw virtually no fighting in 1948, whereas Ghosheh, eleven years old at the time, remembered the traumatic and formative events of the war and Nakba as a firsthand witness to violence and militancy in Jerusalem, his city of birth. Fear of the artillery fire from Zionist militias that was pounding their neighborhood prompted his family to flee the city for more than a year to Jericho. In the years between his family's return and their second period of exile from Jerusalem after the 1967 war, Ghosheh became a committed young activist in the Muslim Brotherhood.[107]

Under Hashemite rule, the Muslim Brotherhood was largely accepted as a legitimate, often amenable, political force from the perspective of the Jordanian state. Under the banner of the Brotherhood, he protested both the prospect of Jordan joining the British-led Baghdad Pact alliance as well as Nasir's jailing of Brotherhood activists in 1954. But in the wake of the Arab loss and renewed Palestinian refugee crisis of 1967, which afflicted both `Azzam and Ghosheh personally, a "corrective" movement formed within the Brotherhood that aimed to militate the Brotherhood's ranks towards waging a popular *jihadi* struggle in Palestine akin to the struggle in Vietnam. Split along regional lines, with certain national branches offering support and others rejecting any contribution to the initial Islamist *fida`iyin* project, Ghosheh, `Azzam, and their fellow *ikhwanji*s relied on meager financial support and the expertise of their Fatah and PLO-

[107] Ghoseh, *The Red Minaret*, 24-35.

aligned comrades in the initial stage of their operations.[108] The exchange of expertise was reciprocal, as Ghosheh reports him and other *ikhwani* comrades lent their architectural engineering knowledge to Fatah in constructing the various fortifications for the training camps.[109]

`Azzam and Ghosheh distinctly recalled the tensions between local authority and the PLO during this period of *fida`i* ascendancy in Jordan. Both men portray their PLO counterparts as causing friction with the local population and authority with their military marches, political presence, and leftist rhetoric. Not only alienating some of their local interlocuters, recollections from the fighters of the Bases of the Sheikhs portray a fractious dynamic between the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Islamists. `Azzam himself was brought before a panel of PLO fighters in 1970 for questioning regarding an inflammatory anticommunist sermon he gave in Irbid on the occasion of Lenin's centenary birthday.[110] Both Ghosheh and `Azzam claimed positive relations with the local (pious) population and Jordanian army units stationed in the northern sector, which is backed up by the recollections of Zarqa's mayor at the time, who said that `Azzam's sermons in the city's main mosque were widely attended by the region's residents.[111] While the Islamists formed a relatively small component of this guerrilla network, located in a cluster of camps named after notable cities/villages in Palestine, they attracted a wide swath of international volunteers, with Brotherhood activists from Syria forming a notable segment of the *ikhwani* guerrillas (the line share of known fallen

[108] Hegghammer, "Fighter" in *the Caravan*. See also, Ghosheh, "the late Sixties and early Seventies" in *the Red Minaret*.
[109] Ghosheh, *The Red Minaret*, 97-99.
[110] ` Abd Allah ` Azzam, *Hamas: harakat al-muqawama al-islamiyya fi falastin, al-judhoor al-tarikhiyya wa al-mithaq (Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine, Historical Roots and Charter)* (Markaz Shahid `Azzam al-Il` alami, 1989), 22-23.
[111] Ghosheh, *The Red Minaret*, 97-99, see also, Hegghammer, *the Caravan*, 59-60.

fightesr from the Bases of the Sheikhs hailed from Hama or Damascus).[112] The Egyptian Brother `Abd al-Aziz `Ali, a veteran of the conflict against the British in the Suez region, led the combat operations of the Islamist *fida`iyin*, later going on to train cadres of the Syrian Brotherhood and Hadid's militant offshoot, the Fighting Vanguard in their struggle against the Ba`th.[113] During the Afghan *jihad* in the 1980s, `Ali joined `Azzam's Services Bureau as a military advisor. As Thomas Hegghammer has noted, `Ali's career represented "the Muslim Brotherhood's institutional memory in military affairs" as a ubiquitous figure in the group's armed struggles over a forty-year span from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Throughout their operations in the frontier of Jordanian and Israeli-occupied territory, the Brotherhood's *fida`iyin* subtly expressed their militancy not only against Israel but also against their ideological enemies within the Arab political house. One of the Islamist *fida`iyin*'s final operations before the Black September conflict between the Jordanian government and PLO rooted out *fida`i* presence in the Kingdom was named after the recently executed ideological pillar of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb, in honor of the four-year anniversary of his "martyrdom" at the hands of Nasir's regime.[114] Further, Isam al-Attar, the Syrian Brotherhood's General Guide, visited the camps while in exile from Syria, then under Ba`thist rule. Writing on this brief period of *jihad* in the 1980s, `Azzam would recall the secularity of the Ba`th as a particularly motivating factor for young *ikhwanji*s: "In Syria, where the Ba`th Party was dominating, one would say: 'I believe in the Ba`th, our only Lord, and in Arabism, our only religion.'" After visiting the camps, Attar would claim that "all the Muslim Brotherhood cadres in Jordan and Syria visited the camps or participated in the fighting."[115] Whether this bears truth

[112] Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 59.
[113] Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 51.
[114] Ibid, 58.
[115] Ibid, 52.

or represents an exaggeration, there is no doubt that the Bases of the Sheikhs provided a critical venue for socialization and ideological consolidation for radical members and adherents to the "corrective movement" within the Muslim Brotherhood, providing" a means of interfacing with leaders across the regional branches as well as important leadership figures. It deepened `Azzam's ties to Syrian Brothers that he had met during his time at University of Damascus, but with whom he had not forged close relationships due to his remote learning. The sheikh was charged with returning the body of a Syrian comrade to his family in Hama, where he stayed with the influential Marwan Hadid.[116] As the Syrian Ikhwan was at this point an underground movement, with Hadid as its most notable militant in this period, `Azzam witnessed firsthand the mechanics of a *jihad* based on Schmittian *absolute enmity*.

Hadid and his Fighting Vanguard had gradually drifted ideologically from the Attar-led Damascene "old guard" leadership of the Syrian Brethren. Attar had advocated a nonviolent strategy since the outbreak and fierce repression of Islamist resistance centered in Hama in 1964[117], his exile from Syria seriously hampered his ability to contain the hardline faction emerging across the "northern axis" of the Syrian *ikhwani* branch. Hadid, along with leading Hama-based *ikhwani* ideologue Sa`id Hawwa, built support among the Sunni population by utilizing Qutb's strategy of *da'wa* (proselytization) combined with building institutional presence within professional organizations when possible. The nadir of Hawwa's incitements against the "godless *nusayri* regime" came in the Hafiz Asad era, amid the controversy over the Ba`th's proposed secular changes to the Syrian constitution. *Jund Allah* ("*Army of God*") was published by Hawwa in this period,[118] disseminating widely among the "northern axis" mosques and

[116] `Azzam, *Hamas*, 23.
[117] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 89.
[118] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 96-98.

reaching further to Brotherhood branches outside Syria via the militant *ikhwani* network that had consolidated under fire in the Bases of the Sheikhs. The text trafficked in sectarian logic in its call to wage *jihad* against the "nusayri" Asad government. As the Hadid-Hawwa wing of the Syrian Brothers built up popular support via public demonstrations and mosque activism, it simultaneously prepared to wage armed struggle by covertly building up caches of light arms.[119]

While the Syrian Ikhwan brought the *jihad* home with them upon their return from the Jordan adventure, Ghosheh and `Azzam remained in the Hashemite Kingdom, absent any desire to struggle against the ruling regime. During Black September, the Islamist *fida`iyin* essentially demobilized, with most members returning to their home countries. `Azzam and Ghosheh both recalled that good relations with the local population and rank-and-file of the Jordanian military rescued their movement from the same violent fate the secular *fida`*iyin groups faced from the Kingdom. The Qutbist-*jihadi* enmity animating Islamist opposition to Nasir and the Ba`th was clearly not a generic rejection of state authority, but a contingent position based on the *ikhwanji*s' status as dissidents under insecure postcolonial regimes. Recalling a general repression towards politically subversive activities following the crackdown, `Azzam stated "We [the 'corrective movement'] blamed ourselves a lot and stayed away [from *jihad*] from 1970 to 1979," adding that fellow *ikhwanji*s "wrote about [*jihad*] in books," especially if there was an active conflict as in Syria, but that all of them "who [had] tasted the sweetness of *jihad*" longed to return to the armed struggle eventually.[120]

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[119] ` Azzam records that Hadid dispatched his followers to amass armaments whenever possible from around Syria. For the sheikh's writings on Hadid's clandestine efforts, see Appendices 2 and 3 in *Ashes of Hama*.

[120] 'Abd Allah 'Azzam, "Memories of Palestine (ca 1989)," trans. Thomas Hegghammer and Alaaeldeen Nabil Soliman, *Die Welt Des Islams* 53, nos. 3–4 (2013): 460–65, ATLA0001964391, 464 https://doi.org/10.1163/15685152-5334P0009.

Both Ghosheh and `Azzam began their professional careers in earnest, `Azzam as an academic at the University of Jordan with the *shari`a* faculty,[121] and Ghosheh as an engineer contracted with the Jordanian government, and later with various private firms.[122] Both men followed the Qutbist strategy of occupying positions of influence within society to facilitate the Ikhwan's *d`awa* and political goals. As an educator, `Azzam developed a reputation as a popular lecturer and charismatic orator, delving into the contentious campus politics of the period on the side of the Islamists as soon as he joined the staff in 1973. `Azzam's classroom became a model for the pedagogical project of the student Islamist movement. As a rising writer on issues concerning the Islamic world, and an active advocate of conservative social values on campus, like veiling for women and sex segregation in his classroom, the Islamist student sector at the University of Jordan considered `Azzam both an intellectual inspiration and exponent for the ethics of the model *ikhwanji*.

Numerous contemporaries from the *shari`a* faculty and other departments have asserted that `Azzam was one of the university's most popular figures at the time. Due to the high-population of Palestinian students—both from the occupied territories themselves but also those with Jordanian citizenship who had resided in the Kingdom for a generation or perhaps more--`Azzam's influence was not limited to the Amman campus. Muhammad Kazim Salawha, an alumnus of Jordan University and a formerly active Hamas member, claimed that his generation of militant activists "was inspired by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam" to *jihad* during the First Intifada.[123] A Jordanian Muslim Brother, Kazim `Ayish, told *Al-Jazeera* in 2009 that "hundreds"

[121] Hegghammer, *The Caravan*, 80-81.
[122] Ghosheh, "The Late Sixties and Early Seventies" and "The Seventies" in *The Red Minaret*.
[123] Hegghammer, *the Caravan*, 85.

of Hamas cadre had studied with Sheikh `Azzam at the University.[124] As will be discussed in a later section, `Azzam's educational legacy within Hamas extends well beyond the students he personally mentored: his footprint on the movement's intellectual architecture is evident not only through his influence on the 1988 *mithaq* (charter), but also through the presence of his work in the movement's pedagogy.

The Qutbist "corrective" current within the Brotherhood found ample opportunity to rhetorically support the various *jihadi* movements gaining steam in the 1970s. Despite the obvious sectarian differences separating the Iranian Revolution's leaders and the Brotherhood, the Jordanian-based *ikhwanji*s saw Khomeini's rise to power as a model for overthrowing decadent, disbelieving regimes, especially in Syria and Afghanistan, where active *jihad*s were being waged. Ghosheh recalled a rally in Amman celebrating the victory of the Iranian revolution in 1979 in which `Azzam gave an enthusiastic address praising the triumph of Islamic forces over the Shah. However, the Sheikh would sour towards Khomeini's Islamic Republic amidst the Ayatollah's reticence to diplomatically intervene on behalf of the Syrian Islamists repressed by Ba`thist security forces in Syria, along with what `Azzam perceived as the "dominance" of Shi`i theology and jurisprudence over the revolution.[125] As Khomeini's adherence to Shi`i Islamist ideas was well known, especially in the lead-up to the Islamic Revolution's victory, it was more likely that the Sheikh's willingness to overlook doctrinal differences, apparent in his exuberant praise for the Iranians at the summit of the revolution, was overshadowed by his repulsion to the Syrian regime and its association with revolutionary Iran.

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[124] Yasir Abu Hilala, *Awwal Al-Afghan al-` arab (The First Afghan Arab)*, 2009, 22:40, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrjnCcaPWpU.
[125] Ghosheh, *the Red Minaret*, 118.

`Azzam's relationship to the Syrian Brothers' *jihad* was mostly affinitive, as he wrote hagiographic biographies of fallen *ikhwani* figures such as Marwan Hadid and polemicized the Asad regime in his lectures, decrying it as *kufr*. His eulogy for Hadid placed the Syrian Brother in the canon of Brotherhood and Islamic martyrs like Qutb and Banna, while comparing the Syrian jihadist movement to the budding anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan: "[the people of Hama] are bedouins who do not play around, just like the Afghans."[126] The sheikh's profile as a prominent lecturer and rising star in the Jordanian Brotherhood apparently drew the attention of Syrian intelligence in Amman, with multiple sources close to `Azzam claiming that an incident wherein shots were fired at his family home was the work of *ba`thi* agents.[127]

By 1980, Jordan's domestic intelligence service had grown weary of `Azzam's increasingly oppositional stance towards the Hashemite regime, which he framed as a covert ally of Israel and Zionism in his lectures and writings. Considering his later criticism of the Iranian revolution, his dismissal would ironically be based on a dispute he entered with a major Jordanian newspaper editor who had printed a polemical cartoon against the clerics empowered after the Shah's downfall. `Azzam's impassioned argument was conveyed by the editor to the Jordanian government, which moved to dismiss the Sheikh from Jordan University. In the interest of maintaining its de facto alignment with the Jordanian government, the Brotherhood branch in Amman did not come to `Azzam's defense. Further, his prominent role in the dissenting Qutbist faction of the Brotherhood initiated a drift between himself and the Jordanian Brotherhood leadership, prompting the Sheikh to harbor suspicions that the Ikhwan upper brass was pleased with his departure from the university and, subsequently, the country itself. Indeed,

[126] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 215.
[127] Hegghammer, *the Caravan*, 101.

`Azzam left Jordan for Saudi Arabia, and then Pakistan, in the fall of 1980, where he would continue building connections with an emerging global Islamist network of activists.

The *jihadi* milieu that `Azzam and his contemporaries inculcated in their *fida`i* camps had shifted considerably from its essentially nationalist origins. After all, the Bases of the Sheikhs technically operated under the Fatah umbrella, yet the Islamist *fida`iyin* shifted from the *real enmity* of nationalist struggle, which defined its opposition to the Zionist enemy through the occupation of Palestinian land, to the *absolute enmity* of revolutionary jihadism. The "telluric character" of the *fida`i* partisan had given way to an internationalist vision of offensive *jihad* waged against the atheist regimes of the region. Though it must be noted that the Islamist *fida`iyin* did emphasize their greater ideological commitments through symbolism, such as the dedication of a consequential operation to Sayyid Qutb.[128] Timing an ambush against an Israeli tank patrol to coincide with the anniversary of the Egyptian writer's martyrdom sent the message that the Bases of the Sheikhs saw the Occupation in the West Bank as just one manifestation of their absolute enemy. `Azzam and his Qutbist comrades expanded their scope of action from the national liberation struggle of Palestinians, a mobilizing cause to Islamists due to the sanctity of Jerusalem as a space to Islam, to the realm of "disbelief" at large. While the Afghan *jihad* would become the locus of the *jihadi-partisan* archetype that `Azzam embodied in the mid and late 1980s, the latter half of the 1970s and early 1980s saw Syria as the epicenter of Islamist armed struggle against a ruling regime.

While the riots of the 1960s and early 1970s were somewhat of a dress rehearsal for the Fighting Vanguard and Syrian Ikhwan's *jihad* from 1976-1982, two immediate factors would force the Qutbist faction of the Brotherhood in Syria to escalate its armed activities against the

[128] ` Azzam, *Hamas*, 23.

Ba`th, the Syrian state, and eventually the `Alawi community writ large. The first concerned an immediate political variable: the death of Marwan Hadid in Mezzeh Prison. Captured in 1975, the leader of the underground, vanguardist faction of the Syrian Brothers quickly deteriorated in health, reportedly losing significant body weight and dying in such a manner that his family and comrades were unsure if he was killed or died due to intentional medical neglect and abuse when they were given his body in 1976 by state authorities.[129] The other overriding factor pushing the Vanguard to begin its violent campaign was the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in the spring of 1976. Increasingly perceived as a covert sectarian intervention by the `Alawi Asad regime in favor of another minority group—the Lebanese Christians—and a betrayal of one of Arabism's central protagonists in the Palestinian *fida`iyin*, the invasion of Lebanon to contain the leftist-Muslim coalition provided both a rhetorical tool and strategic asset to the *ikhwani* opposition. Recalling the episode with hindsight, `Azzam accurately recognized the United States's tacit role in the Syrian invasion through its acceptance of Damascus's aims.[130] The invasion allowed the Ikhwan to cast the avowedly "anti-imperialist" Syrian state as an ally of the US, the Maronites, and Israel. A third, longer-simmering dynamic in Syria provided ample ground for discontent that the Ikhwan sought to channel: the Syrian economy was sputtering under the increasing strains of stagflation, hitting the northern agricultural heartlands particularly hard.[131]

A series of Fighting Vanguard-authored assassinations against civilian, military, and Ba`th Party targets rocked Syria throughout the period between 1976 to 1979. The initial intent of these attacks was not necessarily to debilitate the state but to convince the Muslim

[129] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 102-103, 215.
[130] `Azzam, *Hamas*, 15.
[131] For an explanation of Syria's mid-1970s economic decline and its effects on the Ikhwan's rebellion, see Fred H. Lawson, "Syria's Intervention in the Lebanese Civil War, 1976: A Domestic Conflict Explanation," *International Organization* 38, no. 3 (1984): 451–80, JSTOR.

Brotherhood leadership and broader Sunni population of the Vanguard's case for armed struggle. This tension between the movement's grassroots Qutbist faction and its traditional leadership was seen across the Brotherhood's national branches, including in Jordan, where `Azzam increasingly found himself at odds with the General Guide and his circle within the Ikhwan. A veritable vanguardist current was building steam across the Brotherhood's Levantine chapters, centered on the *absolute enmity* of Qutb. Sa`id Hawwa's writings in the Brotherhood's *Al-Nadhir* publication began referencing Ibn Taymiyya's medieval *fatwa*s to condemn the `Alawi, referring to Asad as a *nusayri* leader and increasingly casting the entire `Alawi community as *murtaddun* ("apostates who have left Islam"). The targeted assassination campaign degenerated along with the radicalizing rhetoric into indiscriminate sectarian violence against the `Alawi, symbolized in the infamous 1979 Aleppo Artillery School Massacre, in which 83 `Alawi cadets were gunned down by a Sunni Ba`thist officer-turned-*ikhwani* double agent.[132]

This sectarian bloodletting brought Syria to the brink of civil war: Syria's security services arbitrarily detained thousands of civilians in and around Aleppo in the attack's aftermath, spurring rioting among Sunni Aleppines that killed a further eighteen `Alawi civilians, and the Sunni Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass was forced to intervene in clashes that erupted between Sunni and `Alawi officers at the Homs Military Academy in the ensuing days.[133] With the army in danger of splintering along confessional lines as in Lebanon, the Asad regime closed ranks behind its `Alawi core and escalated its repressive campaign by empowering Rif`at al-Asad's "Defense Brigades," a mostly-`Alawi paramilitary infamous for its ruthless methods and extraordinary authority during the duration of the Ba`th-Ikhwan conflict. The difference in regime behavior was made gravely and immediately manifest after a March 1980 riot in an

[132] Batatu, *Syria's Muslim Brethren*.
[133] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 74.

alpine northern village was brutally suppressed by Rif`at's forces, which killed over two hundred protestors in the mountainous hamlet.

Eventually, in Syria, in contrast to Jordan, where `Azzam was eventually pushed out for his radicalism, the atmosphere of repression and mounting pressure on the Brotherhood to act after the death of Hadid facilitated a gradual convergence of the leadership and Vanguard's positions regarding armed struggle. In 1979, after the anti-`Alawi massacre in Aleppo, the Syrian Ikhwan's consultative council officially lent its support to armed opposition to the Ba`th, opting to establish a military organization to rival the Fighting Vanguard.[134] This was partially due to the regime's refusal to draw a distinction between the Brotherhood and the Vanguard, despite the latter operating autonomously. Within a year of the bloody incident in Aleppo, the state promulgated a law that punished membership in the Syrian Ikhwan with death. A "joint command" was established between the *ikhwani* fighting groups, and as the Ba`thist crackdown intensified the Brotherhood's actions moved towards a counter-escalation. After Sa`id Hawwa's ascension to the Ikhwan's military command in January 1982, the Islamists in the Brotherhood stronghold of Hama moved quickly toward insurrection, distributing arms amongst the city's residents in preparation for a protracted conflict with the regime.[135] The idea was that the Hama uprising would inspire similar revolts across Syria's major cities, bringing about a terminal crisis for the Asad regime. Veterans of the Fighting Vanguard like Abu Mus`ab al-Suri, a later associate of al-Qaeda founder Usama bin Laden (1957-2011), decried the idealistic logic behind the Hama uprising—which the rebellion's *ikhwani* leaders thought would precipitate a battle that would ultimately see them dislodge the Asad regime and use Syria's state machinery to wage *jihad*

[134] Ibid, 110-117.
[135] Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*, 125**-126.**

against Israel[136]—recalling that the rebels ran out of anti-tank rockets after only four days of conflict.[137] Instead of becoming the spearhead of the Levant's Islamic revolution, Hama became the tragic symbol of the rebellion's defeat in the three weeks of fighting and massacres that ensued.

While initially successful within Hama itself, the revolt turned into a brutal standoff between the residents, Islamist resistance, and the regime. Tens of thousands were killed, with many more displaced, in the collective punishment that the regime unleashed on the northern city, which saw much of its old quarter razed amidst the massacres. Hawwa, seen by many as the architect of the ill-fated uprising due to his speeches on Baghdad-based opposition radio bands inciting revolt in the days leading up to the rebellion, remained in exile, along with much of the Syrian *ikhwani* leadership. Fighters from *jihad* that managed to escape sought refuge in neighboring Arab states; many of these militant exiles (including al-Suri) soon found a new struggle to attach their efforts to in Afghanistan, drawn to the anti-communist rebellion that `Abd Allah `Azzam had dedicated himself to supporting after moving to Pakistan in 1981 to support the solidarity movement for the Afghan *mujahidin* based there.[138]

The same period that saw the waning of the *jihad* in Syria witnessed the formation of the Islamic Resistance Movement in Palestine's nucleus, a movement that would become known by its Arabic acronym, "Hamas" (*hamas*). In Gaza and the West Bank, the dominance of the secular

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[136] Seized from bin Ladin's possessions by the US after his assassination in Abbottabad, Pakistan, a memo likely authored by the al-Qaeda leader cataloged by the US Department of Defense s "SOCOM-2012-0000017" recalls institutional knowledge that he gained from veterans of the Syrian *jihad* that he met in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The document stated: "the Brotherhood's calculations were unrealistic. The Brotherhood even thought that after it was able to topple the regime, it would take on Israel." See Nelly Lahoud et al., *Letters from Abbottabad: Bin Ladin Sidelined?:* (Defense Technical Information Center, 2012), https://doi.org/10.21236/ADA560875.

[137] Abu Mus` ab al-Suri, "Appendix 5: Abu Musab al-Suri on the Battle of Hama in February 1982," in Lefevre, *Ashes of Hama*.

[138] Ibid, 139-141.

nationalist and leftist movements in the social organizations and universities left supporters of the Brotherhood with the task of building popular support by engaging in social activism and religious education. `Abd Allah Yusuf al-Laddawi (1985-2025), a member of al-Qassam Brigades who was killed by Israeli forces during the genocide in Gaza, wrote in his insider history of Hamas that traces the movement's institutional legacy from its roots as a branch of the Ikhwan. He estimates that up to 1987 (the year of Hamas's emergence as a formal organization), the Brotherhood organized approximately forty percent of mosques in Gaza and the West Bank under its direction.[139] Sayyid Qutb's concept of a "believing vanguard" that challenged disbelieving regimes through da`wa and *jihad* when possible took root in Gaza in the wake of the Nasirit crackdown on Brotherhood activity throughout the 1960s. Qutb's books, along with Sa`id Hawwa's and the other leading intellectuals of the Brotherhood, were disseminated through movement-affiliated mosques as small, digestible booklets, incubating a popular constituency for the *absolute enmity* that animated *jihadi* struggles across the Levant.[140] Ironically, the Israeli occupation facilitated the Gazan Ikhwan's return to public life, and it experienced a resurgence in membership through its mosque and campus activism throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

Yahya as-Sinwar (1962-2024), head of Hamas in Gaza from 2017 until his killing in Rafah by the Israeli military in 2024, reconstructed the process of the Ikhwan's growth among the college youth in his semi-autobiographical prison novel *The Thorn and the Carnation*. Through his fictionalized portraits of the *ikhwani* activists he personally knew through life in Gaza's camps and Israel's prisons, Sinwar recorded Hamas's internal history by amalgamizing

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[139] ` Abd Allah Yusuf al-Laddawi, "'The Seeds of Hamas: A Report on Promoting the Values and Morals of Islam in Palestinian Society' (2025) [Part One]," trans. Mujamma Haraket, Mujamma Haraket, Substack, November 18, 2025, https://substack.com/@mujammaharaket/p-179220872.

[140] Abd Allah Yusuf al-Laddawi, "'The Seeds of Hamas: A Report on Promoting the Values and Morals of Islam in Palestinian Society' (2025) [Part Three]," trans. Mujamma Haraket, Mujamma Haraket, Substack, January 10, 2026, mujammaharakat.substack.com/p/abd-allah-yusuf-al-laddawi-the-seeds-1bf .

the personal narratives he encountered from his compatriots in the Ikhwan/Hamas. One of his characters, an eventual participant in the Al-Qassam Brigade's early actions, cuts his teeth as an organizer while at Jordan University, where the faculty of the Sharia College introduces him to the classic contemporary works of political Islam. In Sinwar's narrative, the Palestinian students at Jordan University wield their political experience from that center of Islamist activism to bolster the efforts of the nascent student Islamic Bloc at Bir Zeit University in the occupied West Bank. [141] `Azzam's influence on the Islamist scene at Jordan University was doubtlessly central to the work of these activists, as his writing from this period featured prominently in the movement's mosque-based outreach.[142] One of Sinwar's characters nearly follows `Azzam's lead by attempting to relocate to Pakistan to aid the Afghan *jihad*, only to be foiled by the authorities.[143] While `Azzam never returned to Palestine physically, his specter was present in every reading circle and education center that used his work to cultivate a consciousness geared toward *jihad*.

The novel's narrator, Ahmed, eventually becomes a member of the Brotherhood through the activism of his cousin, Ibrahim, a clear narrative stand-in for founding Hamas member Ibrahim al-Maqadama (1952-2003). A consequential scene in Ahmed's politicization depicts one of the Brotherhood *da`wa* initiatives facilitated by the access Gazans and West Bank residents had to the land of historical Palestine under the pre-Intifada system of movement between Gaza, the West Bank, and Israel. A group of young men is led by Ibrahim and other *ikhwani* activists to visit Al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron. En route to Jerusalem, the group stops their bus at the remnants of villages razed in the Nakba to give a stark lesson in the history of the

[141] Yahya Al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, (TASQ: 2024), 130-132.
[142] Abd Allah Yusuf al-Laddawi, "The Seeds of Hamas [Part Four]".
[143] Al-Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, 135.

national struggle. Sinwar's narration through Ahmed's words imprints the affective power of the Al-Aqsa complex's grandeur and its symbolic value for the Brotherhood:

> We regathered and climbed the steps to the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock. Ibrahim began to explain about the mosque and the rock from which Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, ascended to heaven during the Isra and Mi'raj... [Ibrahim] then delved into the significance of Jerusalem being the essential earthly station on this celestial journey… A shiver ran through my body, and I was enveloped by chills I couldn't hide, echoed by those standing beside me. For us, from the Gaza Strip's refugee camps, visiting Jerusalem for the first time – previously just a name with minimal impact – now stood in this sacred place surrounded by occupation forces, allowing entry to some and denying others. It dawned on us that the conflict had another dimension than previously understood; it wasn't just about land and a people displaced, but a battle of faith, culture, history, and existence. [144]

These scenes of Islamist social and political outreach focus on the sensory and affinitive associations of Sinwar's characters rather than specific doctrine and intellectuals. Sinwar's protagonists are compelled to *jihadi* organizing through their social networks as much as their dedication to Islam and the national struggle. Conversely, Laddawi's history of Hamas's educational "seeds" and popular incubators centers the scholars and figures that constructed the Palestinian Ikhwan's *Weltanschauung*.

The differing contexts in which *Seeds of Hamas* (2025) and *Thorn and the Carnation* (2004) were produced leads to differing methods of communicating Hamas's pedagogical material despite covering similar subject matter. Produced within the Israeli prison system during

[144] Sinwar, *The Thorn and the Carnation*, (147-151).

the Second Intifada, Sinwar's novel does not explicitly name `Azzam, Hawwa, Qutb, or even the Brotherhood's founder Hasan al-Banna, only positively citing Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926-2022), an Egyptian *`alim* associated with the Brotherhood. A production of al-Qaradawi's play "the Scholar and the Tyrant" was performed as a pedagogical and fundraising initiative of the Islamist student movement, aiming to raise funds to donate to the Afghan *jihad* while promoting a message of pious dissent towards the secular regimes of Egypt and the Ba`th through the production's allegorical morality tale about a corrupt `Umayyad ruler. From Sinwar's standpoint in 2004, the lack of references to Brotherhood figures appears a strategic decision to avoid potential controversies between Hamas and groups/entities with which it was contemporarily engaged in acts of solidarity. After all, the novel's concluding chapters give tertiary references to the budding Axis of Resistance concept, with Sinwar placing several Hamas-affiliated characters in the Marj az-Zuhor deportee camps in Southern Lebanon, where Hizballah and Syrian intelligence forged direct relationships with the deported Hamas leadership, during the First Intifada; not to mention the narrative's conclusion which depicts a scene of the various armed group of Gaza cohering in a unified solidarity march despite their ideological differences.[145] Beyond mentioning the Tal al-Za`atar massacre against Palestinians in Lebanon, perpetrated by Maronite militias and indirectly facilitated by the Syrians, Sinwar discusses the role that opposition to the Ba`thist Syrian regime played in *ikhwani* pedagogy.

Laddawi's narrative, in contrast to Sinwar's portrait of the movement's development, does not shy away from the Qutbist *absolute enmity* central to Hamas/the Ikhwan's intellectual project. At the heart of the social-outreach campaign in both Gaza and the West Bank was Brotherhood leader Sheikh Ahmad Yasin (1936-2004), a scholar and preacher who was detained

[145] Sinwar, *the Thorn and the Carnation*, 314-315; 449-450.

by Nasirist authorities for his Qutb-inspired *da`wa* work.[146] Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Yasin spearheaded a mosque-building campaign among Gaza's refugee camps that pooled communal resources and mitigated the need for authorization by Egyptian or Israeli powers. In Sinwar's narrative, his role as educator and leader for the camp's "truth seeking" youth is represented through his shepherding of mosque-based study groups:

> [Young men from the camp] began to frequent [Sheikh Ahmad's] mosque for prayers, then sit in a circle to read the Quran or study religious books on the Prophet's biography, jurisprudence, or hadith. [He] would explain, interpret, and train the young men around him, who received his teachings eagerly.[147]

In Gaza's refugee camps, an Egyptian-curriculum, often delivered by international NGOs and the UN provided the main form of education Laddawi expounds the utility of the mosque-based strategy with clarity: " The mosques phase'… between the years 1967–1975…aimed at building mosques and absorbing the foundational base of a generation capable of bearing the burdens of social change in Palestinian society and of steadfastness in the face of the enemy." Yassin sought to "translate [the Palestinian Ikhwan's] social discourse into a tangible reality" through the initial *da`wa* phase of the Palestinian *jihad*.[148] The institutional fabric of Hamas was woven with the mosque as its primary stitch—a site of independent ideological and social reproduction which Yasin and other *ikhwani* organizers used to cultivate a generation geared toward *jihad*.

Laddawi, writing in the midst of a regional battle that had only partially drawn in Hamas's Axis of Resistance allies with the exception of Syria, did not hesitate to name the grievances with the Ba`thist regime that were inherent to the movement's outreach, strategy, and

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[146] ` Abd Allah Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas" [Part One].
[147] Sinwar, *the Thorn and the Carnation*, 103-104.
[148] Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas" [Part One].

ideology. He situates the transition to *jihad* after Sheikh Yasin's *da`wa* strategy as a response, in part, to the success and failure of other *jihadi* campaigns:

> …the phase that followed the university was the phase of confronting the occupation, after the backbone of the movement had grown firm and its followers had multiplied and the idea of jihad had deepened among its sons—especially after the experiences of Afghanistan and Syria and the Islamic Revolution in Iran and after the Palestinian organizations left Lebanon.[149]

Afghanistan's Islamist opposition appears alongside the Syrian Brotherhood and the Iranian Revolution as models that inspired Palestinian believers to take up *jihad* during the First Intifada.

Laddawi offers brief biographical portraits of "notable figures of the methodology", which feature the Brotherhood's founder Hasan al-Bana and the movement's intellectual architect Sayyid al-Qutb, but also several notable Syrian Brotherhood figures who played prominent roles in the anti-Ba`th *jihad*, which Laddawi was keen to highlight. Sa`id Hawwa is described as a leader "close to the people and very popular… tender-hearted and sensitive," as well as a "prominent theorist" and expert of Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence that called for the ultimate ideal of a "global Islamic state." Laddawi describes this revered personality's role in the anti-Ba`th opposition without reservation, calling his period of leadership in the Syrian *jihad* as one "distinguished by his high understanding," even citing the Syrian *ikhwanji*'s *Jund Allah* as an important text within the Brotherhood/Hamas's educational incubators.[150] *Jund Allah* called for *jihad* against the "*nusayri*" Asad regime and the `Alawi in general as apostates to Islam; Hamas maintained Hawwa's texts alongside those of Syrian Brothers Munir al-Ghadban (1942-

[149] Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas" [Part One].
[150] Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas" [Part Four].

2014), Mustafa al-Sibai (1915-1964), and the songs of pro-Ikhwan *munshid* (singer of hymns) Abu Ratib.[151]

In 1982, the Palestinian Ikhwan was able to reattach itself to its West Bank counterpart and engage in religious/cultural activities with minimal interference from the Israeli army/authorities.[152] Sheikh Ahmed Yasin's *al-mujamma` al-islami* (The Islamic Center), a social-service and education provider for many Gazan residents. A year after the reunification of the Palestinian Brotherhood, a covert conference was held in Amman wherein the Palestinian Brothers decided to undertake armed struggle.[153] Under Yasin's directions, the Sheikh's trusted followers (including Sinwar) began organizing covert cells to initiate armed *jihad* against the occupation. Two organizations were formed along these lines: the Organization of Jihad and Da`wa (known by its Arabic acronym *al-Majd*) and the Palestinian *mujahidin*—the former was dedicated toward internal security against the occupation's intelligence penetration in Gaza, while the latter intended to procure arms for eventual resistance operations.[154] Public demonstrations against the occupation of southern Lebanon were subsequently organized by the Palestinian Ikhwan through Sheikh Yasin's movement; the momentum towards a more confrontational *jihadi* movement in Palestine hit a snag when one of the Palestinian *mujahidin* group's arms caches was discovered by Israeli agents, leading to Yasin's arrest and imprisonment in 1984.[155] Sheikh Yasin was released the following year as part of a prisoner exchange agreement between Israel and an offshoot of the PFLP, and the Palestinian Ikhwan's gestures at armed struggle continued apace. The Palestinian Ikhwan developed an apparatus to wage armed

[151] Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas", [Part Three]
[152] Wagemakers, *the Muslim Brotherhood*, 113.
[153] Paola Caridi, *Hamas: From Resistance to Regime*, Third, trans. Andrea Teti (Seven Stories Press, 2023), 63-80.
[154] Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas" [Part One].
[155] Caridi, *Hamas*, 63-81. Also, Sinwar, *Thorn and the Carnation*, 151-156; 304-305.

operations against Israel throughout the leadup to the First Intifada, inaugurated with the revolt of Palestinian workers in Gaza after the killing of six workers by an Israeli ramming attack in December 1987.

The outbreak of the Intifada brought about the announcement of Hamas as an organization and the onset of its armed operations. The expansion of *ikhwani* organizing in Gaza and the West Bank to the realm of active *jihad* would have a transformative effect on the nature of the Palestinian Islamists as a partisan/antisystemic movement. While the ideological framework of the movement would remain Qutbist, reproducing the polarized worldview of the worlds of Islam and *jahiliyya* within its educational content and internal ideology, Hamas would establish its ultimate political goal as Palestine's liberation from Israeli occupation rather than the institution of *hakimiyya* (divine sovereignty) on a universal scale. The Islamist political grammar of Hamas modulated over the period of the First Intifada, maintaining its internal Qutb and `Azzam-inspired pedagogy while adopting an increasingly traditional nationalist orientation in public communications. From a Schmittian view, the drift of Hamas from its transnational *jihadi* roots to a territorially-bound nationalist cause represents a shift in the movement's ultimate horizon from the *absolute enmity* of the Qutbist vanguardist faction of the Ikhwan to the *real enmity* of a national liberation movement. In other words, during Hamas's initial period, it distinguished itself from the global revolutionary horizon of the transnational *jihadi* current from which the movement developed. In its pedagogy and theory, Hamas's antisystemic goals remained the same, with the *jihadi* theorists of Qutb, Bana, and `Azzam maintained as pillars of the movement's intellectual apparatus. But on a practical level, Hamas anchored itself to the land of Palestine, harnessing the totalizing paradigm of Qutbist *jihad* for a national struggle rather than a global struggle. This shift from the global horizon of the global *jihadi* movement to the

telluric goals of Palestinian nationalism entailed the cultivation of unexpected relationships with some of the very entities that the movement's *jihadi* intellectuals would incite against.

Conclusion: Hamas's Telluric Jihad

The period between 1987 and 1991 saw major innovations in Hamas's strategic position as a partisan/anti-systemic group. The preparatory phase of *da`wa* that Sheikh Yasin oversaw gave way to the onset of *jihad* against the Israeli occupation, a transition that `Abd Allah al-Laddawi partially credits to the models of *jihad* that Islamists offered in Syria and Afghanistan during the 1970s and 1980s: "the phase that followed the university was the phase of confronting the occupation…the idea of jihad had deepened among [the Ikhwan's] sons—especially after the experiences of Afghanistan and Syria…"[156] The drift of Hamas from a node of the transnational *jihadi* movement to an autonomous nationalist actor steeped in Islamist political grammar engendered a contradictory position for the movement regarding its relationship with the broader *jihadi* movement. The conduit for this contradiction was Hamas's foreign policy, which was informed by pragmatic considerations for the movement's survival amidst the conditions of the First Intifada and the Oslo process.

Marj az-Zuhour and the Islamist-Ba`thi Rapprochement

During the First Intifada, Hamas's political leadership, much as it is today, was concentrated mainly in either Gaza or the Palestinian diaspora in an Arab state. Ibrahim Ghosheh recalls that the Gazan Ikhwan initiated the revolt and established Hamas as an autonomous structure, activating their comrades in the West Bank soon after and gaining the support of the

[156] Al-Laddawi, "Seeds of Hamas" [Part One].

Palestinian members of the Jordanian Ikhwan as well.[157] Ghosheh led the Palestine section of the Jordanian branch in coordinating an external committee dedicated to supporting the Intifada from abroad. This body eventually morphed into Hamas's first external political body, laying the foundations for its Political Bureau. Ghosheh relocated to Kuwait to develop the Bureau along with Khalid Mish`al, Hamas's longtime diaspora-based political chief. However, the Hamas office in Kuwait City would soon be shuttered and relocated to Amman following the anti-Palestinian reprisals in Kuwait during the retreat of Iraqi forces in the First Gulf War. Ghosheh had participated in a multilateral Islamist effort to de-escalate the Gulf Crisis throughout 1990-1991, but to no avail. As a member of this diplomatic delegation, Ghosheh became acquainted with the political elite of two states that had become *betes noires* in the Sunni Islamist scene: Syria and Iran.

Tehran took an interest in posturing an alternative regional alignment that contested the growing bloc of Arab states seeking negotiations with Israel. Eight days before the US-sponsored Madrid Conference bringing together Arab actors and Israeli negotiators, Iran convened the Second Conference in Support of the Intifada, bringing together all the various Palestinian political factions. Ten of the factions (including Hamas, PIJ, PFLP, but not Fatah) issued a joint statement calling for a unified political position to reject the Madrid Conference and support armed resistance. Part of the agreement stipulated that the next meeting of the resistant factions would be in Damascus, where they would consolidate their unified strategy.[158] In Ghosheh's previous encounter with the Syrian Vice President `Abd al-Halim Khaddam (1932-2020), the prospect of a possible partnership between Hamas and the Syrian government seemed nil, as he

[157] Ghosheh, *the Red Minaret*, 139-141.
[158] Abdalhakim Aziz Hanaini, *Manhajiya Harakat Hamas Fi Al-` alaqat al-Kharajiya: Suriya Namudhjan 2000-2015 (Hamas' Foreign Policy: Syria as a Case Study, 2000-2015)* (Zaytouna Center for Studies and Publishing, 2018), 80-82.

had noted the "fundamental disagreements" that separated the two parties.[159] In fact, Hamas would not have made it to the second meeting of the factions in Damascus had it not been for the intervention of PFLP-General Command leader Ahmed Jibril, who promised a hesitant Khaddam that his party would take responsibility for the Islamists.[160] The factional meetings in Damascus took place, where Hamas was able to coordinate its own bilateral meeting with the Syrians for January 1992, and a thaw between the *ikhwani* offshoot and the Ba`thist government ensued. At this stage, Qassam Brigades co-founder Abdelhakim Aziz Hanaini considered the relationship between them and the Syrians to be based on mutual necessity as well as mutual suspicion.[161] Events in the First Intifada would soon alter this dynamic.

In December 1992, Israeli forces raided hundreds of homes across the West Bank and Gazaand sent 415 suspected Islamist activists from Hamas and PIJ to a remote area in the Israeli-controlled south Lebanese "buffer zone", near the village Marj az-Zuhor. The deportees elected Hamas leader Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi (1947-2004) as their spokesman and went on to establish a camp in the harsh countryside, enjoying the support of the local Lebanese authorities and political parties and the neighboring Syrians as well. The activists invited the international press to tour the camp and lend coverage to their plight, drawing in consistent media attention and establishing Hamas as an internationally known actor.[162] The press coverage temporarily succeeded at pressuring the Arab states to slow their negotiations with Israel, but more consequentially, the deportations facilitated the expansion of ties between Hamas and the Ba`th regime and formed the background context from which the Axis of Resistance concept would flourish. Hafez Asad dispatched his information minister to contact Hamas's newly installed

[159] Ghosheh, *The Red Minaret*, 153.
[160] Hanaini, *Manhaijiya harakat hamas*, 82.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Caridi, *Hamas*, 98-101.

representative in Syria to inform him that any necessary facilities that the deportees requested could be provided by the Syrians.[163] Ghosheh records that Lebanese political parties and the Syrian government ensured the deportees' access to food in the initial trying months of their exile.[164] Rantisi wrote an open letter praising the "courageous" stance of the Asad regime in supporting the deported activists, marking a significant shift in the public discourse of the Palestinian *ikhwanji*s. Soon after, the official presence of Hamas cadres in Damascus began to swell, eventually keeping pace with the other resistance factions' place in the Syrian capital. While most Marj az-Zuhor deportees were able to return after a year in exile, those who feared lengthy sentences upon their return to occupied Palestine made arrangements to reside in Syria with the financial support of the Ba`thist government. The movement began organizing in the Palestinian refugee camps across the country, becoming the first *ikhwani* organization to openly operate in Syria in more than two and a half decades.[165] Tensions between Jordan's government and the Hamas leadership residing in Amman boiled over from 1995 to 1999, and pressure mounted on the Political Bureau to find a new host country. With the strategic depth offered by its expanding relationship with the Ba`th in mind, Hamas's leadership made the decision by the late nineties to relocate to Damascus, under the security umbrella offered by the Ba`thist state.

In 1998, the flourishing partnership between Hamas and Syria was symbolized by the warm reception Sheikh Ahmad Yasin received upon his visit to the country in May 1998. Having been released the year before as part of one of Hamas's first successful prisoner exchange agreements with Israel, Yasin was granted diplomatic privileges on his tour of Syria that the Ba`th typically reserved for a head of state: high-ranking state officials received the Sheikh at

[163] Hanaini, *Manhaijiya harakat hamas*, 84.
[164] Ghosheh, *the Red Minaret*, 172.
[165] Hanaini, *Manhaijiya harakat hamas*, 85-87.

Damascus Airport at the VIP lounge that typically served foreign diplomats and leaders. Accompanied by the movement's leading Political Bureau members, including Ghosheh and Mish`al, Yasin was invited to a high-profile meeting with Hafiz Asad, his vice president Khaddam, and the Syrian foreign minister. The contents of the meeting communicated the utility of the Ba`th-Hamas partnership, as the leaders exchanged compliments on their counterpart's opposition to the Oslo process and the style of rule imposed by the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority. The other agenda items in the meeting mostly landed in Hamas's favor, as the Syrian president recognized the movement's paramount role in the Intifada in front of other militant factions and offered increased measures to accommodate the movement in Syria, adding that the meeting offered a necessary step in reconciling Islamic and nationalist movements.[166] The only topic that did not go over well was Yasin's offer of mediation between the Syrian Brotherhood and the regime, which was met with an emphatic rejection by Asad.

The Asad-Yasin meeting was followed by a mass rally in the Yarmuk refugee camp, where thousands of Palestinians and Syrians received the *ikhwani* icon in what was surely the largest Brotherhood-related rally in decades. The Syrian Brotherhood, in its own right, was not pleased with the reconciliation between its sister organization and the government that had forced it into exile and clandestinity. A meeting between Hamas Political Bureau member Musa Abu Marzuq and the General Guide of the Syrian Ikhwan was organized, wherein Marzuq explained the movement's pragmatic and nationalist rationale for pursuing a relationship with the Ba`th. Despite the reservations of the Syrian Brothers, the meeting ended with a memorandum that clarified Hamas's rationale for working with the Syrian state as concern for the Palestinian

[166] Hanaini, *Manhaijiya harakat hamas*, 85-87.

refugee population and its dire need for constructive external relations in the contemporary geopolitical environment.[167]

Inevitable Divorce

Hamas's footprint in the Palestinian refugee camps played a unique role in Syria's politics. The organization was allowed to launch a broad range of social service initiatives and charitable endeavors within Syria's Palestinian refugee camps. Throughout the 2000s, Hamas began to monopolize the political and social organizing scene within the camps.[168] Additionally, ss the sole Islamist party sanctioned by the Syrian government, Hamas in Syria functioned as a sort of release valve for the country's Islamist underground political culture. Much of the same pedagogical material that Hamas promulgated in their Palestine-based educational incubators was filtered through the movement's social apparatus in the Syrian camps to produce its Qutbist ideological message without raising the alarms of the Ba`thist security state.[169] The religious social values that Hamas promoted in its areas of control in Gaza were similarly enforced in Yarmuk and other camps where the movement was strong.[170] While most of the Islamist organizing that Hamas performed in Syria was limited to the Palestinian community, the organization and its leaders were able to influence the majority Sunni Syrian society through their sanctioned activity. Khalid Mish`al began attending a Damascene mosque outside the Palestinian camps along with his confidantes and followers, gradually drifting the space into a

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[167] Hanaini, *Manhaijiya harakat hamas*, 96-115.
[168] Valentina Napolitano, "Hamas and the Syrian Uprising: A Difficult Choice," *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 3 (2013): 85–73, IJP0000289830.
[169] Nidal Bitari, "Yarmuk Refugee Camp and the Syrian Uprising: A View from Within," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 1 (2013): 61–78, https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2013.43.1.61.
[170] Nasser Sharara, "(As-Shabah 'hamas' Tuqatil Fi al-Yarmuk) أشباح «حماس» تقاتل في اليرموك," *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut, Lebanon), December 19, 2012, https://www.al-akhbar.com/Arab/80493/أشباح--حماس--تقاتل-في-اليرموك.

more politicized direction. Non-Palestinian Sunni Islamists, like the first post-Ba`th Syrian president, Ahmed al-Shar`a, began attending the mosque during Mish`al's time in the Syrian capital, creating an acceptable venue for Islamist social organizing outside the Palestinian camps.[171]

At the outbreak of the Syrian Revolution in 2011, Hamas attempted to preserve the preferable status quo by striking a middle path between supporting the regime and the Syrian people's aspirations. The movement's ability to act as mediator between the Sunni majority and the Ba`th was recognized by regional actors, as the Arab League general secretary Nabil al-Arabi requested Mish`al to approach the regime to find a peaceful solution.[172] The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood leader, Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni, asked Mish`al personally to intercede on behalf of the Syrian people to prevent a descent into violent confrontation between the opposition and the government. The moderate tone of the movement towards the uprising—calling for the regime to engage in a process of popular consultation and reform—was criticized by major figures in the transnational Islamist scene. Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, the renowned Egyptian scholar, warned Hamas that its refusal to condemn the regime outright would translate as solidarity with Asad against the Syrian masses. Caught between the benefits offered by Ba`thist patronage and the *absolute enmity* of the movement's pedagogical core, Hamas set itself on a course for friction with the Syrian state when it refused to participate in the Asad's counter-insurgency strategies, including its requests for Hamas to support pro-regime demonstrations in

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[171] Raya Jalabi, "The Secret History of Syria's New Leader, Ahmed al-Sharaa," *The Irish Times* (Dublin, Ireland), March 16, 2025, https://www.irishtimes.com/world/middle-east/2025/03/16/the-secret-history-of-syrias-new-leader-ahmed-al-sharaa/.

[172] Leila Seurat, *The Foreign Policy of Hamas: Ideology, Decision Making and Political Supremacy*, SOAS Palestine Studies (I.B. Tauris, 2022), 90 https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12709081?sid=75569069.

Yarmuk.[173] By December 2011, the movement had extricated most of its staff and non-Syrian born members out of the country, dispersing them across their home cities and villages or in the movement's offices in the Gulf.[174] In February 2012, the movement had left the country, although its spokesman denied any permanent break with the regime. That same month, head of the Hamas in Gaza, Isma`il Hanieh (1962-2024), delivered a sermon at Egypt's Al-Azhar Mosque where he declared solidarity with the Syrian people's uprising for "just reforms" as the crowd chanted anti-Ba`th and anti-Hizballah slogans.[175]

The escalation of the Syrian civil conflict after the outbreak of revolution drew in Hamas in ways unforeseen to the cautious political leadership. The Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar* reported Hamas members and sympathizers in the Yarmuk camp lent their support to the opposition militia the Free Syrian Army (FSA), after the withdrawal of most of the movement's organizational infrastructure in early 2012.[176] Rebel leaders of the Islamist militia Ahrar as-Sham claimed that Qassam Brigades members tutored the Syrian opposition on tunnel repair via video chat.[177] Claims surfaced from Western diplomatic circles that Qassam Brigades veterans in Syria were training FSA members in guerrilla strategy. Hizballah-affiliated media began to run stories accusing Hamas fighters of supporting rebel units during the Battle of Qusair in 2013.[178]

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[173] Nasrin Akhter, "Understanding a Decade of Syrian-Hamas Relations, 2011-2021," *Syria Studies* 14, no. 1 (2022), https://ojs.st-andrews.ac.uk/index.php/syria/article/view/2485.
[174] Ibid, 90-94.
[175] *(Ismail Haniyeh's Speech at al-Azhar Mosque)* كلمة إسماعيل هنية بالأزهر الشريف, produced by (Al Jazeera Mubasher) قناة الجزيرة مباشر (Al Jazeera, 2012), 41:32, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWX8d9ln8tk.
[176] *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut, Lebanon), December 19, 2012.
[177] Mamoon Alabbas, "How Did Hamas's Military Expertise End up with Syria's Rebels?," *Middle East Eye* (London, United Kingdom), May 23, 2017, https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/how-did-hamass-military-expertise-end-syrias-rebels.
[178] Qasim S. Qasim, "'We're Fine, Reassure Us!' (نحن بخير، طمّنونا عنكم)," *Al-Akhbar* (Beirut), June 21, 2013, https://www.al-akhbar.com/Politics/52890/%D9%86%D8%AD%D9%86-%D8%A8%D8%AE%D9%8A%D8%B1--%D8%B7%D9%85%D9%86%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%86%D9%83%D9%85?utm_source=mango-searchx&utm_medium=title_and_relatives&utm_campaign=%D9%83%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%A8%

Freelance Syria-based Palestinian journalist Ibrahim Khader claimed that Hamas support for the Syrian opposition was organized on an individual basis, without any directive from the organization, which sought to stay out of the conflict. Khader estimated about 200 Qassam Brigade veterans had "broken off" from the Palestinian movement to provide their support to the anti-Ba`th resistance in Syria.[179] Certain members of the Hamas leadership made their solidarity with these fighters clear, most explicitly when Hanieh attended the funeral of Mohammad al-Qneita, a Qassam Brigade member who was killed fighting alongside the Syrian rebellion in Idlib.[180] By the end of 2013, Bashar al-Asad was directly accusing the Palestinian movement of supporting the Islamist "terrorist" opposition.[181]

Despite a Hizballah/Iran-backed "rapprochement" process undertaken throughout 2019-2022[182], the Syrian Ba`th and Hamas remained worlds apart, as Bashar al-Asad's Syria was the only actor in the Axis of Resistance to reject the possibility of opening a "solidarity front" with Israel.[183] The contradictions of Hamas as a partisan group were laid bare through its abrasive, unstable dynamic with the Syrian regime; with the *absolute enmity* rooted in its *ikhwani* ideology precluding the movement from maintaining an alliance with Syria based on mutual *real*/*relative enmity* towards Israel. An admixture of the telluric partisan and the global revolutionary partisan defines Hamas's essence as an antisystemic actor, drawing its legitimacy based on Qutb's totalizing vision of alternate modernity while basing its strategic outlook on the logic of a

20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%85%20%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%82%D8%B5%D9%8A%D8%B1.

[179] *Middle East Eye* (London, United Kingdom), May 23, 2017.

[180] Seurat, *The Foreign Policy of Hamas*, 93.

[181] Akhter, "Understanding a Decade of Syria-Hamas relations".

[182] Ibid.

[183] Hassan Hassan, "Assad's Plan To Keep Syria Out of the War in Gaza," New Lines Magazine (Washington, D.C), September 27, 2024, https://newlinesmag.com/argument/syria-assad-plan-to-keep-out-of-the-war-in-gaza/.

territorially-bound national-liberation movement. In many ways, this contradiction has offered Hamas an asset, cohering its popular base with a revolutionary ideology that inculcated a culture willing to wage a *jihad* of "victory or martyrdom"[184] for the sake of the organization's nationalist goals. Yet this same contradiction forced the movement to undergo a reckoning with its host and patron, which unearthed the nationalist-Islamist movement's roots as a branch of the global *jihadi* movement that Sheikh `Abd Allah `Azzam cultivated through his transnational activism.

[184] Sheikh Ahmad Yasin's famous slogan for Hamas was "we are waging a *jihad* of victory or martyrdom."

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