



Jewish Community Relations Council

of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin, Sonoma, Alameda, and Contra Costa Counties

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July 16, 2008

Vol 1. No. 2

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUES

War without end:

The “Muqawama Doctrine” of perpetual war against Israel as the overarching strategy for Hezbollah and Hamas

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The Arabic word *muqawama* is often translated as *resistance*, as in *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, the Islamic Resistance Movement, better known as Hamas. The simple translation, however, does not reveal the doctrine of perpetual warfare and unending conflict that has developed within Hamas and Hezbollah.

The unique challenge posed by Hamas and Hezbollah

The challenge Israel faces in the confrontation with Hamas and Hezbollah requires both a different type of political and military strategy than in the past. The main threat Israel faced in prior years was a coalition of Arab states fielding large armies that met the Israeli army on open battlefields. On four occasions – 1948, 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982 – the Israel Defense Forces completely overwhelmed these Arab armies. This led to Arab leaders arriving at the conclusion that the “military option” against Israel was not feasible and was a drain on national resources that needed to be shifted for the benefit of their citizens.

This realization that Israel could not be defeated on the battlefield was a prime motivation in Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s decision to make peace with Israel in 1978. Jordan followed suit in 1994, and a number of other Arab states today have open channels with Israel, including trade and tourism.

All these Arab governments share a common belief in the Arab state system, which was built upon a vision of *secular Arab nationalism*. Today, however, Israel’s main challenge is that of radical *Islamic religious movements* holding extremist ideologies usually called *Islamism* (*al-islamiyya* in Arabic). This term refers to a set of ideologies that holds that Islam is not only a religion, but also a political system. The more extreme variants of Islamism call on Muslims to reject foreign influences, especially liberal democratic values such as pluralism, gender equality, and individual rights such as freedoms of expression, association, etc.

In 1979 a Shi’ite version of radical Islamism gained power in Iran, ousting the pro-American Shah and forming the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of the principles of this regime is the exportation of “Islamic revolution” to the entire Muslim world. Two of Iran’s clients are Hezbollah and Hamas, both of which – just like their Iranian sponsor – are seeking Israel’s destruction as their ultimate objective.

A very different scenario than in the past

Both Hamas and Hezbollah provide Israel with major challenges on two fronts in both the north and south. The challenge is not in the form of huge armies equipped with tanks, artillery, helicopters and jets.

Instead, both Hamas and Hezbollah are equipped with a new philosophy dubbed by veteran Israeli journalist Ehud Ya'ari as the "Muqawama Doctrine." Ya'ari identifies five pillars of this Muqawama Doctrine.

1. *Peace is not an option*: The Arab world must not, because of temporary hardship or setbacks, be dragged into recognizing Israel and accepting its existence through peace agreements. Since Israel cannot be defeated in the near term, immediate victory is not necessary and ongoing warfare for generations is the strategy. When in need of a respite, it is permitted to reach *hudna* (armistice) agreements, valid for a limited period only, with the "Zionist regime." The *hudna* idea is well illustrated by Hamas's proposal for a cease-fire, but not a peace treaty, in return for an Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines.
2. *It is not necessary to wait for there to be a balance of forces*: Unlike Egypt's President Gamal Abdul Nasser, who aimed to build up enough military might to beat Israel, or Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, who sought what he called "strategic parity," the *Muqawama* Doctrine rejects any delay in the fighting, unless a *hudna* is in force. The "mukawama doctrine" claims that fortitude and determination will make up the difference in military power. Suffering and loss are a symbol of victory not failure; death is a prize, not a disaster. In such a worldview, military disadvantage is not an obstacle, but in fact it turns disadvantage into advantage.
3. *Do not fight over territory*: The goal of the *Muqawama* Doctrine is the methodical erosion of the enemy's resolve. There is no need to defend territory or to try to conquer land. The essence is to spill blood, and since that is the case, it is better to focus on the Israeli civilian population as the primary target.
4. *Jihad is not a national struggle*: In effect, Iran and its protégés in Lebanon and Gaza (Hezbollah and Hamas respectively) have requisitioned the old formula of the "Popular War of Liberation" fashioned by nationalists such as Arafat, and injected it with exclusively Islamic content. Fighting is for the sake of *Allah* and not out of nationalistic sentiment.
5. *The Arab state is not a suitable vehicle*: The *Muqawama* Doctrine is not merely a military system, but a comprehensive, alternative system. In this view, the Arab states constitute a flawed and inefficient apparatus, unfit to conduct a long-term historic battle. The task must be shouldered instead by the radical Islamic movements that, alongside their military activity, engage in societal reform through educational, health and business institutions. Hamas and Hezbollah are headed by *shura* (consultation) councils composed of senior clerics. This "Shurocracy" is key to rehabilitating the community as well as defeating the enemy, offering an alternative hierarchical structure to dictatorships, monarchies and democracies.

What does this all mean?

Israel is faced with challenges more complicated than ever before, against enemies that don't aim for immediate victory, who see their disadvantages as advantages, who are not concerned about losing territory, and who are not connected to nationalism, a state or country. Israel's previous strategy was aimed at overwhelming Arab armies arrayed against it. To overcome the *Muqawama* Doctrine, Israel will need to adapt itself to this new reality and formulate novel and effective strategies.



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