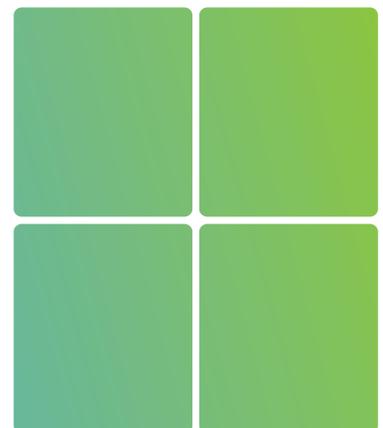




**Political Integration of Islamist
Movements Through Democratic
Elections: The Case of the Muslim
Brotherhood in Egypt
and Hamas in Palestine**

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Acronyms

PA: Palestinian Authority

PLC: Palestinian Legislative Council

Hamas: al-Harakat al-Mouqâwama al-Islâmiyya

AOLP: Active Organisation for the Liberation of Palestine

UN: United Nations

NDP: National Democratic Party

Executive Summary

This EuroMeSCo research paper starts from the premise that the recent electoral victories achieved by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Hamas in Palestine – which, respectively, propelled the Brotherhood to become the primary opposition force to the unshakeable PND, and the Islamist movement to assert its leadership of the Palestinian Authority government – constitute an important evolution in the politico-ideological positioning of these two movements.

This research paper aims to analyse these key changes, in light of the historical context of the movements' formation, the evolution of their ideological agenda, and the conditions of their entry into the political game.

By highlighting the similarities and differences between these two movements, the paper will consider to what extent their decision to participate in the democratic process, by presenting candidates for the legislative elections after having for so long refused to recognise Western democratic principles, reveals the pragmatism and opportunism they use to their advantage.

In a national context little inclined to implementing real political reforms, the movement of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood – which is considered illegal within the framework of a nation-state where full control is exercised over its political and social sphere – finds itself in a position that compels it to embrace democratic values and to adapt itself to the rules of the international political system. For its own part, Hamas – defined as an Islamic “national liberation” movement deploying violence to counter an occupation – also shows evidence of pragmatism, within the context of an international political system little disposed to applying pressure on Israel towards ending its military occupation of the Palestinian territories. In fact, Hamas shows regard for the balance of international and local forces, having always justified its changes either politically or religiously. The movement's position has evolved since its arrival to power, from an initial rejection of the Oslo Accords rooted in aspirations to liberate the entire area that was historically comprised by Palestine, to its later evocation of the “Hudna” concept of truce with Israel.

This research project strongly recommends the integration of these two Islamist movements into the democratic process and recalls the importance of recognising the democratic choices of the Egyptian and Palestinian people. According to the authors, the integration of the Muslim Brotherhood remains the only guarantee, within a broader framework of political reform, of creating a new elite capable, in the long term, of competing against this same movement. The Muslim Brotherhood should endeavour to resolve its problematic blend of politics and religion, with an eye to becoming legalised and to founding, as it demands, a political party separate from the religious brotherhood and where promotion and recruitment is no longer conditioned by religious criteria.

The integration of Hamas in the political game is crucial to stability and to the success of the peace process, given that sustained pressure on the movement will only breed violence. An ideal scenario would see Hamas accept the definition of a political path based on the Arab peace initiative guidelines and the reform of the Palestinian Authority's institutions. Meanwhile, the organisation of anticipated legislative and perhaps even presidential elections, should permit the appeasement of tensions between Hamas and Fatah, and give voice back to the people.

Introduction

The Islamist mode of thought, understood as an ensemble of ideas calling for a reform of society informed by the political categories of the religious body, found its physical expression with the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood – *al-Ikhwân al-muslimûn* – in Egypt¹. The birth of political Islam harks back to the year 1928, when a young Egyptian teacher, Hassan al-Banna² (1906-1949), founded the association of Muslim Brothers in Ismaïlia, near the Suez Canal. Al-Banna believed himself invested with a mission. His group was supposed to act as the core energiser of a reconstitution of the Islamic Caliphate, which had collapsed in 1924. This appeal did not address itself solely to the Egyptian brothers, but rather invited a union of all Muslims.

To this effect, a separate wing was added to the movement after 1945, with the aim of assuring contact with the Islamic world. In Egypt, the resulting proselytising impacted on students in particular, especially those from Al Azhar University. The young graduates thus returned to their countries of origin and there formed the embryonic branches of the association. In a few years, the new wing was already in liaison with several organisations, from Morocco to Indonesia, and from Somalia to Syria.

Following the death of Hassan al-Banna, on 12 February 1949³, and the Nasser revolution of July 1952, Nasserian repression⁴ of the Muslim Brotherhood forced their emigration – mainly to Lebanon, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf countries, where the presence of its members stimulated the blossoming of numerous social and cultural organisations and institutions.

The Muslim Brotherhood's Original Project: Islamising Society

The Muslim Brotherhood had as its main objective, the Islamising of society and the fight against the Westernisation of morals and institutions. Islamisation can be defined as the contemporary adaptation of Islamic categories to then be mobilised towards establishing a cultural and political alternative to Western-inspired values and institutions.

According to the Brotherhood, the Islamisation of society should be pursued through social and political action since religious lecturing is not enough to ensure that Islam embodies a global and totalising mode of thought. “The Islamist movement therefore conceives itself explicitly as a socio-political movement, founded on an Islam envisioned as a political, as well as religious ideology”⁵.

However, the will to define a political alternative articulated according to a religious referent is not a recent development; it is inscribed in the history of the Muslim world. The novelty here lies in the evolution of the discourse defending this will, within a context of increased contact between Muslim societies and the West since the 19th Century as a result of colonisation.

Sayyib Qutb rejoined the Brotherhood in 1951, developing the movement's doctrine. As a theorist, he based himself on Islam to elaborate an ideology rooted in the *Zakât* order – legal charity – presented as being the third path between capitalism and communism. This brand of Islamic socialism influenced a large share of the militants. Employing Islamic concepts⁶, Qutb declared that societies (professed Muslim, or not) lived in *jâhiliyya*, otherwise understood as the ignorance of God and the sacred law. The mission of all Muslims should therefore be to combat the *kufar* – or miscreants – who lead these societies, through *jihad*, the ultimate objective being the creation of an Islamic state⁷.

In fact, the origins and subsequent development of the movement find their justification in the reconsideration of nationalism. “Muslims of the nationalist period ignore Islam, according to Qutb, in the manner of pagan Arabs of the primitive *jâhiliyya*. Similarly to their adoration of stone idols, Qutb's contemporaries venerated, in his opinion, the symbolic dolls that the nation, the party, socialism, etc represent”⁸.

1 Patrick HAENNI (1998) *Trajectoires de l'islam politique en Égypte*, Cairo, September 1998, page 4.

2 As is stated by Sabrina MERVIN (2000), in *Histoire de l'islam. Fondements et doctrines*, Paris: Flammarion, 312 pages: “Hassan al-Banna (...) was not a man of religion, but a bureaucrat formed in a regular, modern style school, established in 1872, called Dâr al-‘ulûm”, pgs. 172-173.

3 Hassan al-Banna was assassinated by the police services.

4 After the dissolution of the association of the Muslim Brotherhood in Nasser in 1954, the persecutions and the exile of many of its important members promoted the movement's expansion abroad.

5 See Olivier ROY (1999) *L' échec de l' islam politique*, Paris: Seuil, 251 pages.

6 Sayyib Qutb used Islamic concepts to support his vision. He evoked notions of *jâhiliyya* – kindness, *tâghût* – idol, *ubûdiyya* – adoration, and even *hâkimîyya* – designating God's sovereignty.

7 Sayyib Qutb was inspired by the works of an Indian author, Abû A'lâ al-Mawdûdî, who exercised great influence over Pakistani politics.

8 Gilles KEPEL (2000) *Jihad. Expansion et déclin de l' islamisme*, Paris: Gallimard, 464 pages.

“A population that shares a homogeneous culture is marked by a deep wound when it does not boast a State of its own (its members are obliged to live in a State led by groups of an alien culture).”⁹

Hamas, or how to Associate Islamism and Nationalism

At the origin of Hamas lies the 1973 creation of the Gaza Islamic Centre – *Al-Moujamaa al-Islami* – that represents the activist Palestinian ramification of the Muslim Brotherhood. This association, working in the domain of charity, pursued the objective of Islamising society, which was believed to be the necessary preamble to an eventual liberation of Palestine¹⁰. The Palestinian Muslim Brothers had this particularity in relation to other Palestinian nationalist movements – that of refusing to base their engagement on a purely nationalist motivation. The religious dimension held sway over nationalist ideology. The Arab defeat of 1948 – *al Nakssa* – is, according to them, that of nationalism. A reclaiming of the Palestinian territory cannot be envisioned without a previous Islamisation of society. The idea of founding a Palestinian state on a secular and democratic model is thus logically rejected. In accordance to this project, the Islamists sought to occupy the social terrain¹¹, during the 1970s and 80s, by establishing charitable Islamic organisations. Their capacity to mobilise the popular strata allowed them to compete against the nationalist and secular strains of the Palestinian resistance, notably Fatah.

A further particularity of the Muslim Brotherhood wing operating in the Palestinian territories was that it did not represent a homogeneous group, due to several factors. The principal reason related to the territories' geographical conditions: the Gaza Strip Brothers and those from the West Bank evolved independently, to the point that the latter became close to the Hasemite Kingdom of Jordan and its elements appeared more flexible and pacific in their attitude towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the other hand, the Gazan Brothers were a lot more virulent in their discourse and engaged, even if with limitations, in armed struggle.

The Palestinian uprising – *Intifada* – in December 1987 highlighted the power of popular revolt. Taking advantage of this mobilisation, Sheikh Ahmed Yassine, Sheikh Abdallah Nimr Darwish and Abdelaziz al-Rantissi announced the creation of Hamas, which emitted its first declaration on 14 December 1987. Hamas was the solution to the dilemma confronting the Muslim Brotherhood, of how best to respond to the criticisms voiced by the nationalists and the Islamic Djihad regarding its absence from the terrain of armed struggle. In addition, Hamas called on the Association of Muslim Brothers to fulfil this double mission. All the while resisting the Israeli occupation, Hamas took charge of re-Islamising Palestinian society. In contrast to Fatah, Hamas has as its ultimate aim the liberation of all of Palestine.

Without renouncing their original mission, the Palestinians Brothers, through Hamas, were able to become involved in the *Intifada*. Hamas would come to mark their military engagement and to embody the Islamic resistance movement – *al-Harakat al-Mouqâwama al-Islâmiya* – allowing them to develop an important political know-how¹².

Entering into armed struggle against Israel via Hamas, the Palestinian Brothers participated in the resistance under the banner of Islam, and the *Intifada* lent them a nationalist character. The charter of the Islamic resistance movement adopted in 1988 officialises Hamas' affiliation to the Muslim Brotherhood, while still distinguishing it from the mother organisation. Three arenas of combat are defined: Palestinian, Arab and Muslim. The “Palestinisation” of the Palestinian Brothers' vision reveals a nationalism that distances itself from the doctrine of those members of the Brotherhood who deny national identity and prefer the notion of a Muslim community – *oumma*¹³. Nationalism can be defined as being “(...) a theory of political legitimacy demanding that ethnic boundaries coincide with political boundaries (...)”¹⁴. In other words, “nationalism is essentially a political principle, which affirms that political and national unity should be congruent. (...) The nationalist sentiment

9 Ernest GELLNER (1989) *Nations et Nationalisme*, Paris: Payot, 208 pages.

10 The Islamic Centre was recognised and authorised by Israel in 1979, seeing in it a solution to the growing Palestinian nationalist sentiment in the Gaza Strip. The Muslim Brotherhood association was declared illegal in 1989.

11 The Islamists – namely Sheikh Yassine – created parallel charitable, social and cultural structures, such as (in 1973) the Islamic Society, *al-Moujtama' al-Islâmi*, which was responsible for managing institutions of social solidarity, mosques, and Koranic schools, among others.

12 See Abderrahim LAMCHICHI (2001) *Géopolitique de l' Islamisme*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 336 pages.

13 Sayyid Qutb discarded national belonging as a blasphemy adopted from the pre-Islamic era.

14 Ernest GELLNER (1989) *Nations et Nationalisme*, Paris: Payot, 208 pages.

is the feeling of anger that incites the violation of this principle, or the feeling of satisfaction that seeks its realisation. A nationalist movement is a movement fuelled by such a sentiment¹⁵. This definition might characterise Hamas' engagement, which has the particularity of basing its nationalist ideology on a prior Islamisation of Palestinian society¹⁶.

Contrary to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas is a divided movement. In addition to its political wing, the movement possesses a military one¹⁷: the Ezzedine al-Qassem Brigades¹⁸. The first develops a rationale dependent on its final aim: decisions are made in function of the probable consequences of each political option. As regards the military wing, its rationality is value-based and it acts in function of how appropriately these actions conform to the cause it has promised to defend.

Finally, a section of the movement is located in the territories and another operates, in exile, from Damascus, in Syria.

The organ leading Hamas is a consultative council called *majlis shura*, whose members remain anonymous. Decision-making happens in liaison with the political bureau – responsible for foreign affairs, propaganda, internal security and military affairs, and which invests itself in socialising the Palestinian people through the Islamic Centre and the Islamic University of Gaza.

The “Islamic Alternative” or the Islamist Political Project

Hamas' electoral victory in January 2006 inscribes itself in the growing Islamist trend present in the Middle East, as is testified by the increased power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt¹⁹. Having Hamas at the head of a Palestinian government marks a rupture in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Presenting itself for the first time at the moment of the legislative elections, the Islamic resistance movement, which originated in the Muslim Brotherhood, defeats the historic Fatah formed by Yasser Arafat, the party that had embodied the Palestinian struggle. From then on, an Islamist current, characterised by an ideology rooted in the non-recognition of the state of Israel, leads the national fight. Drawing its legitimacy from the doctrines of Islam, Hamas claims the Palestinian land as foremost a Muslim territory. Thus, the ideal for which the movement fights is closer to the model of an Islamic-state rather than that of a Nation-state. Its nationalism is characterised by a religious mobilisation and is motivated by issues of identity.

The Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas defend the idea of an “Islamic alternative”. Islamism provides a vision of the future, an ideal in which to believe. Both Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood present themselves as the sole viable opposition. These two movements have acted, ever since their creation, as receptacles of dissatisfaction, frustration and popular disenchantment.

The impact of the Palestinian crisis in Egypt cannot be measured merely in terms of public opinion²⁰. Beyond the bond linking Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has repercussions on Egyptian political life. This began with the role played by former Egyptian President Anouar al-Sadate in the 1970s, and continued until the August 2005 Israeli retreat from Gaza. Thus, since Hamas' electoral victory and the blockade of Palestinian political life, President Hosni Mubarak has mediated with the actors involved, while the Muslim Brotherhood seeks to learn from this experience of Islamists in power.

Whether it is the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or Hamas in Palestine, these two movements aspire to transform the established institutions and to reform the State, its principles and legislation, while still adhering to a de facto acceptance of its rules. Participation in the political game, by presenting candidates for the democratic legislative election, reveals their opportunism. While the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas for a long time refused to

15 Ernest GELLNER (1989) *Nations et Nationalisme*, Paris: Payot, 208 pages.

16 What differentiates the Islamic Jihad from Hamas is that the first did not have at its origin a vocation to become a movement of the masses, having preferred to concentrate its efforts on military operations.

17 See the website of the Ezzedin al-Qassem Brigades: <http://www.alqassam.ps/arabic/>

18 Named after Ezzedin al-Qassem, Palestine's first modern martyr. Born in 1871, in Jablah, Northern Syria, Ezzedine received his religious instruction in Cairo. After having participated in the resistance against the French in Syria, he fled and settled in Haifa, where he found echoed his discourse against British Imperialism and the Zionist invasion of Palestine. His message focused on *jihad*, understood as being the only way to retaliate against the foreigners. He insisted on the power and strength of both peasants and the destitute to fight the invaders. Around 1929, he began organising an armed resistance to protect Palestine and to defend the Islamic faith. His main objectives were thus *jihad* and the proclamation of a reformed and fundamentalist Islam.

19 The fundamentalist political parties won the legislative elections in Iraq, Afghanistan, and also in Lebanon.

20 Read Tewfik ACLIMANDOS, “L’Egypte en Egypte”, in *Outre-Terre*, n°13-2005/4, pgs. 191-199.

recognise Western democratic principles – specifically the organisation of open and plural elections – both movements eventually understood that by remaining outside the political game, they would never come to diffuse their message. Even if they rejected the associated fundamentals, their participation in elections would allow them the opportunity to dominate this game, or in the very least to influence its outcome. The strategies pursued were the same, yet the tactics applied by each movement differed.

The two movements reveal noteworthy characteristics. The Muslim Brotherhood, which was not a political party, became the leading political opposition force against the unwavering National Democratic Party of Egypt. As for Hamas – which is qualified as a terrorist organisation by part of the international community, notably those implicated in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – it is now at the head of the Palestinian Authority. The message seems clear: in both cases, the people democratically expressed their will for change.

In order to understand how these important evolutions came to pass, it is pertinent to analyse the entry of these two movements into the political game. The passage from social action to participation in local elections, and eventually to a political break-through in apparently democratic and transparent legislative elections, reveals the paradox of the democratisation and political opportunism displayed by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and by Hamas in Palestine.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt: A Religious and Political Role

In this century, as well as the last, perpetual conflict between those in power and the Muslim Brotherhood has represented a fatality for Egypt. It is a burden that weighs heavily on the country's process of political and democratic reform and one that thus cannot be ignored. Starting from the premise that the Muslim Brotherhood represents a danger for democracy, the movement is denied and excluded, creating a political problem, yet one only acknowledged from a security perspective.

Relations between the Muslim Brotherhood and the governments in power have always been thorny, ever since the founding of the movement by Hassan al-Banna in 1928. This rapport alternated between periods of conflict and of reprieve, but without ever actually threatening the integrity of either the Brotherhood or the government. It became important to find a political space where this dilemma could be resolved – a space offering a platform upon which a solution, capable of establishing a neutral field of political competition in future decades, could be elaborated.

During its eighty-year existence, the Muslim Brotherhood has witnessed a rich diversity of ideas and generations. As a result, the movement has acquired an intellectual and political flexibility, allowing it to develop a global vision of Islam and offering its associates the chance to become politicians, preachers of good values, delegates of mosque tribunals, Members of Parliament, suffis, or even revolutionaries, which would explain why its leaders have included the conservative judge Hassan al-Hodeibi, as well as the radical militant Sayeb Qotb.

Curiously, this culture, based on a blend of politics and divination, today seems unable to keep in line with recent political evolutions, especially as the Brotherhood's political weight, and that of the demands made by its delegates, have become more significant. These representatives found themselves confronted by problems of an entirely different character, which demand specific competencies and experience – problems that could not be resolved by referring to vague religious slogans, such as those brandished by the Muslim Brotherhood in the last legislative election: for instance, "Islam is the solution". The more politicised current that exists within the Brotherhood believes that the old form of recruitment, founded on religious conditions and criteria, cannot continue in an era privileging political and partisan competition.

The Muslim Brotherhood's prudent approach to the establishment of a party may be explained by the current detrimental climate of 'legitimate' politics that is shared with marginal parties that have no presence on the streets. Nevertheless, other reasons relate to the very nature of the Brotherhood's historic evolution. If it succeeds in creating a political party, this should stimulate what could be seen as a rebirth of the movement.

Overall, the principles shaping the original foundation of the Muslim Brotherhood could be considered valid and efficient outside the spheres of power. Yet this would no longer be true following the creation of a political party keen to assume power, which would be operating under the flash of the media and that would have to open its candidacy to all citizens, whether Christian or Muslim, practicing or non-practicing. Judging by the Muslim Brotherhood's campaigning rules, recruitment procedure, political discourse and propaganda, the image of this political party will differ from that of the spiritual component of the Brotherhood, which engages its members in the observation of internally-defined religious principles and practices.

As with the question of the movement's campaign, the ideology adopted by the Muslim Brotherhood represents a challenge. It continues to be informed by a notion of an integral Muslim faith, in a world that, after the demise of the former Soviet Union and the Communist bloc, abandoned grandiose ideologies in favour of partial and moderate ones.

Communism and Baathism, along with the remaining political 'religions' that inspire themselves on ambitions aimed at moulding humanity, society and the individual according to pre-determined models, all fell from grace. Their demise saw the collapse of this type of reasoning, well before that of their ideological choices. It is clear that the Muslim Brotherhood shares a tendency towards grand ideologies, even if it shuns any association to the movements mentioned, for the simple reason that it is informed by religion and the Muslim faith. Yet in the political terrain, reference to the sacred texts is translated into reflexions and practices. In order to root the idea that belief in an all-encompassing Islam is not enough to assure the development and modernisation of nations, a renovation of the Brotherhood is needed.

Hence the importance that the Muslim Brotherhood party be aware of this new era, where the principles and values of democracy are privileged, and that it seize this historic opportunity to embrace moderate ideologies adapted to the present context, rather than formally reject a global reality and balance of power that it does not fully grasp, or submit to the commands of the Americans and the Arab elites.

A political party associated to the Muslim Brotherhood shall surely never be authorised under the present regime, yet this has not prevented the movement's participation in the last legislative election, where for the first time in its history, the Brotherhood obtained 88 seats in Parliament. A glance at the movement's journey shows that its entry into Egyptian politics was characterised by a unique adaptability and pragmatism. The political vision now pursued by the Muslim Brotherhood appears to be stimulating a general re-evaluation of its internal dynamics, as well as of relations with its foreign counterparts.

The Muslim Brotherhood represents a movement of adaptation. Evolving through many stages, its political path promoted a maturing of the Brotherhood's political project. It has adapted and invested in the public political space conceded by the ruling government, and the street remains the main site where the movement reaffirms its positions as regards the themes of contemporary politics.

The Pragmatism of the Muslim Brotherhood

Political participation in stages

The Muslim Brotherhood's entry into politics is characterised by its adaptability. Benefiting from an internal political conjuncture and an ever-growing base of popular support, the Brothers were able to avoid the interdiction of which they were object, all the while taking advantage of their ambivalent status.

In addition, the movement's ideology logically evolved to adjust itself to the weak will for political engagement shown by its constituents. Originally, the Muslim Brothers believed that the political field, marked by a State-controlled multi-party structure, was not compatible with their objective of founding an Islamic State.

The re-organisation of the movement's structures, which began in the early 1970s following the liberation of the Muslim Brothers imprisoned under Nasser, responded to the movement's desire to escape the State and its security apparatus. Since the end of the 70s, the Brotherhood has become the most important religious movement in Egypt²¹. In parallel, the Muslim Brotherhood has had significant success in professional trade union elections (lawyers, doctors) and those of student associations. The movement's objectives consisted in exercising a progressive control over the State, to then eventually peacefully claim power²².

²¹ The emirs of Gamma al-Islamiya, very influential on university campuses, decided to join the Brotherhood when the movement was taking flight.

²² The tamkim project – "to make it possible" – is a confidential text that guided the restructuring and modernisation of the organisation. Police found the text in 1992, which permitted the state to gauge the actual power of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Its quite particular status – whereby the movement is banned, yet tolerated²³ – proves an ally. Effectively, this position permits it to escape certain legal restrictions and demands, such as transparency or programme precision. In this spirit, the participation of the Muslim Brotherhood in the legislative elections of 1984 took place out-with the legal framework that requires the obtaining of an administrative authorisation to establish a party. Instead, the movement associated itself with the *Al-Wafd* party. It was thus within this coalition that, for the first time, the Islamists won seats in Parliament. Again in 1987, the Muslim Brotherhood secured the spread of their message by participating in the Islamic alliance formed with the Socialist workers' party *Al-Amal* and the socio-liberal party *Al-Ahrar*, both frozen at present.

The Muslim Brotherhood's adaptability to the political context

Proving their adaptability and capacity to seize auspicious occasions, the Muslim Brothers distinguished themselves politically through the important role they played in what could be described as “the democratisation process”²⁴ in Egypt.

From 2004, and operating on an empty political field, the Muslim Brotherhood presented a project of reform from the headquarters of the journalists' trade union²⁵ and then invited the three main government-authorised opposition parties for a debate – these being *Al Wafd* (liberal), *Al Tagammu* (leftist), and the Nasserian party. The movement thus operates as a locomotive of the opposition while negotiating, as is its habit, ad hoc political alliances and contacts.

At the close of the summer of 2005, within a political context of presidential elections, the importance of the Muslim Brotherhood's mobilisation became evident. Dozens of thousands of members of the Brotherhood participated in demonstrations organised across the country. Since the beginning of the 1950s that Egypt had not seen such mass popular action. This was the occasion for the group to mark its position vis-à-vis the important political evolutions currently characterising Egypt, notably following the amendment of Article 76 of the Constitution²⁶, concerning the presidential elections. The dialogue initiated in 2004 by the Muslim Brotherhood with the other political forces, and which led to the arrest of a few hundreds of its members, motivated the creation of the “National Coalition for Change and Reform”. This coalition is composed of movement leaders and members, representatives of the neo-*Wafd* party, together with political and public personalities belonging to a host of Egyptian schools of thought and public action. It inscribes itself in the momentum for political reform jump-started by the mobilisation of the Egyptian Movement for Change – *Kifaya*²⁷ – and of the National Gathering for Democratic Change²⁸.

After several meetings, the coalition organised, on 20 July 2005, its first demonstration at the headquarters of the journalists' and lawyers' trade unions, and just opposite the club of the judges. The objective of this rally was to show support for the judges' position regarding political reform and the elections²⁹.

Therefore, at the dawn of the legislative elections held in December 2005, the Muslim Brotherhood presented itself as the path of reform and of change. Its political programme aims to guarantee freedom of expression and end the state of emergency imposed since 1967³⁰. Using its electoral slogan “Islam is the solution”, the Brotherhood defends the independence of professional unions and organisations, political transparency, the fight against corruption, and the freedom of political prisoners, where these pertain to the promotion of Islam-oriented social change, such as the wearing of headscarves or forbidding the sale of alcohol³¹. The Muslim Brotherhood occupies a privileged position in the social terrain of a country where the Islamisation of society is already well under way.

23 The Egyptian constitution bans any legal recognition of a party founded on religious principles. The desire to establish a political party led one of the members of the Brotherhood, Mr. Aboul Ela Madi, to leave the movement in order to create a new formation, *Al Wasat*, or “the centre”. Despite numerous appeals to the relevant authorities, *Al Wasat* still awaits its official recognition.

24 The true democratic progress of the political reforms advertised by the government remains to be seen. Certain analysts and observers of the Egyptian political scene read into this promotion of reform a consolidation of authoritarianism. Read Jean-Noël Ferrière's article “L'Égypte à la veille du changement”, November 2006: <http://www.ceri-sciences-po.org>

25 The Muslim Brotherhood held a conference on 3 March 2004, in the premises of the journalists' union, to present their propositions for reform, following the U.S. announcement of its Great Middle East Project.

26 Prior to the amendment, in the terms of Article 76, 1, “The People's Assembly presents the candidates for the Presidency of the Republic and submits the selection to national plebiscite. These candidates to the assumption of Presidential functions are presented to the People's Assembly and offered for review by at least a third of its members”. The President is elected through public referendum, by gaining an absolute majority (Article 76, 2). If this majority is not obtained, the People's Assembly presents an alternative candidate (Article 76, 2). The new article announces: “the President of the Republic is elected by anonymous direct general vote”. The limits of this legislative reform become visible in the conditions imposed on candidates: “(...) the candidate must be backed by at least 250 members of the People's Assembly, the Consultative Assembly and the popular municipal councils. (...) Political parties existing for at least 5 consecutive years before the opening of the Presidential candidacy, and having during this time developed their activities and obtained in the last legislative elections a minimum of 5% of the seats in the People's Assembly and the Consultative Assembly, have the right to present their candidate (...)”.

27 A member of *Kifaya*. By associating itself with such a social movement for reform, the Muslim Brotherhood appeared to defend democratic values.

28 It is managed by a general secretariat of 36 members. 9 belong to the Muslim Brotherhood, whose provisional general secretariat assists the Brotherhood's spiritual guide, Mohammed Al-Sayed Habib.

29 Close to 4000 people participated in this demonstration – mostly members of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also a few hundred members of the *Kifaya* movement.

30 Established in 1967, the state of emergency was only lifted from May 1980 to October 1981, following the Camp David agreements signed by Israel and Egypt. Imposed once again after the assassination of President Anouar el Sadate, it was from then on extended on a regular basis. The law establishing the state of emergency, forbid, among other things, the gathering of more than five people, and was justified on a very vague legal basis.

31 On several occasions, the government pushed the Brotherhood to adopt a firm stance on matters linked to religion – as happened with the declaration made by the Minister of Culture, Farouk Hosni, deploring the veiling of women. See Hadia MOSTAFA “Begging to Differ”, in *Egypt Today*, January 2007, pgs. 38-40.

Nevertheless, the political efficiency of the Muslim Brotherhood remains limited. Knowing that the parliamentary members of the National Democratic Party (PND) represent the two tiers of the Egyptian People's Assembly, the Brotherhood³² is the only movement bearing its influence on the country's legislative life, in the voting of laws and in amendments to the Constitution. According to its stance, the movement can only make use of the Parliament as an official grandstand for the expression of its discontent with public politics.

A further sign of their adaptability, the Brothers are characterised by an exemplary discipline and assiduity. The Parliament regularly convenes for two daily sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening. The PND's elected representatives are not always all present at the evening meeting. But seeing as the votes are considered whatever the number of attending MPs, and that the Muslim Brotherhood never fails to be present, the PND decided to replace the evening sessions with afternoon ones.

The adaptability and electoral success that have benefited the Muslim Brotherhood are sullied by the refusal of the instituted power to respect and affirm these electoral victories. In addition, the political suggestion, backed by the Parliament, to postpone until 2008 the municipal elections scheduled for April 2006, was rooted in this refusal to accept the democratic consequences of the Brotherhood's probable success in these elections.

An international Islamist movement?

Since the legislative elections of 2000, there has been a noted change in positions within the Executive. The Muslim Brotherhood has abandoned frontal violent opposition to the regime, while pursuing a broadening of its social base.

In what concerns the relationship of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood with its foreign counterparts, rather than opening up to external dialogue, the movement turned within itself. Already in the 1990s, following Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, the Gulf War had dealt a blow on the movement's capacity for mobilisation³³. During this time, internal confrontation with Mubarak's regime led to the capture and imprisonment of thousands of members.

The *Tanzim Al-Dawli*, known as the international organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood, remains hard to define. The overall Head of the international alliance has been, since its birth, the Egyptian leader. Significantly, he is the sole bearer of the title of *murchid*, or "guide". Those responsible for the local branches are called "secretary generals". The real creation of the *Tanzim Al-Dawli* took place exactly on 29 July 1982, under the influence of Mustafa Machhour. Since his release from prison in 1973, this high official of the Muslim Brotherhood has dedicated himself to strengthening the ties of the international movement through extensive travel abroad, and with the help of Mohammed Mehdi Akef, who has resided in Munich since the end of 1981. In 1996, Mustafa Machhour was elected "supreme guide", at the age of 75. This was an accolade for the founder of the international organisation. However, its structure would continue to disintegrate – a situation not helped by the fact that the vice-guide, Maamoun Al-Hudaybi, who succeeded Machhour following his death in November 2002, has bad relations with the foreign branches of the movement³⁴.

With Mohammed Mehdi Akef's³⁵ rise to power, becoming the Brotherhood's seventh supreme guide, international networking was revived. His election in January 2004 may be interpreted as a will to reaffirm the links forming the global organisation³⁶.

In this spirit, Mohammed Mehdi Akef published an open letter on 17 August, in which he expresses his support for the resistance in Iraq: "There is no alternative to the sustained political and national support of the (Muslim) people for the resistance in Palestine, in Iraq and in Afghanistan, both in material and moral terms (...) Islam believes that this resistance repre-

³² The Brotherhood came to hold 88 seats after the legislative elections of 2005, having previously only had 16 members of Parliament, all of whom had run as independent delegates.

³³ The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1991 provoked the first crisis. The Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood supported Iraq, while those based in Egypt criticised President Saddam Hussein and remained silent regarding the U.S. intervention.

³⁴ One of his first initiatives as guide was to challenge Kamal Al-Helbawi, an Egyptian living in London who, in 1995, was nominated spokesperson of the Brotherhood in the West.

³⁵ Seduced by the social discourse of Hassan al-Banna, Mohamed Mahdi Akef joined the Brotherhood in 1950, at 22 years of age. He entered the movement's paramilitary wing and in 1954 was involved in the assassination attempt against Gamal Abdel Nasser. He escaped a death sentence, which was instead changed to 20 years of reclusion, thanks to the intervention of Abdel-Hakim Amer, who was close to his family and also a friend of Nasser.

³⁶ The Syrian, Howaidi, who resides in Amman, in Jordan, was discharged from his functions. Yet he continues to exercise a symbolic influence: he represents a means of contact with the Brotherhood members abroad, given that the Egyptian members of the movement are not authorised to leave the country. Machhour nominated him for this role.

sents a jihad for the glory of Allah and that it is a commandment, a personal obligation (*fard-hayn*) pertaining to all inhabitants of occupied countries. (This commandment) weighs over any other (religious) commitment. Even a woman is expected to engage in this battle, with or without the permission of her husband, and young people also have the right to fight³⁷.

Similarly, Hamas encourages armed struggle against the US invasion: on 19 August, Hamas published a declaration of “solidarity for (the cause of) Muqtada Al-Sadr and his brothers who resist the US occupation” and launched an appeal to the Iraqi people – Sunni and Sh’ite, Arab or Kurd – “to express their solidarity and reinforce national unity in the fight against the repressive aggression directed at us all”³⁸.

Although Akef pacified relations with the movement’s foreign branches, his vision is less international than would appear at first glance. The official website of the Muslim Brotherhood announced the death of Sheikh Yassine, the spiritual leader of Hamas killed in March, referring to him as the “guide of the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood”, despite the fact that the title of guide has always been reserved for the leader of the Egyptian organisation. This could be viewed as the affirmation of a growing autonomy³⁹. Or rather, the reason why the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood appears ever less concerned with the international branches may stem from the exemplary adaptability and pragmatism that the movement’s internal political project demands.

Nonetheless, the political experience of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt serves as an example to several Islamist movements. Even Hamas has accepted to enter the game of democratic and pluralist elections – and this without having anticipated the electoral victory that propelled the movement towards leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

Yet, whereas the Muslim Brotherhood has proved its adaptability and political maturity, Hamas is not prepared to reconsider its founding ideology and appears to be on a quest for monopoly over power.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is quite pleased with Hamas’ electoral victory. This success reflects positively on the movement as a whole, given that it is the first time in its history that the Brotherhood accedes to power, let alone through democratic means. Thus, the movement has been granted a historic opportunity to put its political ideas, and associated programme, into practice. Whatever the outcome of this experience – whether it’s a political success or failure – it is sure to impact strongly on the Muslim Brotherhood in terms of the movement’s global scope.

The Integration of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Democratic Process: A Complex Challenge

Adopting the democratic concept

The question of whether to adopt democratic values became an issue for the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood since the late 1980s. An ideological updating commenced at the margins of the Brotherhood in 1989⁴⁰ and was finally defined in 1994, with the publication of a founding document that sought to reconcile an Islamic perspective with notions of citizenship and political pluralism⁴¹.

In 2004, a new step was taken with the statement made by the Muslim Brotherhood’s spokesperson. Abd Al-Mun’im Abû Al-Futûh⁴² expressed his support for a whole-hearted adoption of democracy to act as a regulatory instrument of power, avoiding the discourse about the adaptation of democracy to Islamic and Arab realities⁴³. Thus, in defending the principle of popular sovereignty, he made no associations to a religious framework, such as the concept of *shura* – consultation. His entire statement – including the unconditional recognition of the principle of citizenship and its consequences, for instance the idea of a Coptic presidency or a female leader – was backed by the leader of the Brotherhood, Mohammed Mehdi Akef.

37 <http://www.elbehira.com/wmview.php?ArtID=614>
38 http://www.palestine-info.info/arabic/hamas/statements/2004/19_8_04.htm

39 Similarly, in Iraq, the participation in the interim government of a minister close to the Muslim Brotherhood ran counter to the movement’s frenzied opposition to the occupation of Iraq by coalition forces. Another example was the attitude of the Union des Organisations Islamiques de France towards the ban on veiling in schools. Several branches of the Muslim Brotherhood, notably European ones, would have liked to see the movement assume a more combative stance.

40 Abd Allah AL-NAFISI (ed.) (1989) *Le mouvement islamiste, vision prospective*. Documents d’auto-critique, Cairo: Madbuli.

41 The Muslim Brotherhood, *Dar al-nachr wa al-tawziâ al-Islâmîa*, “Notre position vis-à-vis de la femme, de la Shûra et du pluralisme”, Cairo, 1994.

From being the official bearers of the Islamist ideology, built around their project to establish an Islamic State, the Muslim Brotherhood eventually became a defender of democracy. The movement assumes the characteristics of a political party – no different to any other – with a programme far-detached from the grand account of the restoration of the Caliphate. This ideological evolution reveals the movement's political maturity. With its original doctrine, the movement could encompass the demands of the less-privileged groups who sought the elimination of social oppression, while also awarding the middle-class and bourgeoisie the share of morality and social mobility that they lacked. Today, with the movement's unconditional support for the State's liberal politics – *intifah* – and the agricultural reform of 1997, the Brotherhood's recruitment has concentrated on the middle-class, leading the movement towards a more liberal stance in its politics. The primary factor motivating an adherence to the Muslim Brotherhood is the movement's network. Becoming a member can in fact facilitate daily life, on both a personal and professional level⁴⁴. The movement's progression towards greater political integration has resulted in a new expression of popular support.

The inclusion of the Muslim Brotherhood in the democratic process is not an easy option, but is unavoidable if it hopes to achieve genuine democratic reform that permits the emergence of a civilian democratic elite capable of rivalling the Islamists in the legislative elections, as well as in the professional unions and student organisations, without requiring administrative or security interventions.

Contrary to what many think, this political current has a modern organisational structure, the competency of which was displayed during the last legislative elections in Egypt, when it managed to mobilise the members of the Muslim Brotherhood and their partisans in support of the movement's candidates. Having won 88 seats in Parliament, the Muslim Brotherhood now constitutes the second largest political force in the country, after the party in power, and the most significant force of opposition, given that its members of parliament make up around ten times that of all the other opposition parties combined, which together only achieved 9 seats in the Egyptian parliament.

For certain observers and secular political militants, the unexpected success of the Muslim Brotherhood in the legislative elections seriously threatens the modern civil State that Egyptians have constructed over the last two centuries and for which they paid dearly in terms of ideological conflicts and struggles against both foreign occupants, as well as its own internal obscurantism. This modern State has experienced periods of power and development, but also of decline and regression.

Relations between the civilian political regime and the Islamic forces, primarily represented by the Muslim Brotherhood, were mainly characterised by confrontation. Despite the repressive methods applied, especially after 1948 and all throughout the Nasserian period, this confrontation remained more political in nature.

Following the 1919 Revolution, and with the Constitution of 1923, a strong liberal political party, Le Wafd, emerged in Egypt. It enjoyed tremendous popular support and presented a coherent political vision that was pursued to the best of its capacities. During this period, and in spite of its force and socio-religious influence, the Muslim Brotherhood failed to gain any seat in Parliament.

The Revolution of July 1952, and the resulting establishment of the republican regime, dealt a violent blow to the project of the Muslim Brotherhood, as much in the ideological and political level, as in their fight for power. These clashes soon grew into violent security conflicts, beginning with one in *al-Manshiyya*, Alexandria – the square where the assassination attempt against Nasser by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood had taken place – and which continued up until Sadat's presidency. Sadat's political vision was clear-cut,

⁴² He is the leader of the Democratic Current, fighting against the culture of clandestineness and radicalism that breeds within the Muslim Brotherhood.

⁴³ Husam TASSAM, "The al-Wasat current that runs through the Muslim Brotherhood calls for the suppression of the brotherhood and the annulment of the international organisation", in *al-Qāhira*, 205, 16 May 2004.

⁴⁴ Husam TASSAM, "Adherence to the movement now reveals different objectives: people become members of the Muslim Brotherhood to take advantage of its contacts and to facilitate certain elements of daily life, namely by benefiting from its racketeering networks"; "Révisions douloureuses pour les Frères musulmans d'Égypte", in *Le Monde diplomatique*, September 2005, pgs. 4-5.

expressed in one of his most memorable statements as: “No religion in politics and no politics in religion”. Initially, Sadat sought to win over the Muslim Brotherhood in order to defeat the Left, before then turning his back on both. The Israeli-Egyptian bilateral agreement, together with the negative outcome of Sadat’s internal politics, eventually cost him his life.

Currently, the Egyptian government gives far less importance to “political logic” in its relations with the Muslim Brotherhood and other opposition forces. The regime’s position vis-à-vis existing national parties is characterised by a narrow-minded security spirit. For two decades, the State sought to destroy these parties by instilling within them a sense of dissatisfaction. In addition, it did its best to hinder the action of emerging political forces, such as the sabotage attempt on the *al-Ghad* party, which saw its leader jailed as a result. Newly-established parties, such as *Al-Wasat* – democratic, Islamic, centre party, presenting a model similar to that of the Turkish Justice and Development Party, *al-aadâla wal-tanmiya* – and the neo-Nasserian *al-Karâma*, were refused legal authorisation to found a party, contrary to other parties that enjoyed no popularity and whose leaders had never even exercised any political action, their past activities being limited to divination and speculation about pilgrimage visas. Surprising as it may seem, 16 of the 21 parties present in Egypt engage in no political or public action.

The difference between the two types of rapport developed with the Muslim Brotherhood – political, or then security and bureaucratic in nature – resides in the fact that the first presupposes the movement’s inclusion in the political equation as a civilian political party respectful of the Republican regime in place, and its elaboration of a precise political programme steering away from the pompous slogan used in the last legislative elections: “Islam is the solution”. This also assumes that the regime will be prepared to politically confront it as a party, but not as an organisation engaged in both divination (*da aawiyya*) and politics.

In this domain, two important Middle East experiences, those of Turkey and Iran, had an impact on Egypt. The first saw the establishment, from the start, of a Republican regime based on a secular constitution – pure and harsh in certain aspects – and under the watchful eye of the military institution. The integration of the Islamists into the political equation could not be achieved without its forces conforming to the State’s judicial and political institutions. After a long road marked by political conflicts between non-religious and Islamist entities, the latter managed to fully integrate the democratic equation, constituting a political party that eventually acceded to power and would today appear to be more Europeanised and democratic than the secular conservative forces in Turkey. Contrary to the Turkish regime, Iran, guided by its Islamic framework, managed to also establish defined political and constitutional criteria – regardless of our reservations as to their legitimacy – through which it infiltrated the different forces of the political equation. Conservatives and reformers continued to confront each other and nothing could prevent a fierce political battle, even if it had the ruling regime as its backdrop.

As for Egypt, although it has a centre-leaning republican government and a secular constitution – stipulating, however, that Islam is the principal source of the legislation – the country has not succeeded, even after a quarter century, in managing political conflicts with any of its political movements, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood. According to the official discourse, the Brotherhood is deemed an illegal and forbidden organisation, but that nonetheless disposes of enough influence to lead worker, student or political action. This movement uses religion to generate political mobilisation that is not, and cannot be contested by the State. In fact, the State itself acted in a similar way to assure the legitimacy of its regime, starting with the *fatwas* of Al-Azhar in support of Mubarak’s candidacy in the last presidential elections, to the Sufi brotherhoods and others that lent support

to the government in its opposition to an organisation that used religion as a tool in the service of citizens, with a view to gaining their votes.

Consequently, before implementing genuine political reform, a clear and efficient solution to the Islamist phenomenon will have to be found within a new space. This, in order to stimulate the movement's transformation into a civil political strain that does not attribute a sacred character to its political discourse and that views any criticism as targeting its practical, rather than religious programme.

The cultural challenge: Who are the true reactionaries?

The second challenge linked to the "Islamist danger" is the regressive ideas characterising this current, posing a threat to the Egyptian Enlightenment movement (*al-tanwîr*), as well as to creativity and the arts.

Political Islam's more pacific currents treat questions related to creativity and the arts with great restraint, and often in an ambiguous manner. In contrast, the representatives of "official Islam" – Al-Azhar and the independent sheikhs close to this institution – show a more conservative attitude to modernity than that of the Islamist political movements⁴⁵.

This difference in attitude does not lie in the fact that the latter have always been more liberal than the sheikhs of Al-Azhar. Nevertheless, their organisational reality, public action aspirations, and interactions with other political forces – within trade unions and under the umbrella of Parliament – contributed towards their evolution, contrary to those who never left their desks and who, as civil servants, only acted according to pre-determined mechanisms, which translated into prohibition *fatwas*, the persecution of intellectuals and writers, and the seizing of their publications.

The majority of conservative statements hostile to the values of work and creativity come from mosque leaders and the official TV networks. If such statements were tolerated or ignored, it was because they remained under the danger threshold, or in other words, outside the political sphere, and contributed to the co-existence of a "dumb-down" culture of unquestioned trust with a "rose-tinted" one inspired by the soap operas dominating official Egyptian television.

The opposition battle between the pacific forces of Islam and the Arab regimes is not so much a struggle between reactionary and secular groups, but more often between politicians and bureaucrats, or between dynamism and inertia. As such, the streamlining into the democratisation process of these pacific movements of political Islam requires a complete overhaul of the state structure and its regime, paving the way for a fair political combat.

This integration, whether through finally recognising the legality of the *Al-Wasat* party or by integrating the conservative section of the Muslim Brotherhood, demands the democratisation of state institutions and of the governing party, together with a renewal of the elite in power and the emergence within the political sphere of new competing factions.

Can the Muslim Brothers become true democrats?

A large share of responsibility shall continue to weigh on the Islamists as regards their integration in the democratisation process. Contrary to what many think, it is not just about whether they genuinely believe in democracy. This question applies to all political forces, whether right- or left-wing. What is more important, is understanding how to motivate the Islamist current to exercise a form of politics that is governed by constitutional and judicial

45 This is clear when comparing the role of Al-Azhar with that of the Muslim Brotherhood in the seizure of literature and artworks that has occurred over the last decade.

rules and that is not subject to any religious interpretation, which then subordinates it to other movements merely because it has been deemed a “religious movement”.

Certain leaders and members of peaceful Islamist currents consider any point of view not in line with theirs to be in contradiction with Islam. They see themselves as superior to other political movements that criticise them and treat these with distrust and disdain.

This attitude of superiority stems from a belief that they are the faithful guardians of Islam and its values, which often makes them oblivious to the fact that these values belong to the domain of individual personal choice, and thus that their translation into a matter of public choice will end up erasing any private immunity and make them subject to worldly motives. The success of the Islamist movement in this sphere depends on the economic and political development it achieves, independent of the ideological and doctrinal references that concern none but itself. Islamists must recognise the successes and failures of their movement, without relying on any form of religious or political immunity.

There remains the crucial question of whether the Islamists, and more specifically the Muslim Brotherhood, can become not only a democratic current, but also fulfil the objectives of the democratic process. We believe so. The Muslim Brotherhood’s participation in politics – as a legal political party, and not as the politico-religious movement it is at present – will be accompanied by parallel changes in its discourse. In addition, there will be schisms within its ranks oriented towards two currents: a conservative current founded in the old ideology, and a political current evolving in the form of a party that no longer takes refuge in the sacred and does not confuse preaching with political action.

Given Egypt’s state of political inertia and its lack of a political class, as well as the regime’s inability to engage younger generations of all political leanings – whether liberals, Islamists or leftists – rather than hand-picked individuals, it will be difficult to draw the Muslim Brotherhood into such a strict political game. Continuing to treat the Muslim Brotherhood as a forbidden organisation can only delay the progress towards greater democracy within the Islamist movement. It also fuels the persistence of the current state of inertia, denying any political role in public action, to the benefit of the bureaucratic mechanisms that preserve the governing elite and select high officials without any regard to their experience or political training.

The impact of this situation was strongly felt in the last legislative elections, held at the close of 2005. The vastly contrasting results achieved by the legitimate and banned forces, the latter consisting of the Muslim Brotherhood and certain independent candidates, reflected the crisis that affects the judicial system, which is the dominant political influence in Egypt.

The party in power pursued its electoral campaign in close liaison with the administrative and security organs of the State. Entering the political battle backed by powerful administrative weapons, it found no need to deploy any serious efforts to appoint an elite group with a sufficiently clear political vision and solid background to stand up against the competitors, notably the Muslim Brotherhood. The outcome of the electoral campaign would, in any case, be set in their favour thanks to the intervention of the Administration and of the security forces.

As such, the legitimate political forces lost their dynamism and the opposition parties found themselves imprisoned within a rigid structural framework that prevented their serious rivalling of the party in power. The example this party set for opposing ones was characterised by an absence of internal democracy and a static leadership, made up of senior officials known as “the eternalists”. This model was found echoed throughout other parties, leading to their disappointing performance in the elections.

Within democratic regimes, the field of legitimacy does not merely serve as a forum for the healthy clash of ideas and political or partisan orientations, but also acts as a filter through which new forces can enter the political scene. By contributing to the establishment of fresh rules of competition, these forces confront the “old guard” with a dilemma: either they evolve and innovate under the pressure of competition, or they collapse and retreat from the political playing field.

In all democratic countries, this field of legitimacy is a site of transformation, creativity and fair competition between differing political forces. It is also the point of departure for the evolution of the established regime, through newly-created mechanisms that operate according to democratic rules known to all competing forces, even the most extreme. This is what happened in Europe after World War II, when the communist parties seeking to abolish the dominance of capitalism finally submitted to democracy and became reformist movements, some of which eventually came to power without any alteration to the rules of the democratic game.

It is time to renew this field of legal legitimacy and ensure that the authorised partisan forces reflect the forces truly operating on the ground. Only this will bring an end to the paradox that is the co-existence of a legitimate field, composed of forces that are in practice ineffectual, alongside a forbidden field that encompasses influential and active forces, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Such a situation seriously threatens the future of legitimacy and democracy.

It is impossible to conceive of a truly democratic project without envisioning the integration of the pacific movements associated with political Islam. The integration of the Muslim Brotherhood into the democratisation process would infuse politics into public life and stimulate the renewal of other civil parties, including that of the National Democratic Party now in power. This would lead to a change in their discourse and promote recruitment of the best political elements in their bid to challenge the Muslim Brotherhood, whose political outreach amongst the masses is very intense.

Consequently, the Muslim Brotherhood’s reform can only be achieved through a reshaping of the Egyptian political system that succeeds in integrating the party into the democratisation process, thus stimulating further democratic development. Only then will Egypt free itself from a system dominated by rigid inertia and enter into an era of democracy, creativity, and vibrant social dynamics.

It is therefore necessary to understand that it is not political and democratic reform within the Arab world that will elevate the Islamists’ standing or give them a particular strength. Their presence in Egypt mounts back eighty years and any attempt made in the past to exclude or even destroy them was doomed to failure. In the current climate, it would be best to pursue a dynamic vision of the political field and not constrain it to a fixed format. The political elite should abandon its ethnocentric perspective and show greater imagination, gambling on the fact that democracy is a process and that the Islamists’ integration reflects a more global evolution towards reform.

It is clear that Arab citizens need to feel that their political choices – whether conservative or even reactionary – are acknowledged and implemented, both within their countries, and abroad on the global stage. These decisions should be protected from the severe reactions that the United States and Europe have demonstrated in the past. There currently exist Arab regimes highly dependent on the US, yet wholly incompetent in political and economic terms, as well as in the matter of democracy. It is high time to involve these Arab populations in political life and respect the outcomes of their democratically achieved choices: in Palestine – which recently saw the rise of Hamas to power, in Egypt – where the Muslim Brotherhood won 88 seats in partially democratic elections. This would represent a new

beginning, leading public opinion towards brighter horizons where democratic choices are respected and capable of influencing the international arena. Radical discourse could thus no longer feed off the despair, frustration and distrust that prevail as regards international criteria and the purpose of democracy and peaceful struggle.

What motivated Hamas to participate in the legislative elections was the emergence of a context favouring an electoral victory. The objective was to put pressure on the politics of the Palestinian Authority and to broadcast the movement's message now upholding settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through a vehicle other than violence – even if many of its members did not renounce this approach. The unexpected but foreseeable results placed Hamas at the head of the government, face to face with its destiny.

Hamas' popularity became reinforced during the 1990s with its refusal of the Oslo Accords⁴⁶, signed in 1993 and which established the Palestinian National Authority and its political apparatus. The decision to take part in the 25 January 2006 parliamentary elections thus reveals a contradiction in the movement's vision and in its position vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

An auspicious context

The integration of the Islamic resistance movement in the political system had been intended since its early years. Since 1990, Hamas had claimed the right to at least 40% occupancy of seats in the Palestinian National Council – a demand refused by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the umbrella confederation of the Palestinian Authority. Hamas understood that it represented a threat to Fatah and that the national liberation movement sought its elimination. Then in exile, the PLO's leadership – headed by Yasser Arafat – was working towards the creation of an entity guaranteeing the PLO's monopoly in decision-making and Palestinian representation.

Eventually, negotiations on the question commenced when the PLO adhered to the agreement establishing two States, which caused Hamas to proclaim *jihad* to liberate each parcel of the original Palestine.

The presence of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip in 1994 initiated a new phase in the relations between the nationalist and Islamist movements. The PLO, sole Palestinian spokesperson in the Oslo process, was in full control over the structures created, to the detriment of Hamas who played a significant role in the national struggle between 1987 and 1993. Arafat and the Fatah dominated the Palestinian political landscape and its associated institutions in an ostentatious manner, excluding rival organisations allied to the recourse and decision-making process of the Palestinian Authority. The Oslo Accords were only possible due to the shared Palestinian and Israeli desire to push Hamas back into the occupied territories.

Hamas insisted on the illegitimacy of these accords⁴⁷ and their resulting institutions. The outcome of the Oslo talks was seen as a betrayal⁴⁸. Hamas does not recognise the existence of the Palestinian Authority, given that it should only emerge as an outcome of the liberation of the occupied territories. As it stands, the Palestinian Authority is seen as the civil administration of the occupation, tied to the enemy – a mere dependent that assumes an executive and operational role but enjoys no sovereignty. The Palestinian Authority “manages” Hamas from a security perspective, while leaving the possibilities for dialogue open. Following this logic, the Islamist movement boycotted the Palestinian Authority's presidential elections in 1996, as well as the legislative elections, yet continued to pursue its own development. Hamas broke all ties with the Palestinian political system, arguing that the Palestinian Authority is an autonomous government and therefore enters into contradiction with the objective of an independent Palestinian State. This denial of the Palestinian Authority was manifested in the refusal amongst Hamas militants to integrate the official political and administrative bodies. According to them, such participation would imply a legitimisation of this entity.

Hamas in Palestine: Between Dogma and Politics

Hamas' Political Opportunism

46 Ian S. LUSTICK, “The Oslo Agreement as an Obstacle to Peace”, in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.27, 1, Fall 1997, pgs. 61-66.

47 Tension grew with the February 1994 massacre of 29 Muslims at the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron. The Islamist organisation intensified its armed campaign by resorting to suicide attacks against Israeli civilians.

48 It should be highlighted that before the start of the peace process in 1993 Hamas had already accepted the idea of a transitory solution, but this was brought into question with the signing of the Oslo Agreement. Hamas did not want to become assimilated with Fatah, and thus it altered its position.

Similarly, the 1996 elections were dismissed by the ranks of the Islamist movement since they claimed that only a share of Palestinians had the possibility of voting in these elections – those living in the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. The global Palestinian diaspora was not taken into account and the Jerusalem-based voters had to cast their vote through the post. As such, the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) appears conditioned and controlled by the occupation.

Hamas instead proposed the organisation of local elections, which would represent a logical extension of its action on the ground. This suggestion was rejected by Arafat, following the advice of his heads of security who predicted that such elections would trigger a situation similar to the Algerian scenario.

Eventually, the position held by the Islamic resistance movement evolved. Two tendencies emerged within the movement's ranks. While the political bureau abroad maintained its rejection of the Palestinian Authority, those members living within the territories could no longer ignore the political system in place, which had become very present in Palestinian daily life. According to Hamas, the Palestinian Authority, created in 1993, would in time crumble. Yet the reality is that it remains present and continues politically engaged both within the territories and abroad, acting as the official Palestinian spokesperson amongst the international community. The recognition it has achieved motivates Hamas to define a new project that consists in claiming the reigns of the Palestinian Authority, when and insofar as conditions allow.

The movement's popularity continually increases thanks to its position as an opponent to an unsatisfactory peace process, its role in the second *intifada* (which erupted on 28 September 2000) and its military operations against the occupier.

What is more, Hamas' apprehension, in the face of the turnaround in US foreign policy observed since 11 September 2001, found justification in the financial sanctions that were successively imposed after this event on those organisations deemed "terrorist" by the US government. Thus, in a bid to prevent the aggravation of its financial situation, Hamas engaged in a quest for legitimacy. The elections seemed a means of translating its popular legitimacy into an institutional one.

The evacuation of the Gaza Strip, unilaterally decided by Israel, served Hamas' political interests, providing it with a justification for participating in the elections. According to the Islamist movement, the territory liberated by the occupier should become administrated by the resistance, whose armed struggle had precipitated this retreat.

Also, from an ideological point of view, Hamas justified its engagement with the institutions of the Palestinian Authority based on religious criteria. Since 2003, the Islamic resistance movement moderated its strict position. Rather than criticising the Palestinian Authority on the issue of legitimacy, it began to question the efficiency of its administration, highlighting the corruption pervasive amongst its ranks. Hamas thus begins to implicitly accept its existence.

The marked tendency towards wanting to justify political participation was evident in Hamas' public statements. Adnan Asfour, the spokesperson for the Islamic resistance movement in the West Bank, explains the evolution of Hamas' ideology as a response to the people's growing expectations of the movement and what it should achieve.

Hamas envisions a gradual integration into the existing political institutional framework. The Islamic resistance movement will encourage its members to engage in the Palestinian Authority's civil and military institutions and to cooperate in the arena of public services, in conformity with its field missions, and closely in line with the needs of the population.

Hamas' initial efforts in favour of its political integration were hindered by the political context of the time. The movement acquired a popular legitimacy as a result of the position

it adopted on matters related to the peace plans and the existence of Israel. But in 2004, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict took on a new dimension for Hamas with the assassination of its leaders who sought to restrain the clandestine opening up of the movement. These events led Hamas to review its work methods and opt for political visibility, accompanied by an official discourse and decision-making process similar to that of the Gaza Strip affiliates in Damascus. Knowing that the movement's financial means were generated abroad, and given that at this time part of the international community qualified it as a terrorist organisation, Hamas had to take advantage of this opportunity to gain legitimacy.

This appeared possible as regards two elements:

- Hezbollah's experience in Lebanon: an Islamist movement that operates aggressively on the ground and has integrated political life / an official political organisation, thus managing to diminish the external pressure it is subject to and "softening" the terrorist label often attributed to the movement.
- The death of the peace process: the political integration of Hamas will not constrain it into approving an unproductive agreement.

The political turnaround was precipitated by the death of the two movement's respective historic leaders. In fact, both Fatah and Hamas lost their charismatic leaders the very same year. On 22 March 2004, Sheikh Yassine⁴⁹, founder of Hamas, was killed in an Israeli attack⁵⁰. A few months later, 11 November saw the death of Yasser Arafat, Head of the Palestinian National Movement, in a Parisian military hospital⁵¹. Hamas managed to continue with its activities and define a coherent leadership, while the Fatah found it difficult to recover from the loss of its leader and political hegemony at the time of the second *intifada*. Arafat had built the party in his vision – a situation that was to become the principal challenge facing Abbas.

The agenda of the new president of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, was limited to stabilising the national political system, as well as relations with Israel, the Arab states and the international community at-large. The achievement of these objectives required the collaboration of Hamas. Abbas thus opted to negotiate with the Islamists and offer a division of power, integrating them into the Palestinian Authority's institutions through the means of legislative elections. This strategy was supported by Egypt. The United States did not judge it necessary to intervene, seeing as this plan corresponded to its own political agenda for the region and its aim to promote democracy as a damper on terrorist resolve.

In reality, Abbas hoped to lead Hamas away from the path of violence and end its military unilateralism. The Road Map⁵² envisioned the dismantlement of its armed infrastructure⁵³; but recognising that the use of force in dealings with Hamas is not effective, the Palestinian President preferred the solution of political integration⁵⁴.

Finally, three major events paved the way for the Islamist movement's entry into politics:

- the Oslo Agreement had fulfilled all it could – a sentiment shared by Israeli leaders;
- the balance of costs and benefits bode well for Hamas' political participation;
- the death of Fatah's charismatic leader.

The idea was that once Hamas became a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council, it could no longer ignore the laws passed in a forum where it was represented. If Hamas recognised the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority, any violation of the PLC's laws could be used to justify a muscled intervention against Hamas. The solution proposed by Abbas resembled political blackmail: Hamas would have to choose between political integration and military independence.

49 Gilles PARIS, "The spiritual son of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Ahmed Yassine, became radicalised in the 1980s", in *Le Monde*, 22 March 2004.

50 Vincent HUGUEUX and Hési CARMEL, "Les milles vies de Hamas", in *L'Express*, 29 March 2004.

51 For a short biography of the Palestinian leader, see: <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/proche-orient/a12315>, and for more about the debate surrounding the circumstances of his death, read: Amnon KAPÉLIQOUK, "Yasser Arafat a-t-il été assassiné?", in *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2005.

52 The 2003 Road Map was outlined in collaboration with the United States, the European Union, the Russian Federation and the United Nations. Made public in April 2003, this diplomatic document was supposed to institute the coexistence of two States: an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State side by side with Israel. The first stage consisted in re-establishing confidence between the parties, See: "A Middle East Road Map to Where", Crisis Group Middle East Report, n.14, 2 May 2003.

53 Since his election into the Presidency of the Palestinian Authority, in January 2005, Mahmoud Abbas has rejected the summons of the Israeli representatives demanding the dissolution of all armed groups: the Brigades of the Al-Qqsa Martyrs, Hamas' Al-Qassam Brigades and the Islamic Jihad's Al-Qods Brigades.

54 Two reasons led Abbas to choose this option. The first relates to the destabilising consequences of the use of force against Hamas, as the Palestinian Authority discovered after the spring of 1996 when it launched a campaign of violent repression against Hamas, following its bloody anti-Israeli attacks. The aim now is to avoid any internal confrontation. Civil war is not that far off. In addition, a disarming of Hamas cannot be envisioned for the simple reason that the security forces available to the President are badly equipped and disorganised.

In contrast to Arafat, who appropriated and controlled according to the maxim “divide to better reign”, Abbas chose to lead through a process of incorporation and integration. It was with this aim in mind that Abbas adopted a tactic in the spring of 2003, while he was still prime minister, in a bid to put an end to violent action on the part of radical movements without openly challenging them. After several months of negotiations under the supervision of Egypt, the Palestinian leadership and the representatives of thirteen political organisations signed the Cairo Declaration of 19 March 2005⁵⁵. The signatories observed a period of calm, respecting the cease-fire – *tahdi'a* – until the end of 2005, and immediately began organising local and legislative elections⁵⁶. Unlike the agreement accepted in 2003, the negotiated lull period of 2005 had a political price: the integration of Hamas into the official Palestinian state of affairs and its participation in the municipal and legislative elections. Due to political strategy, or mere prudence, the deadline for the legislatives was postponed from July 2005 to January 2006. This delay would benefit Fatah by allowing it to regain some terrain over the Islamists. And in order to permit the unification of local Fatah factions, the voting method was changed: proportional representation was given preference over the uninominal voting system.

According to the Palestinian President, offering the Islamists a limited scope of political responsibilities would promote their moderation, or at least allow stricter control over the activities of Hamas. Yet this evaluation failed to take Fatah's weaknesses into account.

Fatah's weakness: a catalyst for Hamas' victory

Promoting moderation within Hamas through the means of political integration is a possibility that could have had positive effects. When the Muslim Brotherhood, the premier opposition force in Egypt, was confronted with political responsibilities and questions of social public policy, it came to understand that it was not the only movement referring to Islam to respond to pragmatic queries.

Hamas' political experience must have at least partly resembled this model; but this was without counting on Fatah's weakness and the fragile balance of the Israeli-Arab accords.

Already during the final years of Yasser Arafat's “reign”, the Palestinian Authority was the object of violent criticism, originating from within Fatah itself. The members of the party reproached its leaders for their corruption, nepotism and excessive centralisation of power. In the face of such internal contestation, Arafat resorted to his tactic of “constructive division”, which consisted in pitting his contenders against each other⁵⁷. This formula did not, however, ease tensions, which erupted into a full-blown crisis following Arafat's death.

The legislative elections originally scheduled for July 2005, were deferred to allow Fatah's remobilisation. This postponement had the opposite effect. Disputes multiplied between rival factions, often linked to competing security services, over the distribution of the increasingly scarce financial resources. The primaries, which outline the list of Fatah representatives to the Palestinian Legislative Council, were marked by such internal discord that they ended up being suspended. Finally, Fatah presented two lists, one gathering the old hierarchy, and the second, the reformers.

The organisation and discipline displayed by Hamas advanced it through the various stages of the 2005 municipal elections. Beyond the Gaza Strip, its supporters also encompassed the West Bank, where Hamas won the localities of Kalkiliya, Nablus and Jenin, among others.

In this Palestinian political context – characterised by a divided Fatah belittled by a united and reinforced Hamas – the project to politically integrate the Islamists represented an advantageous opportunity for the Islamic resistance movement, especially since the peace

⁵⁵ See: www.palestine-pmc.com/details.asp?cat=2&id=849.

⁵⁶ The 2005 agreement is of a different nature. Contrary to the unilateral ceasefire – *hudna* – of 2003, this was a truce explicitly conditional on the halt to “all forms of aggressions against the land and people of Palestine” perpetrated by Israel. Although the *tahdi'a* was globally respected by Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and the Brigades of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs, the leaders of which were endlessly hounded by the Israeli army, have not hesitated in orchestrating several attacks since it was proclaimed.

⁵⁷ At the time of the constitution of the last Fatah government, in February 2005, the party's “masters of ceremony” succeeded in guaranteeing Ahmed Qorei a further term as Prime Minister, despite being a notoriously unpopular leader who had demanded a list of the ministers associated with the “Arafat system”. Fatah deputies responded by making a strong case for the internal renewal of the team and for the integration of a strong contingent of technocrats, rather than allowing the promotion of intermediary elements who had been involved in the first Intifada (1987-1993) and were locally well-rooted. This new generation longingly awaited the holding of the Fatah congress – ultimate decision-making organ – scheduled for August 2005, especially since the last meeting, in Tunis, dating back to 1989, when the PLO was still ignored by Israel, the Palestinian Authority did not yet exist and the Middle East was structured according to very different forces.

process was at that time static.

The meeting between Mahmood Abbas and Ariel Sharon, at the 8 February 2005 summit in Sharm El-Sheikh, marked the re-launch, after Arafat's disappearance, of the political dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. However, the cease-fire proclaimed by the two leaders was not fully respected, in particular by the Islamic Jihad and the Brigades of the Al-Aqsa Martyrs, both of which committed terrorist attacks in Israel during this time, but also by the Israeli Zahal, which continued its hunt of Palestinian paramilitaries through frequent targeted attacks.

Although it was expected that Abbas would receive a warmer welcome from Israel, given that Arafat had been considered an obstacle to peace, Ariel Sharon instead decided to reinforce his unilateral strategy. This approach consisted in abandoning the problematic but strategically unimportant regions, such as Gaza, and in consolidating the sectors of the West Bank deemed useful, in demographic or strategic terms, behind a "protective wall" – an action that countered the opinion of the International Court of Justice, expressed in July 2004. The unilateralism⁵⁸ pursued by the Israeli officials reinforced the idea that the Palestinian actor was no longer seen as a partner.

In the face of this stalemate, rather than allow the Palestinian Authority to wield control over Hamas, the elections of 25 January saw the Islamic resistance movement claim power of the Palestinian Authority – including its parliament and its government – in the face of an impassive international community.

The religious justification of political participation

Ever since 2004 – with the murders of Sheikh Yassine and then of his successor, Abdel Aziz Al-Rantissi, only a few days after his appointment – the change in direction taken by the Hamas leadership brought about a transformation in the movement's strategy, as it began to become more engaged in political life. Mushir Al-Masri's book, entitled "Participation in Political Life", adds a religious legitimacy to Hamas' participation in politics⁵⁹. Islam, according to the author, makes political involvement a necessity if a cost-benefit analysis balances in its favour. Thus, for Hamas, integrating the government of the Palestinian Authority would strengthen its popular base of support. The Islamist movement participated in the municipal elections, followed by the legislative ones, all the while distributing leaflets amongst the Palestinians to explain its political engagement.

Hamas officials presented themselves as candidates in the 2005 Palestinian municipal elections. Their positive results suggested that the Islamists were becoming an opposition force to be reckoned with. Going on to win the legislative elections of 26 January 2006⁶⁰, Hamas was invited by the President of the Palestinian Authority to integrate the new government. Despite the structural arrangements made by the Palestinian Authority, with an aim to guaranteeing the continued presence of Fatah, these did not prevent Hamas' well-defined campaign from attracting the voters.

It is of interest to highlight that the electoral procedures, which Hamas had singled out in 1996 to justify its rejection of political participation, had not been altered: voters living in Jerusalem continued to vote through post, political prisoners remained imprisoned by the Israelis, and the Palestinian diaspora was still not allowed to express its will. The only Palestinians who could vote democratically were those residing in the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip. Therefore, it was only Hamas' position vis-à-vis political engagement that had changed in the meantime.

As regards the recent electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and of Hamas in Palestine⁶¹, it seems that the voice of the people spoke out loud and clear in both cases,

58 The Israeli minister Lieberman – who joined Ehud Olmert's government in late October 2006 and who had been a member of the security cabinet and head of the extreme-right wing party, Israel Beitenou – declared that Israel should separate Jews and Arabs, using the divided island of Cyprus as a guiding model (AFP, 18 November 2006).

59 The preface of this book was written by Ismael Haniyeh.

60 Hamas obtained 42.9% of votes, claiming 74 of the 192 seats in Parliament, with Fatah only achieving 45 seats.

calling not only for the Islamisation of society, but essentially for change. The Islamists, proclaimed champions of transparency, presented themselves as the solution to corruption by offering institutional reform within a situation of political blockage that afflicted both Egypt and Palestine, albeit for different reasons. In both cases, the electoral victory of the Islamist movements, within a context of democratisation, denoted a political setback for the traditional parties.

But while the Muslim Brotherhood showed evidence of adaptability and pragmatism, Hamas entered elections firm in its stance that political integration completes, yet does not replace, armed struggle, quickly making it clear that it was not prepared to make any ideological concession.

The normal functioning of the Palestinian Authority's political institutions is compromised by Hamas' inflexible position. The Charter of the Islamic resistance movement, adopted 18 April 1988, describes the movement's founding ideology as a blend of Islamism and nationalism. Contrary to the Palestinian Liberation Organisation, which bases its action on the principles of Arab nationalism and Marxism, amongst other ideologies, Hamas rejects all foreign influences. Furthermore, the Charter specifies that the territory stretching from the Jordanian river to the Mediterranean Sea⁶² – *min al-nahr ila al-bahr* – is considered indivisible from the Islamic goods allocated to the Muslims until the time of the Last Judgement⁶³. It is also mentioned that Hamas will fight to see the banner of Allah hoisted over each and every part of Palestine. And in what concerns the peace negotiations, according to Hamas there is no solution to the Palestinian problem other than through *jihad*, and thus any alternative initiatives, proposals, or international conferences are a waste of time.

Hamas' Political Inexperience

The organisation's popularity in the Occupied Territories is seen as an expression of Palestinian dignity and a symbol of the defence of Palestinian rights, within a context of humiliation and despair. By electing Hamas, the voters were not backing religious fundamentalism, but rather saluting the fighters' heroic acts, as well as their reputation for honesty, in their struggle against the corruption of the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas acquired its political credibility through its charity and social service networks. The organisation adopted a policy of assistance based on socio-economic needs and not religious criteria, thus also allowing families not integrated in the movement, or that are not practicing Muslims, to benefit from this aid. Yet in the political field, Hamas is far from demonstrating a similar level of experience.

The inflexibility of Hamas in its recognition of Israel

With the cessation of aid grants from Israel and Western governments to the Palestinian Authority⁶⁴, the Hamas-led government could barely function following its victory in the legislative elections. The question of which political orientation(s) Hamas would privilege once in power – the nationalist or Islamist political programme – appeared compromised by the West's refusal to prolong its economic support⁶⁵. If poverty is a seed of radicalism, this political decision will merely fuel popular dissatisfaction and breed further violence. Knowing that Hamas is opposed to diplomatic negotiations with Israel, this having been one of the foundations of its existence and a contributing factor to its election into the Palestinian Legislative Council, it would seem unwise to hinge the provision of international aid on an eventual Israeli-Palestinian rapprochement – a realisation that was acknowledged in the Oslo Agreement.

The adaptation of this new political situation to the commitments made in 1993 is some-

⁶¹ At the time of Hamas' participation in the legislative elections of January 2006, it obtained the support of the Muslim Brotherhood's Consultative Council – the majlis al-Shura – which has the final word on most of the movement's affairs.

⁶² Based on a map, drafted by Hamas, of Palestine as it existed before the boundaries imposed in 1967.

⁶³ Jean-François LEGRAIN, "Les islamistes à l'épreuve du soulèvement", in *Maghreb-Machrek*, n. 121, July-September 1988.

⁶⁴ The European Union decided to maintain its humanitarian aid and to continue certain activities in the area of healthcare and education.

⁶⁵ The United States halted all financial support to the Palestinian Authority. On 10 April 2006, in Luxembourg, the Europeans also decided to "provisionally suspend" their direct aid to the Palestinian Authority.

what dependent on Hamas coming to respect three principles: namely, a renouncement of violence, an acceptance of the approved agreements, and the formal recognition of Israel. At first glance, it seems impossible to expect a movement, whose essence is exactly the negation of an Israeli state, to turn on its very founding doctrines; at least not in this way. Time could have been the ideal ally to Hamas' political maturing. Use of the pressure tactic on the Palestinian Authority since the announced electoral victory of Hamas, stalled the political and diplomatic process – creating a deadlock with heavy consequences for the Palestinian people. For its part, Israel pursued its unilateral policy⁶⁶ in the face of what could be seen as a Palestinian civil conflict, marked by clashes between the different factions of the PLO and Hamas. This situation was denied by Sheikh Yassine, who had declared that the movement would never become engaged in internal fighting or in any civil war between Palestinians⁶⁷.

With regard to the recognition of Israel, Hamas distinguishes between two situations: on the one hand, endorsement of the legitimacy of the Israeli invasion – which is deemed unacceptable – and on the other, acceptance of Israel's physical presence – an undeniable fact. Hamas maintained its firm position during all attempts to discuss this theme, refusing to recognise Israel. Considering the pressure and financial threats exercised on the Islamist movement, such a position may have proven too rigid. In response to this realisation, certain elements of Hamas sought a more realistic stance and tried to identify what could potentially be gained from recognising the state of Israel. Hamas believes that until now the Palestinians have gained nothing in political terms from such recognition, not even the repossession of their violated rights, such as the territory confiscated from Palestine. Given this conception of the Palestinian situation, Hamas will not come to accept the existence of its enemy merely under the weight of external pressures. A relaxation of the movement's strict position may however be envisioned if it benefited from internal political support, which might in turn permit the elaboration of a political manifesto that implicitly includes an acceptance of Israel's presence.

Several different scenarios could be adopted:

1) The integration of Hamas into the PLO, lending it a more prominent place than that of other Palestinian currents. This solution would offer an answer to Hamas' dilemma, given that it was the PLO that endorsed Israel's existence and signed the peace agreement. Fatah does not however appear ready to extend Hamas' representation under the umbrella organisation of the nationalist movement, for the following reasons:

- Hamas does not enjoy much popularity amongst Palestinians in exile, who together make up about two-thirds of the total Palestinian population.
- The immense geographical spread of the Palestinian community, across Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and other Gulf states, does not permit the distribution of powers within the organisation to be determined through elections.
- Finally, if Hamas was allowed to lead the PLO, it would imply that Fatah renounce this position, which is very unlikely.

Hamas' integration in the PLO would not have major consequences on the organisation's constitution. It would, rather, lend Hamas some international legitimacy and force it to confront some key issues, such as recognition of the state of Israel.

2) The second scenario possibly adopted by Hamas is that of a referendum. The idea would not be to ask Palestinians about the matter of recognition, but instead to establish an agreement between Abou Mazen and Israel, which would then be submitted for scrutiny by the Palestinian population. Hamas could thus conform to public opinion without compromising its credibility. This would most likely trigger the formation of a unified national

⁶⁶ Along with the numerous decisions taken by Ariel Sharon regarding the division of the territories, Israel adopted several coercive measures, such as forbidding movement between Gaza and the West Bank for party officials, reinforcing the barriers between Israel and the Palestinian territories, and suspending the payment of taxes to the Palestinian Authority on the imports removed by Israel. In the same vein, Ehoud Olmert expressed his wish to fix permanent boundaries of the Hebrew state until 2010, evacuating the isolated colonies close to the large Palestinian urban centres and reclaiming the three Israeli settlements of Ariel, Ma'aleh Adoumin and Gush Etzion.

⁶⁷ Stéphane BUSSARD, "Cheikh Yassine: "Pour obtenir gain de cause, je suis prêt à mourir", in *Le Temps*, 31 July 2000.

government, entirely conceivable within this framework, and the development of a political programme. Such a scenario would see Fatah working in the domain of foreign affairs and assuming responsibility for the decisions taken.

The drawback of the approach here outlined resides in the fact that the co-existence within a unitary government of two contradictory currents would prove extremely difficult to implement in practice.

3) The last foreseeable scenario is that of organising Hamas-backed presidential and legislative elections. This option presents Hamas with two possibilities:

- a) Opt to exit the political stage in order to prevent any division within the Islamist movement.
- b) Renounce its ideological positions, accepting to become an opposition force in the legislative council dominated by Fatah – the goal being to secure sufficient time to implement the necessary changes in the movement’s political organisation, and subsequently prepare for a new election period that could see Hamas emerge as a winner.

Finally, will Hamas, under international pressure, approve the existence of Israel while knowing that it needs the popular support that revolves around this issue, and especially the approval of its military wing?

A moderate political discourse?

Hamas’ electoral programme is entitled “List for change and reform”. Stressing the corruption that pervaded the former government, the Charter develops a series of idealist reforms that reveal its weakness.

The Charter opens with a verse from the Qu’ran: “I only want reform as far as I can”. What then follows suggests that Hamas wants to attract as many listeners as possible, seeing as throughout the entire document it avoids ever adopting a clear stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The war is in fact mentioned as being legitimate; however, its intensification is never insisted upon. The concern is not to upset the voter, who is already suffering under the terrible economic consequences of what would appear an endless struggle. Hamas does nonetheless express its willingness to pursue all means to protect the Palestinians, which implies also resorting to the use of force.

The programme presents the Palestinian state as part of the vaster Arab and Islamic land, and the Palestinian people as brothers of the Arab and Islamic populations.

The desire to politically engage with the PLO and the Palestinian Authority is also mentioned and is framed as a means of serving the Palestinian interests. In what concerns the movement’s relations with the international community, nothing much is said besides encouraging the European Union to become more involved in the management of this conflict.

Even though the religious discourse transpires, it is not dominant. This is probably because Hamas lends great importance to its image of being a pragmatic movement.

The two first objectives of the platform⁶⁸ acting as Hamas’ political programme in the 2006 legislative elections blend nationalism and Islamism. Formulas such as “Palestinians are one nation regardless of location” (first objective, third point), or “work to putting an end to the Israeli occupation and to establishing an independent Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital, while protecting Palestinians using all possible means” (first objective, fifth point), and “reinforce Arab and Islamic unity, ending all border conflicts” (second objective,

first point) accentuate the Islamic hue of the national liberation struggle.

In contrast, other objectives more specifically reflect the project to Islamise society, such as “the Islamic law will be the source of Palestinian legislation”, or “Islam will be the core of the Palestinian education philosophy”.

Ismael Hanieyh’s intervention at the time of the Legislative Council’s vote of confidence was the most moderate stance ever expressed by an element of Hamas – perhaps because he was not in a forum addressing Arab countries, and particularly Israel. The Head of the government framed his movement’s victory within a sense of Palestinian continuity by using expressions such as: “the tenth Palestinian government”, “the right of return”, “the liberation of prisoners”, “democracy”, “the construction of a state of law”, “judiciary autonomy”, “encouraging investments”, etc.

The seven challenges for the government, as they were presented, are:

- Israeli occupation;
- preservation of security;
- the deteriorating economy;
- national unity and reform;
- the reinforcement of Palestine’s status in the Arab and Islamic world;
- the region’s relationship with the rest of the world;
- resistance, evoked through the development of new expressions like “preserving the Palestinian right to resist occupation”, yet unsupported by any practical methods to employ.

As regards the Arab peace initiative, Hamas does not altogether refuse it but underlines that it was not accepted by Israel. Hanieyh declared that the movement was eager to approach international negotiations responsibly. He also expressed its appreciation of the role played by the European Union, as well as the aid provided. The head of the government employed peace-evoking terminology: “quartet”, “viable Palestinian state”, “state with the geographic integration of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip”.

Hanieyh’s discourse reveals a newly emerging perception of the conflict, which is no longer dogmatic, having instead become a struggle for national liberation and independence against an imperialist force. The terms used are taken from international law, contrary to the contents of the movement’s Charter, which does not attribute an international or judicial dimension to the conflict. This evolution emerged during the 1990s. At this time, Hamas was beginning to refer to international law and to the Geneva Convention in its use of the phrase “right to resistance and auto-determination”. The movement declared its respect for “international treaties and organisations given that these do not confiscate the Palestinian people’s right to resistance, auto-determination and liberation”.

Hamas thus appeared to privilege pragmatic interests over theoretical principles. Reinforcing this shift in approach, Khaled Meeshal pronounced his will to develop more tactical policies, better adapted to reality.

It seems that all throughout its political history Hamas has tended towards pragmatism, although always seeking to avoid any compromise of its ideology. In other words, the movement has been able to offer religious justifications for its political actions, relying

68 See: <http://www.pnic.gov.ps/english/govern/Elections/Hamas-program.html>

on different interpretations of Islam's history and on the precept: "That which is justified by the heavens cannot be refused by the earth". The most pertinent example of this tendency was the decision to replace peace negotiations with a cease-fire – *hudna*, this because a peace agreement is binding and requires absolute consensus, while a truce is only provisional and thus more flexible. Sheikh Yassine based himself on a fatwa emitted by Al Azhar when he declared that "reconciliation with the enemy is not legal from a religious point of view" – reconciliation in this case implying the recognition of the occupation and acceptance of the land confiscations. As such, the cease-fire could not be seen as a reconciliation given that it is limited in time – ten years at most. The government may legitimately opt for a truce if its enemy is stronger. This "pause" gives Muslims time for renewal before plunging once again into their struggle. But if the enemy fails to respect the conditions imposed by the cease-fire, it is immediately annulled. Following a similar logic, this "peace" cannot assume an eternal character and be imposed on future generations.

Today, Ismael Haniyeh evokes the term "national immunity". Palestine is a totality, a geographic unit that should be liberated and, according to Haniyeh, it is possible to gradually achieve this goal.

Hamas faces a dilemma. The movement is bound to its ideological engagements, compelled by its political duty to manage crises, and now finds itself abandoned by the very same international community whose democratic principles brought Hamas to power via an altogether transparent electoral procedure. The risk is that Hamas' political experience will serve as an example for other Islamist movements. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, has closely followed this evolution and taken notes for its own political integration. Having accompanied the situation, this experience might either direct the Brotherhood towards a path of greater pragmatism and spirit of concession, or then, make it realise that democracy does not desire the victory of Islamism. If the goal is to harm Hamas' credibility in the eyes of public opinion, by highlighting its incapacity to assume political responsibility, the crisis drowning Palestine will also emphasise the limits of democracy.

On its part, the international community, and notably the United States and Europe, are faced with yet another dilemma. Political contacts with a government led by an organisation qualified as "terrorist", would contradict the fundamental principle that dissuades from any negotiation with terrorists.

Political integration of the Islamist movement would bring its identity into question. Operating outside formal political institutions, the privilege of an informal sort of power, unburdened by official responsibilities, permits the movement to maintain a revolutionary character in the social domain and guarantees its popular support, whatever the level of intervention and means mobilised. There is little chance that the movement's founding ideology, which places it within the opposition, will be contested. Once included in the political game, the organisation finds itself forced to adapt its discourse to the concrete realities that accompany any position in power. It seems difficult to avoid this without stumbling into an impasse.

After its victory in the 2006 legislatives, Hamas had three choices when forming its current Palestinian government. The first was to establish a national unity government. According to all expectations and objectives, this would have proved a good option due to reasons that in time became evident. The second choice was to form a government of technocrats – an option supported by independents, intellectuals and the Palestinian business community. But this kind of government would have to be free of political influence. The third was the one eventually selected by Hamas: that of a government under its control. Hamas formed a coalition with Fatah, but according to its own terms and political

programme. The Islamic resistance movement did not seek to share power; the aim was to preserve its monopoly. Confronted by international pressure, Hamas was unwilling to compromise. Instead, it sought external backing, aligning itself with the Iranian-Syrian axis even though this did not appear a beneficial decision. In reality, Iran never ceased to pursue compromise with the United States and the West in an attempt to secure its margin for manoeuvre at all costs. And the Syrians made use of the Iranian and Palestinian cards to reinforce their negotiating leverage with Washington and to maintain the Baath party in power⁶⁹.

Amidst the violence between the armed factions of Hamas and Fatah, political dialogue is at a standstill. Negotiations thus represent both a hope of forming a national unity government and a “historic opportunity” for Palestine⁷⁰. Hamas has the option of renouncing power in favour of an administration of technocrats, in the interest of the Palestinian people. This transfer of power for a defined period of time would offer the perfect opportunity to kick-start debate around subjects such as the reform of the PLO, negotiations with Israel, and the adoption of new laws regarding political parties, elections, etc. Hamas’ refusal to cede the reins of the government led the Palestinian president to try discharging the legitimately elected government⁷¹.

And while Hamas and Fatah attack each other politically and in the streets, Israel quietly pursues its unilateral politics, redesigning its own map of the region.

Security represents a source of conflict between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. The security apparatus is under the President’s direction, yet Hamas seeks to create its own structure and form a militia. Thus, the President’s decision to halt the constitution of such a military formation, even if under official control, places Hamas in a delicate position. The exercise of authority should be encompassed within the scope of the new government. As Sheikh Yassine declared in 1998, the political and social branches of Hamas cannot be distinguished from its military branch⁷². Today, Hamas proposes the creation of a national army composed of different military factions, a suggestion which could see the dismantling of its military wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam brigade⁷³. The problem posing itself here is that financial pressure will have no impact on Hamas militants who are little motivated by monetary rewards. Martyrdom is their principal motivation⁷⁴. Recent elections within the nurses union reveal the Palestinian support of Hamas. Over 60% of the employees of the Health Ministry voted for Hamas, even while Palestine was under an economic embargo due to the movement’s refusal to make any concessions.

The Islamist stalemate

Rather than stimulating a consolidation towards a peaceful transition of power, Hamas’ victory instituted a dual power within the Palestinian Authority. A compromise that would see Hamas control the government and Fatah bring into question the viability of a presidency. Hamas could not reframe its position without losing credibility amongst its popular base, yet the international sponsors of the Palestinian Authority refused to finance a government led by a movement that did not recognise the Oslo Accords. However, failure to recognise Hamas’ electoral victory and its standing in the political game could lead to the movement’s further radicalisation and trigger a challenging of the Palestinian Authority’s legitimacy, as well as an end to the cease-fire with Israel⁷⁵.

Hamas did not have the time to reassess and develop its positions. International pressure and Israel’s firm stance, refusing all dialogue with the new government, prevented Hamas’ legitimate engagement in the political game. Considering its new political responsibilities, Hamas could have attenuated its extremist positions. Hamas has for a long time fought the

69 Even before the accession of Hamas to power, Tehran’s unconditional support for the Islamic resistance movement was reiterated during the conference held in October 2005, entitled “A World Without Zionism”. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad strongly advised the Palestinians to not succumb to diplomatic demands.

70 Riyadh MALIKI, in Al-Ayyam, 22 May 2006.

71 Greg MYRE, “Abbas threatens to dismiss Hamas government”, in The New York Times, 18 October 2006.

72 “We cannot separate the wing from the body. If we do, the body will no longer be able to fly. Hamas is a body”, Reuters.

73 Sa’ad MEHIO, “La guerre civile palestinienne”, in al-Khaleej, 21 May 2006.

74 Yasser HILALAH, “La guerre contre le Hamas va-t-elle être réglée militairement?”, in al-Ghad, 21 May 2006.

Palestinian Authority under the pretext that it is a product of the Oslo negotiations, and that it is therefore dependent on Israel, the United States and their European partners. By accepting to present candidates for the legislative elections, Hamas made a first step towards a softening of its hardline approach.

The president of the Palestinian Authority has tried to demonstrate the incompatibility between the exercise of governmental authority and the upholding of a resistance programme like that of Hamas. The aim is to force Hamas to abandon its fundamental tenets in the name of pragmatism and transform it into a movement similar to Fatah. But the formula seeking to combine Fatah's realism with Hamas' resistance against corruption does not appear realistic. Hamas has attempted to return to the politics previously pursued by the Palestinian Authority.

A priori, Hamas did not predict an electoral victory that would place it at the helm of the government. The movement was merely seeking to obtain enough seats to secure its participation in the peace process. The movement's political integration thus seems to have missed a stage. Yet Hamas' success is far from complete. Although it has formed a government, the movement must negotiate a duality of power that results from Fatah's and the Palestinian Authority's joint control over the presidency. Mahmoud Abbas' party also possesses a block in the Legislative Council that allows it to prevent Hamas from voting on regular laws. These elections have certainly destabilised Fatah's command of the Palestinian Authority, however, they did not permit Hamas to assume full control.

The political deadlock is real, and even the states financing and backing the peace process are constrained by their own political positions, which forbid negotiation with a government led by a terrorist movement that is against the process in its entirety.

Hamas has been trapped by its own positions. The dilemma confronted is the pressure to define a clear stance and renounce the historic solution lauded since the movement's creation – the liberation of Palestine in the terms of its existence back in 1948. Hamas would accept a transitory solution that secured the territorial boundaries of 1967, but the movement hesitates for the simple reason that it initiated *jihad* with reference to the historic solution. The reality is that this solution is now unattainable, even by force.

Hamas distinguishes between two types of negotiations: operational ones aimed at facilitating Palestinian daily life, and political ones concerning Palestinian rights. Although it accepts the first type, the second are considered mere concessions while the Palestinian Authority remains under occupation. According to Hamas, all negotiations undertaken under occupation are conditions imposed by the strong (in this case Israel) on the weaker Palestinians. Also, how can there be political dialogue when Israel does not even recognise Palestinian rights? Hamas has little faith in the international community. The main reason for this is the 1947 UN resolution responsible for the confiscation of Palestine to establish the State of Israel, whereas no resolution has ever guaranteed Palestinians their rights. And given that Israel fails to respect the established resolutions, the Palestinians will not be submitted to their application. In addition, Hamas considers the international acknowledgement of its legitimacy a concession without any value, since it offers nothing. Hamas only accepts the international treaties that recognise the right to resistance and self-determination. Ahmed Yassine would concede that the international community assume control over the land liberated by Israel until the Palestinians had selected their representatives. This transitory solution suggested by Hamas harks back to that defended by the PLO in 1974 of unifying all the liberated territories to build a Palestinian state.

The debate that engaged both the presidency and Hamas referred to the possibility of founding the Palestinian government based on the Arab peace initiative – an option refused by the Islamist movement and a peace accord that Israel itself never recognised.

The elements of Hamas imprisoned in Israel elaborated, alongside the other detained Palestinians representing almost all the political forces, an agreement entitled “Document of the Prisoners” or “National Conciliation Document” that outlined the Palestinian priorities. The Hamas leaders in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and abroad did not, however, know the contents of the agreement signed by their colleagues. The Islamist movement refused to accept it, knowing that the document did not reflect its point of view. It eventually recognised the agreement when the president of the Palestinian Authority threatened to submit Hamas to a popular referendum.

As regards resistance, Moussa Abou Marzouk, Vice-president of Hamas’ political bureau, believed that such action would lead the government towards sovereignty and liberty. The idea here being that it is possible to link political action and resistance, as certain movements in the region have proven. Theoretically this seems possible, but in practice, the choice remains ambiguous. Hamas acknowledges the destructive potential of an unorganised resistance, arousing disorder and economic decline. As a governing party, the Islamist movement does not desire to destabilise the Palestinian political scene. Consequently, without going as far as denouncing resistance, Hamas wants to structure it carefully. This pragmatic perspective is due to the fact that Hamas has integrated the political game, in which it now occupies an important place⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ When the Islamist movement’s military wing kidnapped the Israeli soldier, the government failed to adopt a clear position on this matter. Hamas carried out this operation for two reasons: on the one hand, to try to fuel its popular support, and on the other, to test the extreme measures that Israel is capable of pursuing against the movement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

A comparison between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood will tend to demonstrate that the two movements are closely aligned. This analogy derives from the fact that Hamas is, at its origin, an extension of the Egyptian Brotherhood that, in the 1970s, spread and blossomed into similar movements in various Arab and Muslim countries. As regards Hamas, however, it is a “national liberation” movement that assumes an Islamic expression, using violence to assure an end to occupation. Hamas thus acts within a context of occupation and of a country without a nation-state. On the other hand, in the Egyptian case the nation-state is present and plays an essential role in controlling the political and social sphere.

Differentiating between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, teaches us that:

- 1) If the international community and the respective national political systems hope to integrate the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas into the political equation, a price must be paid. Similarly, within a just and democratic internal and international environment, these Islamist movements should be prepared to compromise part of their ideological project. It is evident that the Egyptian regime is not ready to implement true political reforms in order to integrate all political forces, including the Brotherhood. In addition, neither the US or Europe seem prepared to demand an end to the Israeli occupation of the occupied territories. If these two conditions – internal and international – are fulfilled, the two Islamist movements will be in a position that obliges them to open up to democratic values and to adapt to the rules of the global system.

- 2) The Palestinian political scene suffered a tremendous transformation after the legislative elections that gave Hamas an absolute majority, allowing it to integrate the government. Contrary to the period of armed resistance, this new era forces Hamas to confront the “non-ideological” challenges of power. These depend more on the balance between international and local forces than on Hamas’ aspirations to liberate all of historical Palestine. It is for this reason that the movement’s militants choose not to mention peace with Israel, but rather invoke the concept of *hudna*, and are ready to recognise the secured borders separating the Hebrew and the Palestinian states in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. This position adopted by Hamas is presented as justifying the US and European refusal to engage the Islamist movement in dialogue, as well as the political and financial boycott exercised against it in a bid to attack its political project. In reality, the strategy pursued by the United States to weaken Hamas aims at financially constraining the movement by blocking all financial transfers that it might benefit from and by refusing any diplomatic dialogue. Nonetheless, these measures fail to encourage Hamas to reconsider its ideological and political positions in relation to Israel. They do not suggest any will on the part of the US to pressurise Israel into respecting the international accords. This stance justifies the long-standing discourse expressed by Hamas and other Islamist movements on the subject of a Western conspiracy against the Palestinian people and the Muslim world at large. The democratic West, along with the non-democratic Arab countries, chose not to enter into dialogue with Hamas. Acknowledgement of the Palestinian people’s democratic option demands engagement with Hamas and its integration into, not exclusion from, the new global equation. This does not necessarily imply an acceptance of its discourse. But it means creating an atmosphere where the movement’s discourse has a chance to evolve, allowing Hamas to assert Palestinian rights and to oblige Americans and Israelis to uphold their promises, which they have continued to neglect ever since Hamas entered into power. The American position towards Hamas is surprising in comparison to that adopted in relation to the Islamist movements in Iraq. In the Iraqi case, the Americans hope to engage the Islamists in the new government, notably the PII Islamic party, which is close to the Muslim Broth-

erhood. The Americans welcome the leader of this party, Tariq Al Hachémi, at the White House and recognise the decisive political role of Shiite religious references in Iraq. And yet they refuse the democratic choice of the Palestinian people that led to Hamas' victory, even though the movement's discourse is more moderate than that of certain Sunni groups in Iraq. It is clear that the option – rejected by the great democratic powerhouses – to integrate Hamas in the political process as a partner for peace, would have initiated an internal reconsideration of its stance. Such progress could have been achieved if an Israeli retreat from the occupied territories became foreseeable as a result of a genuine engagement from the part of Americans and Europeans. The Islamist movement would have been led to recognise Israel and to adopt other, non-violent means of resistance, as well as a more open discourse.

While the peace process continues to advance, the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas will be more motivated to approach the question of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in different ways. New perspectives emerge in such a context, like the protection of equality, the rights of citizenship and of justice, and respect for other religions.

This study has shown Hamas' pragmatism. The movement's position is in evolution – from its initial rejection of the Oslo Accords and denial of the Palestinian Authority, Hamas has changed its stance by entering the Oslo "system" as a political actor, with a view to attaining power, all the while politically and religiously justifying its transformation.

3) The problem of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt is distinct from that of Hamas in Palestine. In the first case, the movement is considered illegal by the Egyptian political power, in a country with an institutionalised central State, even if these institutions are not functioning well at present. In the latter case, Hamas is a legal movement within a context of occupation of a territory controlled by a Palestinian authority, yet without a State.

Despite its ambiguous and controversial presence – given that it had not held a legal status since 1954 – the Egyptian Islamic movement obtained 88 parliamentary seats, ten times more than all the opposition parties. It pursued a successful electoral campaign, thus reflecting its strong political organisations. The question that emerges is whether this movement might, once legalised, win the majority of seats in Parliament. Seeing as it is the Muslim Brotherhood under consideration, the answer is complex. The strong internal cohesion enjoyed by the Brotherhood is due to its status as both a political and a religious movement. This simultaneous status benefits from its illegal classification, which in turn allows the movement to impose a sense of obedience on its members in the name of internal cohesion. Knowing that it cannot defeat the Egyptian state, neither on the political or the religious plane, the Muslim Brotherhood protects itself by diffusing a fatalist discourse, voiced by its members ever since the revolution of 1952. This discourse constrains the Brotherhood members into respecting the orders of the higher echelons in order to preserve the movement's unity, heralded as the main objective. In addition, the movement's religious element has become the very reason for its survival. The mobilisation of the Muslim Brotherhood is not solely directed towards launching political reform, but also to satisfying God. Similarly, the Brothers do not vote to elect candidates but to perform a good act, for which God will reward them.

It is difficult to integrate peaceful Islamic political currents into the democratic process. Yet this engagement remains the only solution to guarantee, in the long run, the creation of a new civilian elite capable of competing against the Islamists within a framework of free and transparent elections. The democratic context established by political reform contributes towards generating actors who know how to play the political and democratic game, and in this way manage to pacifically sidestep the issue of the Muslim Brotherhood's integration.

Recently, discussion about the attempts made by the Muslim Brotherhood to found a political party re-launched the debate on its true intentions. Numerous doubts as regards its aptitude to form a civilian political party entirely separate from the religious brotherhood were also raised as a result, especially given the movement's fear of mixing politics with religion, as if the movement wanted to protect its identity by deeming any aggression directed against it as an offence against Islam or "practicing Muslims". The movement itself should fulfill a further condition necessary for reform, which consists of overcoming its problematic amalgamation of politics and religion. Recruitment and promotion within the movement are conditioned by religious criteria. Also, the Muslim Brotherhood is not open to Christian or non-religious citizens – a situation that contradicts the Constitution.

Consequently, rupture between the religious and political wings of the Muslim Brotherhood has become a prerequisite for the legalisation of the movement's party. It should respect the civil character of the political framework and expressly renounce the establishment of a religious state, firmly rejecting any form of religious discrimination towards citizens.

As regards the religious wing, it could operate in the spiritual sphere alongside other Islamic and Christian associations. And if it desired to eventually become politically active, it should do so with respect to the Constitution and the will of voters.

In contrast to the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas bases itself on a strong ideology and has risen to power in a very politically fragile context. The constitution of the Palestinian state and the question of its territory are always topical issues and the official Palestinian institutions result from an Israeli-Palestinian agreement that Hamas has never recognised.

Recent events have revealed the difficult political compatibility between a Fatah that refuses to abdicate of its political domination and a Hamas that challenges any limitation of its power. Faced with the stalemate that is found reflected in the political and geographical division within the Palestinian administration (a failure of the Mecca Accord), in Hamas' violent seizure of power in the Gaza Strip, and finally, in the destitution of the Hamas government and its replacement by another led by Salam Fayyad, few options are envisioned.

An ideal scenario would see Hamas and Fatah accepting to define a clearer political path rooted in the Arab peace initiative and in the reform of the institutions of the Palestinian Authority, notably its security services. At present, political stability, and the peace process itself, cannot be kept on course without introducing the Islamists into the political game. Applying pressure on Hamas un-backed by the proposal of a viable option, will only nurture further anti-Israeli violence. The premature organisation of legislative or presidential elections would also offer a means of appeasing tensions between Hamas and Fatah and giving the word back to the Palestinians.

The war confronting the Palestinians is one of models. The Abbas model, in the West Bank, conforms to the game of the international actors (Western and Arab) who are prepared to negotiate with Israel and to reorganise its security forces, while the model adopted by Hamas embodies the resistance of the Palestinian people, denouncing the corruption that pervades the ranks of Fatah. The war being played out between these two models translates, in both camps, into actions encouraging the supremacy of each. Recently, the publication of the new electoral law by Mahmoud Abbas favours Fatah by demanding that all candidates respect the PLO's political programme and the agreements signed with Israel. On its part, Hamas maintains control over the Gaza Strip through the use of force, despite repeated demonstrations by partisans of Fatah.

The model defended by Mahmoud Abbas could impose itself if Israel retreats from the West Bank and creates the political space allowing Fatah to reclaim control over the situation. The establishment of a Palestinian state would represent a political victory for the Abbas

camp. It is clear that one factor playing into Hamas' hands is the lack of interest in Abbas' model shown by the international community.

The Muslim Brotherhood was for a long time upheld as the model for political Islamic movements. Today, it stands to learn from Hamas' political experience. The Egyptian Brotherhood fosters close relations with the Islamic resistance movement in Palestine. Although having formally renounced violence in Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood publicly declares its support for the armed campaign pursued by Hamas in the West Bank against the Israeli occupier. This positioning portends to the development of a political scenario similar to that found within the Palestinian Authority, or at least to a political entanglement, if the Muslim Brotherhood one day came to power in Egypt⁷⁷. Its stance regarding Israel and the economic dependence on the United States are also problems to be considered. The movement's position as an opposition force appears the most strategic to successfully impose its political programme – vague and general – and its ideology, if it can adapt itself pragmatically. Over two decades, Hamas' perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has evolved many times. But the most marked development was that caused by its rise to power in 2006. There clearly exists a big difference between Hamas' 1988 Charter and the discourse that currently pervades the movement's ranks. This change of stance is gradual, but remains constant. Torn between the ideological principles of a dogmatic movement and the pragmatic realities of a national liberation movement, Hamas ends up finding religious justifications for each of its political actions. Today's burning question is: until when will it manage to employ this tactic? The answer rests on the possibility of forming a national unity government and, if it is eventually constituted, on whether Hamas will take the further step towards pragmatism that at present remains conditional on an Israeli retreat.

⁷⁷ The probability of this happening through the ballot box, in the context of a political system where the Constitution constrains the political growth of any group but that of the National Democratic Party, remains null. Even if Article 76 of the Egyptian Constitution is once again amended, in response to the pressure being exercised by the opposition groups regarding the restrictive conditions imposed in 2005, the legal ban that prevents the Muslim Brotherhood from constituting a political party will always be an obstacle to it reaching power.

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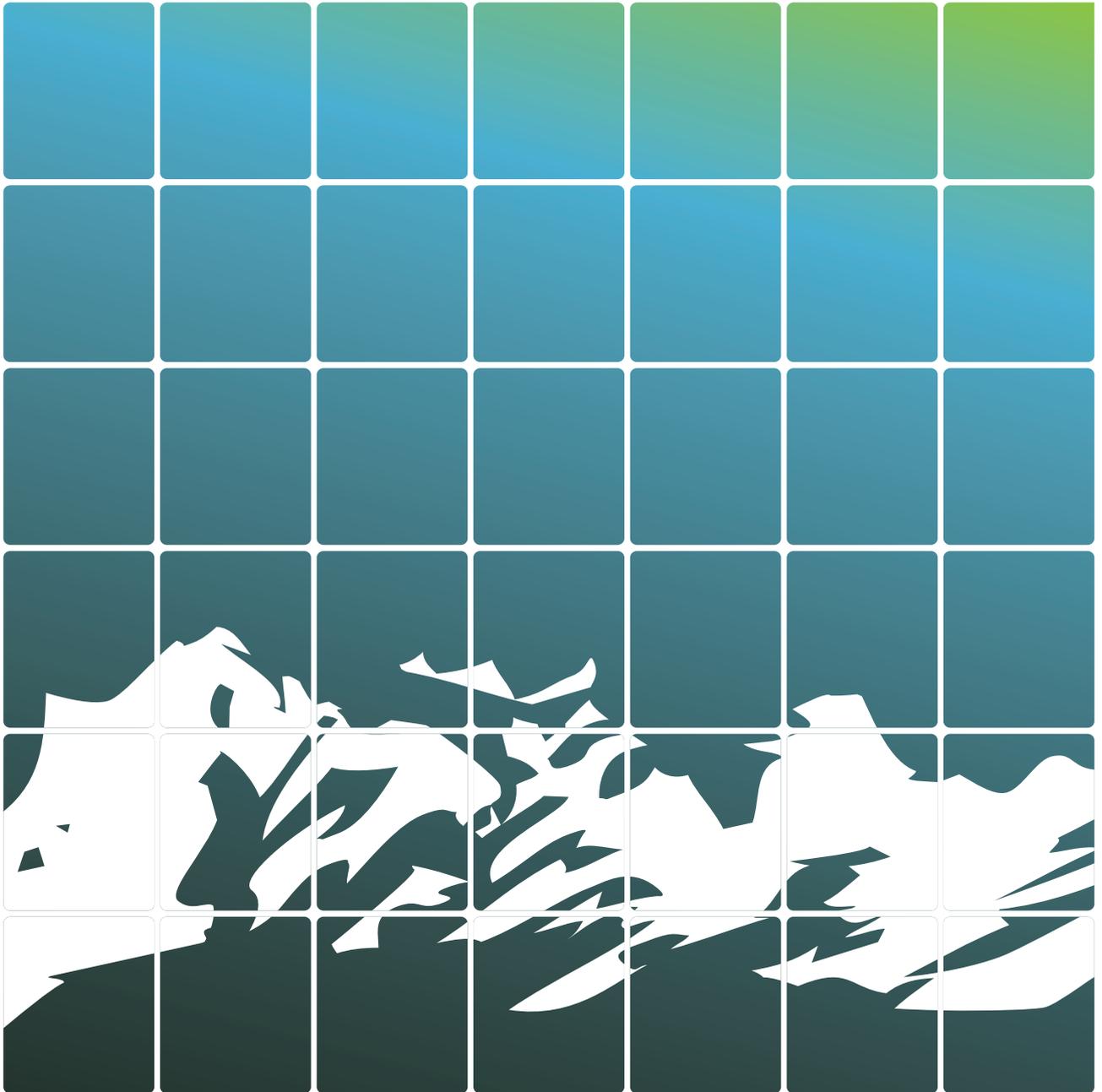
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