



## **Hegemonic Securitisations of Terrorism and the Legitimacy of Palestinian Government**

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*As in most intra-state conflicts, particularly ones between states and ethnic/religious groups over sovereignty, the conflicting Israeli and Palestinian securitisation processes produce different versions of the same reality. For the state, the group fighting for its independence and sovereignty is labelled a 'terrorist organisation' and the attacks organised by this group are securitised as 'terrorist attacks'. On the other hand, a group that is fighting for its rights or independence calls itself a 'liberation movement'. Even at the international level there is no consensus on the definition of terrorist organisations and liberation movements. In this paper this dilemma will be illustrated by the Israeli - Palestinian case analysed in the light of the Israeli and American-led international discourses regarding the nature of the current Palestinian leadership.*

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## **Introduction**

Since the establishment of the State of Israel, Israelis and Palestinian Arabs have entrapped themselves in a vicious cycle of violence. Their mutual deligitimisation was vital for both sides as it enabled them to believe in the distinctiveness of their claims. The negative image of Israel as occupier/apartheid state has been used as a means for creating policy by both the PLO and fedayeen groups like Hamas and Islamic Jihad. These groups have legitimised their existence with the Israeli threat to Palestinian identity. On the other hand, successive Israeli governments have considered these fedayeen groups as terrorist organisations. Since it was a question of survival, the securitising actors (leaders of the Palestinian and Israeli societies) have claimed their right to use extraordinary means to protect the survival of their societies. Palestinians have attacked Israeli settlements and bombed major Israeli cities whilst in return Israel has destroyed Arab settlements, undertaken targeted killings, constructed the separation wall and established check points and road blocks.

Throughout their interactions both sides have employed violence as a means to achieve their political goal. Even though both sides have used violence that harmed civilians throughout the conflict, through a securitisation process, the Palestinian movement has been labelled as 'terrorist' by the Israeli political and military elite. Thanks to the US' support for the State of Israel, Israel's position in labelling Palestinian movements as 'terrorist' has been recognised internationally. Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade and many other militant groups take their places in Western governments' lists of foreign

terrorist organisations, in spite of their claims to be national Palestinian movements centred on mobilising a community to resist occupation.

The objective of this article is to analyse the latest debates on the legitimacy of the democratically elected Hamas government in Palestine in the light of the analysis of securitisation process, which has defined Palestinian terror as an existential threat to the survival of the Israeli state and society. It is argued that the recent debates are not just about the deligitimisation of Hamas government but outcome of an ongoing securitisation of 'Palestinian terror' by the Israeli political and military elite. In the first section, the official definitions of 'terrorism' and 'terrorist organisation' are explored even though these definitions are highly controversial and pejorative. The second section consists of an analysis of the securitisation of 'Palestinian terrorism' by the Israeli political and military elite since the establishment of the State of Israel. Finally, in the last section the hegemonic powers', namely Israel and the US, securitisations and actions regarding the legitimacy of the Hamas-led Palestinian government will be explored.

### **What is *terrorism*?**

Even though the use of violence for the achievement of political ends is common both for state and non-state groups, the definition of terrorism is highly controversial. The main problem is to determine the criteria for the legitimate use of violence. As far as the official definitions of terrorism are concerned, the United Nations described terrorism in *General Assembly Resolution 51/210*

(1999) as 'criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public, a group of persons or particular persons for political purposes.' The resolution goes on to say that these acts are 'in any circumstance unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them.'

The European Union sets out a definition in Article 1 of the *Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism* (2002):

Terrorist offences are criminal offences, [...] which [...] may seriously damage a country or an international organisation where committed with the aim of: seriously intimidating a population; or unduly compelling a Government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.

According to Article 212 (a)(3)(B) of the Immigration and Nationality Act of the United States, terrorism is defined as following:

...activities that (A) involve acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the U.S. or of any state, that (B) appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping, and (C) occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.

In spite of the variety of definitions, common principles among legal definitions of terrorism provide key criteria for international consensus and also foster cooperation among law enforcement structures. Official definitions determine counter-terrorism policy and are often developed to serve it. In spite of the controversies most of the definitions are drawn up based on the following criteria: *target, objective, motive, perpetrator and the legitimacy or legality of the act.* Even though violence is considered as one of the most common characteristics of terrorism the criterion of violence alone does not produce a useful definition, as it includes many acts not usually considered terrorism such as war, riot and organised crime. Mainly the objective of each act of terrorism is to have an impact on large audiences. In general the terrorist attacks negatively affect a government's legitimacy and increase the legitimacy of the particular terrorist organisation and the ideology behind a terrorist act. (Juergensmeyer 2000:125) Another issue that all terrorist attacks have in common is their perpetration for a political purpose. Terrorism is considered as a political tactic that is used by activists when they believe no other means will effect the kind of change they desire. The change is desired so badly that failure is seen as a worse outcome than the deaths of civilians as illustrated by Palestinian struggle over the control of an ancestral homeland. As far as the target of terrorism is concerned it is commonly agreed that the distinctive nature of terrorism is its intentional selection of civilians as direct targets. As is the experience in many cases the victims of terrorism are targeted not because they are threats, but because their suffering accomplishes the terrorists' goals of getting a message out to an

audience. (Juergensmeyer 2000:127-128) Last but not least most of the official definitions of terrorism add criterion of illegitimacy or unlawfulness into the definition of terrorism in order to distinguish between actions authorised by a 'legitimate' government and those of other actors, including individuals and groups. Using this criterion, actions that would otherwise qualify as terrorism would not be considered terrorism if they were government sanctioned. This criterion is inherently problematic because it denies the existence of state terrorism.

In general, the definition of terrorism depends on one's point of view, which implies a moral judgement. The definitions make a distinction between lawful and unlawful use of violence. Hence, the distinction rests on a political judgement: one person's freedom fighter can be another's terrorist, which is one of the central arguments regarding the definition of terrorism. Attempts at defining the concept invariably arouse debate because rival definitions may be employed with a view including the actions of certain parties, and excluding others. Thus, each party might subjectively claim a legitimate basis for employing violence in pursuit of their own political cause or aim.

### **The state of Israel and the securitisation of the '*Palestinian terror*'**

According to Ole Wæver, who has developed a securitisation theory, that argues that threats and security are not objective matters; rather 'security is a practice, a specific way of framing an issue. Security discourse is characterised by dramatising an issue as having absolute priority. Something is presented as

an absolute threat...’ (1996:108) In this regard, today’s security is deeply related with politicising an issue. Security politics is not just about underlining pre-existing threats; but also a performative activity that makes certain issues visible as a threat. Within this context, security refers to a concept that is more about how a society or any group of people come to designate something as a threat.

As far as social side of security is concerned it is about the process by which threats get constructed. This view brings the concept of *securitisation*, which refers ‘the discursive process through which an intersubjective understanding is constructed within a political community to treat something as an existential threat to a valued referent object, and to enable a call for urgent and exceptional measures to deal with the threat.’ (Buzan and Wæver 2003:491)

Buzan and Wæver define a security issue as is ‘posited (by a securitising actor) as a threat to the survival of some referent object (nation, state, the liberal international economic order, rain forests), which is claimed to have a right to survive. (Buzan and Wæver 2003:71) Consequently, the securitising actor claims its right to use extraordinary means for reasons of security. Moreover, the threat can be used to legitimate political action. Positing an issue as an existential threat requires a move from normal politics to emergency politics.

Securitisation theory defines security as a *speech act*, where ‘security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance itself is the act...By uttering ‘security’, a state representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it.’ (Wæver 1995:55) That is to say, the mere invocation of

something using the word 'security' declares its threatening nature, 'invokes the image of what would happen if security did not work.' (Wæver 1995:61)

Stemming from the discussions about the subjectivity of the definition of 'terrorism', here it is argued that the process of labelling an organisation or a group as a 'terrorist organisation' constitutes an act of securitisation. If the securitising actor can successfully attach the label 'terrorist organisation' to a group, and persuade others to adopt this point of view and use all possible means to stop the 'terrorist group', the acts of the particular group would be successfully securitised. Within this context, this section provides a historical account of the securitisation process through which the State of Israel has attached the label 'terrorist organisation' to Palestinian liberation/resistance movements.

As in the case of Israel – Palestine, the conflicting securitisation processes produce different versions of the same reality. For the state, the group fighting for its independence and sovereignty is called a '*terrorist organisation*' and the attacks organised by this group are securitised as '*terrorist attacks*'. On the other hand for the group which is fighting for its rights or independence it is called a '*liberation movement*' or '*resistance*'. In spite of its charity work inside occupied territories as well as its militant activities, within the context of the previously reviewed definitions of 'terrorism' the acts of Hamas<sup>1</sup> have been defined as terrorist acts and the movement have been included in the lists of terrorist organisations by the US, the EU and most of the Western countries as well as the State of Israel.



Security utterances operate as instructions for the construction and interpretation of a security threat. It is the securitising actor who conveys a self-referential practice using discourses of existential threats. Given this internalist view of the context, Balzacq suggests that in order to win an audience security statements must be related to an external reality. That is to say, the success of securitisation rests on whether the historical conjuncture renders the audience more sensitive to its vulnerability. (2005:182) In the Israeli Palestinian case the establishment of the State of Israel and its occupation of the Palestinian territories after the 1967 war had triggered the events leading to the securitisation process. In particular Yasser Arafat, Chairman and the charismatic leader of the PLO, underlined the threat posed by the Zionist State of Israel to the existence of the Palestinian Arabs in their homeland. The Israeli occupation was securitised as a threat to the Palestinian people's survival. Consequently, the PLO leaders called for armed struggle against Israel: 'Our road is the road of death and sacrifice to win back our homeland. If we cannot do it, our children will, and if they cannot do it, their children will. ... To create and maintain an atmosphere of strain and anxiety that will force the Zionists to realise that it is impossible for them to live in Israel.' (Arafat as quoted by Rubin and Rubin, 2003:41-45) The goals of the Palestinian attacks were to weaken the State of Israel and deligitimise the State in the eyes of Jewish people and the international society.

Considering the importance of interactions between audience and political agent, and in spite of agent's perceptions of threat, the success of securitisation depends on 'the securitising actor's ability to identify with the audience's feelings,

needs and interest.’ (Balzacq 2005:184) In order to persuade the public the speaker has to play with his/her language in accordance to the audience’s experience. Thus, thanks to identification with these security statements some sort of cognitive and behavioural change can occur amongst the audience. In this sense Arafat’s early speeches were relatively successful in terms of mobilising the audience –Palestinian people around their cause. Consequently, between 1969 and 1985, outside the Occupied Territories a number of attacks against Israelis and Jews were committed by different Palestinian groups including Black September’s attack at the 1972 Olympics in Munich. Moreover in the West Bank and Gaza a resistance movement had raised. Both the terrorist attacks outside Israel and the resistance in Territories paved the way for the ‘security trauma’ in Israel. Palestinian terrorism was seen as the incarnation of the threat to the Jewish State. Palestinian movements’ anti-Israeli discourses and attacks on Israeli citizens and institutions were securitised by Israeli governments. Thus, the Israeli government claimed its right to use extraordinary means to guarantee the security and the survival of the Jewish people in Israel as a last resort:

The subject of safeguarding against *Arab terrorists'* plans to attack Israeli installations, missions or Israelis, in Israel and abroad, has been our concern since the establishment of the State. (Meir, 1972 *emphasis added*)

*Our war against the Arab terrorists is a vital mission* demanding devotion and concentration. From its very nature, it cannot be limited to defensive means, to safeguarding and self-defence, but must be active in all that has to do with the

detection of *murderers*, of their bases, their actions and operations, to foil their designs and, in particular, to stamp out the *terrorist organisations*. (Meir 1972 *emphasis added*)

We have *no choice but to strike* at the terrorist organisations wherever we can reach them. That is our *obligation* to ourselves and to peace. We shall fulfil that obligation undauntedly. (Meir 1972 *emphasis added*)

As far as the Golda Meir's statements following the attacks at the Munich Olympics, the statements were full of negative connotations vis-à-vis Arabs as terrorists, murderers etc. and the war on Arab terrorism was defined as vital for survival.

According to securitisation theory, the success of the securitising actor is based on the distribution of capabilities and powers within the system. The more power a securitising actor has the more likely this actor will succeed in attempted securitisation and gain the consent of audience. This point brings to the fore the issue of hegemony, which was characterised by Antonio Gramsci as the 'spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group...' (Gramsci as quoted by Femia 1981:42) In the Israeli Palestinian context, Israel with the support of the US, then one of the two superpowers in the international system, had securitised Palestinian attacks on Israeli and Jewish civilians as an existential threat to the Israeli state and society. During this period international

community turned against Palestinians and labelled them as terrorists due to Israeli securitising actors' power to persuade others.

On the other hand, in order to improve the Palestinian image, which had become identified with terrorists the PLO changed its discourse. In his address to the UN General Assembly on November 1974 Arafat defended the rightness of the Palestinian acts and underlined the difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist:

Those who call us terrorists wish to prevent world public opinion from discovering the truth about us and from seeing the justice on our faces. They seek to bide the terrorism and tyranny of their acts, and our own posture of self-defence. (Arafat 1974)

The difference between the revolutionary and the terrorist lies in the reason for which each fights. For whoever stands by a just cause and fights for the freedom and liberation of his land from the invaders, the settlers and the colonialists, cannot possibly be called terrorist. (Arafat 1974)

In his speech Arafat pointed out that Palestinian movement was a liberation movement and the rightness of their cause. This speech is also a very important one in terms underlining the previously mentioned controversy in the definition of terrorism. While Israeli leadership securitised the Palestinians as 'terrorists', Arafat used the term revolutionaries and accused the Israeli government of using the issue of terrorism as a cover up their violent acts against Palestinians.

At the end of the 1980s, after twenty years of occupation, Palestinian frustration and disillusionment reached boiling point. By 1987 an indigenous Palestinian struggle was started. This uprising was developed as a grassroots movement independent of the PLO leaders abroad. Influenced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, who succeed in their struggle against colonialist/imperialist powers, non-violent resistance became the main tactic of the Intifada. It was believed that removing the irrational fear of 'Arab violence', which cements Israeli society together contributes to the disintegration of hostile Israeli elements and helps to isolate Israel politically and morally. (Awad, 1984:25)

During the first year of the Intifada, Hamas, which was formerly one of the armed wings of the religious revivalist Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) in Gaza, was formed to allow the participation of the brotherhood. In August 1988 Hamas published its covenant and rejected the legitimacy of the PLO as sole leader of the Palestinian people. The covenant returned Hamas to its previous uncompromising position that Palestinians should aim for the destruction of Zionism: 'Our struggle against the Jews is very great and very serious. It needs all sincere efforts. It is a step that inevitably should be followed by other steps. Until the enemy is vanquished and Allah's victory is realised.' (The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement, 1988) Thorough the Covenant Hamas clearly pointed out the threats posed by the Zionist State of Israel to Palestinian society and their right to establish their own state. Hamas injected a religious element into the Palestinian security discourse. Besides the nationalistic dimension

Hamas underlined the religious dimension of their fight against Israel and called for *Jihad* against Zionists.

The revival of the peace process caused the intensification of the activities of Hamas, which was opposed to the recognition of Israel. Hamas had grown in popularity among the West Bankers at the expense of Arafat's PLO and has become the dominant force in denouncing Israeli occupation and enhancing welfare and health services for the Palestinian population.

In spite of the intensive Hamas attacks and demonstrations against Israelis, the Oslo Accord was signed in 13 September 1993. In his letter to Yitzhak Rabin, Arafat reaffirmed the PLO's recognition of 'the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security'. Moreover, as was stated in the same letter 'the PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence and will assume responsibility over all PLO elements and personnel in order to assure their compliance, prevent violations and discipline violators.' (Arafat, 1993)

The PLO's reconciliatory turn was challenged by Hamas together with other Islamic militant groups operating in Palestinian territories restarted attacks against Israeli civilians. The bombings inside Israel were widely interpreted as a proof of the untrustworthiness of the Palestinian people and the incapability of the Palestinian leadership to stop the terrorist activities of militant groups. Since then, the Palestinian National Authority has been unable to prevent terrorist attacks against Israel and this has been one of the justifications for delaying the withdrawal from the occupied territories.

The Palestinian attacks triggered the revival of the process of securitising Palestinian terror by the Israeli leadership. Binyamin Netanyahu, then Prime Minister, insisted that peace should not be sought at the expense of security and suggested that what Israel needed was less peace and more security. (Guyatt, 1998:39) The Likud government under Netanyahu brought the issue of terrorist attacks to the top of the security agenda and repeated that 'security' was the precondition for 'peace'. Thus, the terrorist attacks were securitised to justify the battle against terror.

In the last years, the security situation has deteriorated throughout the country and its borders. To stop this deterioration we will have to wage a continuous *battle against terror*. The participants in terror should know that they will encounter a *harsh response*. I refer not only to the terrorists themselves but also to their patrons and those who sent them, to their operators and collaborators. (Netanyahu, 1996 *emphasis added*)

With Netanyahu 'the war against (Palestinian) terror' took back its place in Israeli security discourse.

Just after the failure of the Oslo Accord, the second Intifada, the al-Aqsa Intifada, started. This second Intifada, which was identified with bloody suicide bomber attacks, were followed by aggressive Israeli responses throughout 2001 and 2002. During the second Intifada, Hamas became active both politically and militarily. It joined with the Fatah and Al-Aqsa brigades in several suicide attacks,

and also began plotting to usurp the leadership of the Palestine Authority from the PLO.

Within the context of the securitisation theory it is argued that compared to states and governments individuals or small groups can seldom establish wider security legitimacy in their own right. They may speak about security to and of themselves, but few will listen. (Buzan et al. 1998:27) Following the terrorist attacks and in order to destroy the terrorist networks, strict curfews were enforced in Palestinian areas and shops were demolished by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). Palestinians consider Israeli military curfews and property destructions as collective punishment against innocent Palestinians. (BBC News, 21 January 2003) However, they were unable to label Israeli attacks as '*state terrorism*'.

As a result of the continuous attacks of the IDF, Hamas's popularity increased among Palestinians. In towns and refugee camps besieged by the Israeli army, Hamas has organised clinics and schools that serve Palestinians who feel entirely let down by the corrupt and inefficient Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Many Palestinians cheered the wave of Hamas suicide attacks and they were persuaded that 'martyrdom' operations were the best way to avenge their own losses and counter Israel's settlement building in the West Bank. On the other hand, Hamas was blacklisted as a terrorist group by the United States and eventually by the EU as well. As argued by Gramsci, consent in a hegemonic situation takes the form of active commitment based on a view that the superior position of the ruling group is legitimate. (Femia, 1981:42) In Israeli securitisation



of ' Hamas' case Israeli government was very successful in terms of directing the international community's perception and conceptualisation of Hamas as terrorist organisation.

The Israeli government gave up hope for a negotiated settlement to the conflict and pursued a unilateral policy of physically separating Israel from Palestinian communities by beginning the construction of the separation wall. Israel claims that such a barrier is necessary to prevent Palestinian attackers from entering Israeli cities. Israeli security measures, so called defensive actions to prevent Palestinian attacks, have been seen by Palestinians as draconian measures. Palestinians have defined Gaza as '*a single huge prison*' and the West Bank as being divided into dozens of wards. On the other hand, Israel claims that these measures are merely 'defensive actions' aimed at preventing Palestinian 'terror'.

In summary, the capacity to mobilise security expectations depends on the position, status, and authority of the would-be securitiser. As securitisation can be *pushed* by powerful securitising actors, who use security to pursue their own ends. The success of a securitisation is dependent on power and capabilities of the securitising actor as was illustrated in Israeli Palestinian context. Throughout their struggle with Israel, the Palestinian militant groups' discourses have evolved. Yasser Arafat's 'liberation' discourse has been replaced by Hamas' 'resistance' discourse. Almost the only thing that remained unchanged during all this period was Israel's perception of the Palestinian movement. Both Arafat's liberation movement and Hamas and Islamic Jihad's resistance movement were securitised and labelled as 'terrorism' by the Israeli political and military elite,

which would create gridlock after the election of a Hamas-led government in Palestine.

### **Hegemonic securitisations and the legitimacy of the Hamas Government**

In the period after the demise of Yasser Arafat and the election of Mahmoud Abbas (also known as Abu Mazen), as Chairman of the Palestinian Authority, the Israeli security discourse has changed direction. As a result of the rise of Hamas as a political actor in Palestinian territories, the Israeli government's worries about the state security were increased. Hamas' anti-Zionist and anti-Israeli discourse has paved the way for the Israeli securitisation of 'the rise of Hamas' and 'terror'. During the period after the demise of Yasser Arafat Israeli discourse has transformed from securitising 'Palestinian terror' in general to securitising 'Hamas terror' in particular as an existential threat to both Israeli state and society. Hence first Hamas as a 'terrorist organisation' and later Hamas as 'Palestinian government' were identified as security threats.

Overall, Israeli leadership had a clear interest in the empowerment of a Palestinian leadership committed to the end of violence and the resumption of peace negotiations. However, Hamas had a separate agenda and the Hamas leadership wanted to prevent the Palestinian Authority from adopting positions that they viewed as too compromising. They insisted on reserving the option of armed struggle since they saw Israel's disengagement plan as the culmination of their achievements, which was one of the major worries of the Israeli elite. Hence, the withdrawal was linked with a new wave of Palestinian terror by the

opponents of the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Intifada, which identified with terror and blood in the eyes of Israeli society, has become one of the most popular themes of opponents' security discourse. The possibility of a third Intifada following the disengagement would definitely pose an existential threat for Israeli society.

The Palestinians will interpret the act of disengagement as a victory. They will say that Sharon capitulated... Therefore, they will go back to terrorism. There will be another round. We will bury hundreds of people in a third Intifada.' (Interview with Barak, Haaretz Magazine, 20 May 2005)

The principal problem with the withdrawal ... is that it may set in Palestinian minds the belief that there is a pattern of Israeli behaviour: We received terror in Lebanon we withdrew. We received terror in Gaza, withdrew.' (Interview with Netanyahu, The Jerusalem Post, 11 May 2005)

Throughout this period, the importance of fighting terror has constituted the main theme of the Israeli security discourse. The Israeli political elite wanted the Palestinian Authority to combat the armed groups and eradicate the infrastructure of terrorism in Palestinian territory. This time the task of fighting with terror is assigned to the Palestinian Authority by the Israeli leadership. It was underlined that where the Palestinian Authority failed to do so the IDF would take action. Within this context, in spite of his repeated insistence of his dedication to preventing lawlessness in Palestinian territory, on every possible occasion the

Israeli political and military elite has accused Abbas of not being able to impose the '*one authority one weapon*' rule in Palestine.

On the other hand, Hamas' calls to escalate their resistance to the Israeli occupation until its full departure from all Palestinian lands simply reaffirmed the Israeli anxieties. Through the statements issued in September 2005, Hamas warned of the evil Israeli schemes meant to spark off internal conflicts in the Palestinian lands with the goal of undermining national unity (Palestine-info, 17 September 2005).

Moreover, Israel considered the issue of Hamas' participation in elections as a security threat to Israel since Hamas had not recognised the State of Israel and continued to threaten Israel. Given Hamas' decision to participate in the parliamentary elections in Palestine, the Israeli political and security elite constantly expressed the incompatibility of engaging in violence with participating in local elections, in reference to Hamas. (Jang News, 21 September 2005) Israeli officials were frustrated with the possibility of international recognition of Hamas if it was elected. In order to show the dangers of this possibility, the Israeli political elite and their officials constantly issued reminders of Hamas' founding charter, which contains statements calling for the destruction of the State of Israel. Moreover, the actions of Hamas were shown as evidence of their commitment to the destruction of the Israeli state. Given the fears of the European Union removing Hamas from its terror list, the Israeli government warned international society that it would harm the global war on terrorism, undermine Palestinian Authority Chairman Abbas and set the diplomatic process

back. During this period Israel worked hard to persuade international community to support its position against the Hamas participation in democratic process in Palestinian territories. Israeli elite successfully used the position of Hamas as 'terrorist organisation' and the threats it can pose in case of its election as government. Not just the threats against Israel and/or peace process but also the threats against the global war on terrorism were effectively underlined. Thanks to its hegemonic position of the Israeli state compared to Hamas, Israel has gained consent and active commitment of international community against Hamas.

In spite of Israel's opposition, on 27 January 2006 Hamas was declared as the winner of the elections. The election results put Hamas, considered to be a terrorist group by Israel, the United States and the European Union, in charge of the Palestinian political future, and put at least a temporary halt to efforts to restart peace talks. In this period a revival of securitisation processes at governmental level has occurred. Even though Hamas has continually securitised the relationship with Israel as 'occupation' since its foundation in 1988, with the electoral win their discourse has become 'official'. On the other hand, for Israeli political and military elite having Hamas as the legitimate representative of Palestinian Authority has meant the realisation of a worst nightmare. A Palestine governed by a 'terrorist organisation', which is determined to destroy the State of Israel has become one of the themes of Israeli security discourse. The Hamas government has been securitised and the deligitimisation of the Hamas-led government has become one of the priorities of the Israeli government.

... this [ Hamas ] government does not fulfil the minimal preconditions outlined by the international community, which would enable it to become a possible partner for negotiations. As long as the Hamas government fails to recognise the State of Israel...and act to terminate violence and eradicate terrorism, including attacks on our southern communities, we cannot conduct dialogue with it'. (Olmert, 2006a)

The US has also initiated a campaign against the Hamas government. In the press conference held just after the election results, President Bush reiterated that he will not work with Hamas as a 'partner of peace' until it renounces its goal of destroying Israel and disarms its militias (Washington Post, 26 January 2005).

After the election, Israel and the US have lead the imposition of international sanctions on Hamas government, monthly transfers of tax revenues and international aid and funds, which were allocated to the Palestinian Authority, were suspended and all diplomatic communication with Palestinian government was cut. Moreover, President George W. Bush signed a law forbidding direct aid to the Hamas Authority until it accepts Israel. *The Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act* outlawed aid to Hamas, denied visas to Hamas officials. It demanded that Hamas acknowledge Israel's right to exist, give up terrorism against Israel and adhere to existing agreements with Israel, which was unacceptable to Hamas.

The continuous missile attacks on Israeli settlements scattered around the Gaza Strip and military positions launched by both Hamas militants accompanied with the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier was triggered the Israeli reaction. The securitisation of '*Hamas terror*' resulted in a military operation in Gaza. The

Hamas deal to exchange the kidnapped soldiers in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners was not accepted by the Israeli government. Rather, it caused rage and frustration on the Israeli side.

When missiles are launched at our residents and cities, our answer will be war with all the strength, determination, valour, sacrifice and dedication, which characterise this nation. On the Palestinian front, we will conduct a relentless battle until terror ceases, Gilad Shalit is returned home safely and the shooting of Qassam missiles stops. (Olmert 2006b)

As was eloquently pointed out by the Israeli Prime Minister the terrorist attacks reached a boiling point. In order to gain public support for the rightness of a military operation in Gaza against Hamas militants, Olmert chose wordings to influence sentiments of Israeli society.

Citizens of Israel,

There are moments in the life of a nation, when it is compelled to look directly into the face of reality and say: no more!

And I say to everyone: no more! Israel will not be held hostage – not by terror gangs or by a terrorist authority or by any sovereign state. (Olmert 2006b)

Olmert concluded his speech with underlining the inevitability to defend Israeli citizens and the measures they have to take to destroy terrorist infrastructures.

We will search every compound, target every terrorist who assists in attacking the citizens of Israel, and destroy every terrorist infrastructure, everywhere. We will persist until Hizballah and Hamas comply with those basic and decent things required of them by every civilised person. Israel will not agree to live in the shadow of missiles or rockets aimed at its residents. (Olmert 2006b)

On November 8, an IDF artillery shell intended to disrupt the launching of Qassam rockets landed in a residential area in Beit Hanoun and killed 23 Palestinians. The military operation in Gaza was an affirmation of the determination of Israel regarding terror issue.

In sum, after the Palestinian election, Israel and the US have tried hard to put pressure on Hamas. The hegemonic powers' undermining of the democratically elected Hamas government caused internal tensions and created a chasm between the internally legitimate government and the externally recognised Presidency. The recent clashes between the two groups have paved the way for the worrying possibility of a civil war. Moreover, through blocking international finance and aid to the Palestinian Government and isolating it diplomatically, the hegemonic powers have tried to show Hamas that they are trapped. Ultimately, this strategy succeeds in persuading Hamas at least to join the sought-after unity government with Abbas.

## **Conclusion**

This article has discussed the process of securitisation of 'Palestinian Terrorism' by Israeli securitising actors with US support and their efforts to



deligitimise the democratically elected Hamas government. Since the late 1960s the Palestinians' have decided to use violence as a means to resist the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. This so-called liberation (later resistance) movement was effectively securitised by successive Israeli governments and the military elite as 'terrorism'. Particularly after the US-led global war on terrorism, the Israeli political and military elite has used this to justify their positions *vis-à-vis* Palestinian militant groups.

The formation of a Hamas-led government in Palestine has constituted a dilemma for the hegemonic powers: a democratically elected legitimate government, which is on the major international powers' lists of terrorist organisations. In order to deal with this dilemma, the hegemonic powers persuaded the international community to employ sanctions. It is assumed that thorough economic and diplomatic isolation would force Hamas to change its rhetoric about destroying the State of Israel. However, the results of this policy still remain to be seen.

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<sup>1</sup> HAMAS is the short version of *Harakat al-Muqawima al-Islamiyya* (in English 'the Islamic Resistance Movement')

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