

## **A HAMAS Q&A Primer**

by Mark Durie

### **PART 1 - WHAT IS HAMAS?**

#### **What is Hamas?**

Hamas is a 1980's offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Founded in 1988, Hamas' name is an acronym for "Islamic Resistance Movement" in Arabic. The word *hamas* also means 'zeal', 'enthusiasm' or 'fanaticism' in Arabic.

Hamas is one of two parties in power among the Palestinians. The other is Fatah, whose name is also an acronym, with the meaning 'conquest'.

There are two Palestinian territories: Hamas rules in Gaza, while Fatah rules in the West Bank. Hamas took power in Gaza in 2006 after winning a democratic election. A conflict between the two broke out, in which hundreds were killed.

Both Fatah and Hamas are radical Islamist movements. In the past they have fought each other, but they have also made attempts at rapprochement. Fatah praised Hamas for the October 7 attacks and has called upon all Palestinians to rise up against Israel.

#### **What is the Muslim Brotherhood?**

This is an Islamist renewal movement that was founded in Egypt in 1928. Its ultimate goal is to establish a caliphate, an overarching state ruled by sharia law. The Muslim Brotherhood has a network of supporters in many countries, including the United States and Europe.

The Brotherhood has had many militant offshoots.

The Brotherhood, like many other Islamic revival movements, arose in opposition to the West. These movements all believe that the manifest decline of the Muslim world during centuries of the West's rise is due to poor observance of God's laws by Muslims. Once Muslims obey Islam faithfully, by applying sharia law strictly, including pursuing jihad against non-Muslims, Muslims will become successful and dominant the world once again. This is their utopian goal.

Muslim countries have been experiencing many social, economic and political problems and this has played into the Brotherhood's hands. The Brotherhood's response to general socio-economic failure in these nations has been, "Islam is the solution". It has blamed governments in Arab countries which do not impose strict sharia.

#### **What does "Islamist" mean?**

Islamist is a term used for a form of Islam which is dedicated to achieving political dominance for the religion. An Islamist movement aims to establish an Islamic state in which the sharia is the law of the land. This term can be applied to many Islamic revival

movements. It is often used as a way to avoid calling radical movements ‘Islamic’, to tarring all Muslims with the same brush of radicalism.

### **What is Islam?**

Islam is a religion which offers a total way of life, regulating both individuals and nations, which is based on the teaching and example of Muhammad, an Arab who lived 1400 years ago in Arabia. The sharia is a system of law and principles based on Muhammad and his book, the Qur’an, which he claimed to be a direct revelation from God..

When Western people speak of ‘religion’, they sometimes think of something individual, personal, interior, and spiritual. Islam can be like that for people, but in its overall worldview it is much more than that. It can be political and Muslims often seek to occupy and dominate the public square for their religion. That is why so many political parties in Islamic countries project a religious identity. Some Western people say Islam is not a religion at all, but a political system. I believe that is a mistake based on an understanding of religion which is very Western, and narrow. Islam is both a religion and a political system. Islamic tradition does not recognise the difference between religion and politics; between the secular and the spiritual; or between civilian and military. It is all for Islam.

### **What is Hamas’ goal?**

The goals of Hamas are laid out in a document known as the [Hamas Charter](#), which was adopted in August 1988. Hamas’ fundamental goal is to implement Islam fully and strictly. The Charter states about Hamas, that “Allah is its target, the Prophet is its example, and the Qur’an is its constitution. Jihad is its path and death for the sake of Allah is the loftiest of its wishes.” The Charter makes clear that a core goal of Hamas is the destruction of Israel. It cites the words of the founder of the Brotherhood, Hassan Al-Banna: “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it.”

The mission to destroy Israel is conceived of as a sacred calling. Thus the Charter is full of quranic verses referring to warfare against disbelievers in Islam. However, destroying Israel is but a means to achieving the overarching goal of the full implementation of Islam, which is impossible as long as non-Muslims rule in Muslim lands.

This preferred genocidal future has been repeatedly praised in the sermons of Hamas preachers. For example on April 7, 2023, Sheikh Hamad Al-Regeb said the Jews will only be defeated by weapons and terror, and then he prayed three times, “Oh Allah, enable us to get to the necks of the Jews” (i.e. to cut their throats or behead them).

### **Would Hamas support a two state solutions?**

For reasons given above, Hamas is completely opposed to a two-state solution. Every attack on Israel is designed to prevent this happening. The Hamas Covenant states that “so-called peaceful solutions and international conferences are in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement. ... There is no solution for the Palestinian question except through Jihad.” For Hamas, it is military victory or nothing.

## **PART 2 - WHY DOES HAMAS THINK IT CAN WIN?**

### **Why is the destruction of Israel necessary in Hamas' understanding of Islam?**

The reasons for this are religious. The Hamas Charter asserts that once land has been conquered and occupied by Islam, it belongs eternally as a *waqf* ('perpetual trust') for Muslims. For this reason, Palestine, the Charter says, is "consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day". As a Hamas spokesman recently stated, "It's all ours". That same applies, according to the Charter, "for any land Muslims have conquered by force." (By this logic, Spain and India belong to Muslims too.) The Charter explains further that when land once conquered by Muslims is occupied by non-Muslims, it is a duty incumbent on all individual Muslims to fight to liberate that land.

The creation of the state of Israel was a violation of this principle. Thus Israel is, from Hamas' perspective, an illegitimate state which every Muslim is obliged to fight against.

This teaching about once-conquered land is not unique to Hamas. It is derived from mainstream schools of Islamic law, and has been invoked in many jihad campaigns, including the Afghan jihad against the Soviets and several struggles by Muslims against Western colonization.

### **Hamas is a relatively small entity, and is taking on a highly trained, much larger, and well-equipped Israeli defense force. Its enemy has jets and even nuclear weapons. Why does Hamas think it can win?**

There are several reasons:

- Hamas is inspired by the past victories of Muslims against strong opposing forces. With great pride, the Hamas Charter several times mentions the defeat of the Crusaders as the hands of Saladin. The logic is: "we have done it before; we will do it again".
- Hamas regards victory as a promise of Allah. The Charter states, "The Islamic Resistance Movement aspires to the realization of Allah's promise," quoting numerous quranic verses which speak of this victory. The belief is that if Muslims are only faithful enough in observing Islam, Allah will grant them the victory: those who are pure in heart and firm in action will be successful in war. The Qur'an states that even a small Muslim force will overcome a much larger non-Muslim force: "However often, by the will of Allah, has a small force defeated a big one? Allah is with those who persevere." (Sura 2:29)
- Hamas believes the Qur'an's teaching that terror is an effective way to make your enemy give up. As the Qur'an says, "Strike terror into your enemies." (Sura 8:60).
- Hamas does not stand alone. It is emboldened by international support for its cause from key countries, which provide it with funding and help. It is also encouraged by many non-Muslims in Western nations who sympathize with its cause.

- Hamas sees this struggle as one that is incumbent on all Muslims, everywhere. It intends to awaken two billion Muslims to join in the struggle. By their example, Hamas wants to stir up Muslims everywhere to take up arms against the Jews. They believe their massacre will inspire Muslims about what they can achieve. They want to light a fuse that will lead to a victorious explosion of violence. For this reason, simultaneous with the recent massacre, Hamas issued calls to the Muslims of the world to rise up. The many demonstrations all over the world in support of the Hamas “resistance” were a direct response to Hamas’ global call to action.
- There is teaching in the Qur’an that Jews are war-mongering aggressors by nature. (Sura 5:64) This means it is inevitable that they will go to war against Muslims. From this perspective, peace is not an option for Palestinians: only a Palestinian victory can solve the problem of Jewish aggression.
- At the same time, there is another teaching in the Qur’an that when push comes to shove, Jews will not fight. They are claimed to be too ‘greedy for life’, while Muslims love death (Surah 2:94-96, 62:6). This is why the Hamas military commander, Mohammad Deif, recently spoke of the need to make Israelis understand that their “time is up”. Inspired by the Qur’an, radical Islamic groups have often declared that their victory is imminent.
- Islamic teachings about jihad (war to advance or defend Islam) explain that whether a Muslim soldier kills or is killed, he wins both ways. Fighting infidels is a win-win proposition. If he is killed he attains paradise as a martyr; if he defeats his enemies, he gets to rule over them. This makes fighting an attractive option, even when the odds of victory seem slim.

**What did Hamas hope to achieve by the massacre of October 7, and why did many of the pro-Palestinian protestors consider the attacks to be successful and a source of pride?**

The October 7 attacks were successful from several perspectives:

- They were designed to show that the Israelis are not untouchable or invincible: they can be outsmarted and defeated.
- They put a spanner in the works of the Abrahamic Accords, which were threatening to achieve a rapprochement between Israel and some Arab states.
- They are going to set off a fierce response from Israel, with many Palestinian casualties, which Hamas hopes will turn Islamic states against Israel, activating them to come to the aid of Palestinians.
- There were also emotional benefits, restoring Muslim pride. In this vein, the head of Al-Azhar University in Egypt declared, “The Azhar proudly salutes the Palestinian people who have just restored our confidence, vitalized our souls and breathed life into us after we had thought it was gone forever.” Islam orients its followers to seek superiority and dominance. For example, the Qur’an declares that Muslims are the best people. In an Islamic honor-shame culture, these attacks restored honor to Muslims by

portraying Muslims as triumphant over Jews. Israel is a wealthy, technologically advanced and successful nation surrounding by states which are struggling in many ways. This is a source of shame for some Muslims. Likewise an Australian Muslim, Imam Ibrahim Dadoun was shouting with joy as he preached on the street in Sydney after the massacre, his phrases punctuated by roars of 'Allahu Akbar' from the enthusiastic crowd: "I'm smiling and I'm happy. I'm elated. It's a day of courage. It's a day of happiness. It's a day of pride. It's a day of victory! This is the day we've been waiting for!" The idea that victorious violence brings emotional release is itself Islamic. Sura 9:14 says to Muslims, "Fight them! Allah will punish them by your hands, and disgrace them, and help you against them, and heal the hearts of a people who believe, and take away rage from their hearts." This verse teaches that violence by believers against non-believers is the hand of God against them, and it will "heal" the hearts of Muslims, by restoring their pride.

Despite all this, a risk to Hamas is that they have provided compelling evidence through the October 7 massacre that a two-state solution is impossible. Some Palestinian leaders have been exploiting hopes for a two-state solution, all the while telling their own people to accept only a complete destruction of Israel, "from the river to the sea." Hamas pursues a genocidal campaign, while blaming Israel for prolonging the conflict. This way Hamas can have its cake and eat it too: Israel is blamed for the failure of a two-state solution, while Hamas plans for genocide. If it is accepted that the Palestinians will never agree to a two state solution, this potentially frees Israel up to fight for its survival, instead of having to negotiate for an impossible two state solution, negotiations which have in the past only result in greater insecurity for Israeli citizens.

## **PART 3 – WHO SUPPORTS HAMAS?**

**Many protestors were upset that government leaders have been speaking of Israelis killed by Hamas as victims. What is that about? Why is victimhood such a touchy issue for some Muslims?**

Many Muslims in the West have complained about the many expressions of sympathy for Israelis after the October 7 massacre. Their complaint is that equal sympathy was not expressed for the Palestinians.

It is a deeply embedded psychological characteristic of an Islamic worldview that Muslim victimhood trumps non-Muslim victimhood. It can be offensive, and even hurtful, to suggest otherwise. For example, in 2005 Wafa Sultan was debating Professor Ahmad bin Muhammad, Algerian Professor of Religious Politics, on Al-Jazeera TV when she pointed out that some people have suffered at the hands of Muslims. Ahmad bin Muhammad began to shout, “We are the victims! ... There are millions of innocent people among us [Muslims], while the innocent among you [non-Muslims] ... number only dozens, hundreds, or thousands, at the most.”

This view of the greater victimhood of Muslims is partly a result of the way the Qur’an dehumanizes non-Muslims, for example by the use the derogatory term kafir ‘disbeliever’.

The greater victimhood of Muslims is also embedded in Islam’s origin story. It was the victimhood of Muslims in Mecca which led to the migration to Medina and the shift to violence through establishing the nascent Islamic state. Furthermore, the Qur’an twice declares that persecution (or seduction) is worse than slaughter (Surah 2:191, 217). The implication that shedding non-Muslims blood is not as bad as mistreating Muslims serves to justify violence against non-Muslims.

### **Which countries support Hamas?**

The three countries that provide the most direct support for Hamas, as an official policy of the state, are Iran, Turkey and Qatar. Key Hamas leaders live in Qatar. Qatar also supports the Muslim Brotherhood, as does Turkey.

In addition, there are Muslims all over the world who support Hamas financially through donations which are a form of religious tax. Every Muslim is supposed give away a proportion of their wealth every year, known as the *zakat* tax. Although *zakat* is sometimes described as ‘charity’, helping the needy is only one of its legitimate uses. Another is jihad. By the rules of Islam, Hamas would be seen by many as a legitimate recipient of *zakat* funds.

### **Do other Middle Eastern nations support Hamas?**

Hamas is a wing of the Muslim Brotherhood, and one of the Brotherhood’s goals is to overthrow regimes which it considers to be standing in the way of a full Islamic system. This potentially includes governments in all Islamic states across the Middle East. This ideology makes the Brotherhood a threat to many nations, including the Saudis, who, together with

Egypt, Syria, Bahrain and the Emirates, have banned the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization.

However, many Muslims in these nations are also sympathetic to the Palestinian cause, and would be happy to see Israel destroyed. Because of this sympathy, even though the Saudis regard Hamas as an enemy, a Israeli military campaign to eradicate Hamas in Gaza will make it very difficult for the Saudis to continue on a Abraham Accords path of rapprochement with Israel.

### **Why do some Muslims in our nation support Hamas? And what does it mean for our future?**

Of the Muslims who have come out to protest in support of Hamas, many will be sympathetic to the religious motivations described above. They will reject the legitimacy of Israel on religious grounds and want to see it destroyed. The many demonstrations across Western nations have shown that there are at least some Muslims within these nations who are pleased about the attacks of October 7. They were happy to see Israelis killed. This implies that the religious ideology of Hamas is entrenched among some Muslims across Western nations. However, this is not new information. For decades now, security agencies across the West have been keeping a watchful eye on citizens who believe in and advocate for Islamist ideology.

### **Hamas must have known that Israel would respond with airstrikes against Gaza. Why bring such a calamity against their own people?**

There are and will be many Muslim casualties resulting from the attacks on October 7.

Around 1,500 jihadis were killed in Israel over the ensuing days. There will also be casualties caused by the bombardment of Gaza, and even more Gazan casualties when Israeli forces move back in to reoccupy Gaza.

All in all, thousands of Gazans will die as a result of Hamas' attack. Hamas knew this. Indeed they have counted on it. They believe that every Muslim killed in the war against Israel is a martyr who will attain paradise, which is something that, in their view, every Muslim should aspire to. From Hamas' perspective, Muslims are fortunate to die in this way.

Hamas counts on Gazan casualties to increase sympathy for their cause. They want to drive a wedge between Israelis and Muslims everywhere, and the best, proven way to do this is by causing many Muslim casualties at the hands of the Israelis.

## **PART 4 - WHO ARE THE PALESTINIANS?**

### **What is the meaning and significance of the name ‘Palestine’? And who are the ‘Palestinians’?**

The meaning of “Palestine” is complicated, and it has changed over the years.

The word comes originally from the name of the Philistines of the Old Testament and ancient inscriptions. The Philistines were a people possibly related to the Greeks, and sometimes referred to as ‘Sea Peoples’. They ruled in the area of present-day Gaza. After being defeated by the Assyrians, like so many other ancient peoples, the Philistines eventually lost their distinct ethnic identity sometime after being defeated by the Assyrians, and they disappeared from the pages of history.

The Romans revived the name “Palestine” to replace “Judea” after putting down the Jewish Bar Kokhbar revolt in 132-136 CE. By the time of the Islamic conquests in the 7th century, the region was inhabited by Greeks, Aramaic speakers, settled Arabs and Bedouin Arabs. The original ‘homeland’ of the Arabs was the region under Nabataean rule, centred in Petra, now the southernmost parts of Israel and Jordan. We can know this from the evidence of inscriptions.

After Islamic conquest and the occupation of the Levant by Muslim Arabs, a process of Arabization replaced Greek and Arabic in the Levant, for, for example, Greek and Aramaic speaking Christians switched over to Arabic.

Over the centuries, people from other regions, including Turks, Circassians, Chechens and Armenians moved into Palestine. When the local economy was developing in the first half of the twentieth century, due to the activities of Zionist settlers, non-Jewish economic migrants were also being attracted to the region.

Towards the end of the 19th century a pan-Arabic movement developed, in which Christians and Muslims came together, a process driven by Arabic-speaking Christians who had been traumatized by multiple genocidal attacks on them by Muslims in the region. By this process, peoples whose ancestors had been Greeks or Syrians, came to see themselves as Arabs. Arabic speaking Jews were not included in this new identity.

There is a Muslim tradition that the first kiblah or direction of prayer was to Jerusalem. However references in Islamic canonical sources which are said to name the direction of prayer as being towards “Jerusalem” actually use the word *Sham* ‘Syria’. The first kiblah was towards ‘Syria’. Jerusalem, which is part of what was then known as Syria, is not mentioned at all in the earliest Islamic sources. Later it came to be understood that the reference to the first kiblah being towards ‘Syria’ actually meant ‘Jerusalem’.

While, after Islamic conquest southern the Levant had continued to be administered as part of greater Syria, the term “Palestine” was used in Arabic and European languages for the southern part of the region of Syria. By the start of the 20th century, “Palestinian” was not an ethnicity or a nationality, but a regional designation: it was customary to refer to people who lived in the region as “Palestinians”, a designation which included Muslims, Druze, Jews and



Christians. Under Ottoman rule, many different ethnicities lived side by side, including Jewish communities. Jews who lived in the area were referred to as ‘Palestinian Jews’.

For a time the Mandate of Palestine, administered by the British from c. 1921 to 1946,, included the Transjordan. What had been known as Transjordan became a separate state in 1946 – the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – which is no longer considered to be part of Palestine.

At the time of the 1948 war, Jews had been considering the possibility of calling their state ‘Palestine’. However they preferred Eretz Israel ‘the land of Israel’. As they forged an ‘Israeli’ national identity, the concept of “Palestine” and “Palestinian” was developed into an identity oppositional to Israel. The word “Palestine” came to signify the illegitimacy of a Jewish presence. Over time the rhetoric developed that only (non-Jewish) Palestinians are the indigenous, original inhabitants of the region. This strategy for presenting the Palestinian cause resonated with Western scholarly ideas about decolonization.

Palestinian leaders have projected an Arabic Palestinian identity back in time, claiming the Palestinians are the original inhabitants of the region, some even asserting that Jews have no historical roots in the region at all. Yassir Arafat, for example, liked to refer to Jesus as a “Palestinian” freedom fighter.

### **A Hamas leader recently stated that the Palestinians are the “indigenous” people of Palestine. Is this true?**

This is an appeal to Western notions of indigeneity and colonization: it is meant to convey that Palestinian Arabs were there first, until the Jews arrived to occupy their territory and colonize them. The Jews should now leave in a process of “decolonization”.

This denies the Jews’ long historical connection to the land, including continuous settlement of Jews in the region since before the time of Christ. It also denies the ethnic complexity of Palestinian origins: most of Palestine was only Arabised during the many centuries of Islamic occupation.

### **Why don’t many Palestinians accept that Jews have a historical connection with the land?**

First and foremost, the Islamic ideology of conquest demands that a land, once conquered for Islam, belongs in perpetuity to Muslims. Previous occupants became tolerated clients of the Muslim occupiers, and were allowed to survive as long as they paid tribute.

Furthermore, Islam teaches that Biblical figures like Solomon, David, Abraham and Jesus were all Muslim prophets. Thus if Solomon ever built a temple in Jerusalem, it was a mosque. By this logic, it is Muslims, not Jews, who are the true inheritors of the legacy of the Biblical legacy.

## **PART 5 - WHAT IS THE OCCUPATION?**

### **What is the significance of the term “occupation”?**

This is a term meant to delegitimize Israel, implying Israel is an alien military force occupying the region. From an Islamist perspective, it is in reality the non-Islamic character of Israel that makes it illegitimate.

Much of the Middle East was Arabized as a result of conquest and occupation by Muslims, a dominance which continues to this day, and has caused great suffering, even in the past few centuries, to the surviving indigenous peoples, who include Copts, Yazidis, Armenians, Assyrians, and Eastern Orthodox Christians. From an Islamic perspective, the conquest of the Middle East by Muslims is seen as a good thing. The word used in Arabic for these conquests is *futuh*, which means ‘opening’ or ‘liberation’. In most cases, Islamic imperial conquest was both final and permanent.

For centuries Syria, which included ‘Palestine’, was under Ottoman military “occupation”, but this did not cause Palestinian jihadi “resistance” movements to spring up devoted to a “free Palestine”. This shows that it is not military occupation, in itself, but the fact that Israel is a non-Muslim and even a Jewish state that is the sticking point. The issue is that non-Muslims are ruling over Muslims, so Muslims are no longer in charge. This perspective is also clear in the Hamas Charter.

### **What were the Oslo Accords?**

The Oslo Accords were a process designed to move the Israeli-Palestinian relationship towards a two-state solution. For Israel they promised to provide greater security for its citizens. For the Palestinians they promised greater autonomy in self-government. The departure of the Israeli army from Gaza was one of the fruits of the Oslo Accords.

From Israel’s perspective, the Oslo Accords were a complete failure because Israeli deaths due to terror attacks increased almost tenfold after the Accords were signed. Yasser Arafat, who had agreed to the Accords on behalf of Palestinians, told a Muslim audience in South Africa that the Accords were just a ruse, referring to how Muhammad had deceived the Meccans by entering a treaty with them and then breaking it. Another PLO official, Faisal Husseini, called the Accords a ‘Trojan Horse’.

### **The recent pro-Palestinian protests have been chanting ‘From the river to the sea’. What does this mean?**

In Arabic this is a rhyming chant which expresses an intention to liberate all land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. This includes all of present-day Israel. This chant is code for “Israel must be destroyed.” How must it be destroyed? By killing its people. The October 7 massacre was a foretaste of what this would look like. This is a genocidal chant.

### **Why haven’t Palestinian refugees been settled somewhere, as has happened with millions of other refugees in modern times?**

During the past century vast numbers of refugees have been resettled. Examples are the millions of Germans who fled Eastern Europe after World War Two; the million Greeks who had lived in Asia Minor for thousands of years but were expelled in 1922 by the Turks; and the almost one million Jews who were expelled from Muslim countries after the declaration of Israel in 1948. These multitudes are not kept by the United Nations in permanent refugee camps.

Imagine what a mess Europe would be in today if the millions of Germans who were driven out of Eastern Europe after WWII had been kept in refugee camps on the borders of Germany with Poland and Czechia, waiting for their 'right of return' to be granted, and inspired by a genocidal hatred towards the peoples who now occupy the lands where they used to live.

The situation of the Palestinians as refugees is just like this. With the exception of Jordan, neighboring Arab countries have refused to welcome and accept them. The Arab nations have in effect forced the Palestinians to become a permanent refugee nation, and this for the purpose opposing Israel. This is not motivated by compassion for the Palestinians, and it has been a cruel and damaging policy for them, locking generations into a 'refugee' status.

## **PART 6 - IS ANTI-SEMITISM PART OF THE PROBLEM?**

### **Is Hamas anti-semitic, or just anti-Israel? If anti-semitic, where does that come from?**

Hamas's ideology has been nourished by Islamic anti-Jewish teachings. For example, its Charter cites a saying attributed to Muhammad which states that in the end-times, even stones and trees will cry out, saying 'O Slave of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him'. There are also many verses of the Qur'an which speak disparagingly of Jews and incite contempt for them, attributing base characteristics to them. (See my article [Islamic Antisemitism drives the Arab-Israel Conflict](#)).

At the same time, Hamas has also been influenced by the anti-semitism of Christian nations. For example, the Hamas Charter speaks of Jews as controlling the world, its financial systems and its media. This idea comes from the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was originally published in Russia. In the Hamas Charter, such conspiracy theories are woven in with Islamic themes. For example the Charter transitions from saying that Jews rule the world to saying that "There is no war going on anywhere without having their finger in it", a claim which echoes the Qur'an: "We have cast enmity and hatred among them until the day of Resurrection. Whenever they light the fire of war, God extinguishes it. But they strive (to) foment corruption on the earth, and God does not love the fomenters of corruption." (Surah 5:54). Hamas takes the Qur'an as presenting a true and accurate image of Jews, and bases its attitudes to Jews on this quranic image, fueled as well by European antisemitism.

### **Are Hamas' goals limited to Israel?**

Hamas' goals are broader in two senses. One is that Hamas' primary goal is to establish a full Islamic system. This is the same goal as that of the Taliban and ISIS.

At the same time, the ideology which drives Hamas will not be satisfied with the conquest of Israel. Hamas has one eye on the caliphate. Thus, from time to time its preachers call for the day to come when Islam will conquer Rome, Europe and America. Such statements have a long history. (See here) For example in December 2022, Hamas official Mahmoud Al-Zahar declared that "we are not liberating our land alone. ... The entire 510 million square kilometers of planet Earth will come under (as system) where this is no injustice, no oppression, no treachery, no Zionism, no treacherous Christianity." He is preaching about a global caliphate with Christians and Jews eradicated. In 2006 the then head of Hamas preached a sermon in Damascus in which he declared that the nation of Islam will rule the world.

### **What does 'Saturday comes before Sunday' mean?**

This is an Arabic saying well known in the Middle East which means that Jews will be dealt with first, and Christians later. In reality whenever war breaks out in Islamic contexts, local (indigenous) Christians suffer greatly.

## **PART 7 - WHAT ABOUT THE RULES OF WAR?**

### **President Biden said he is confident that Israel will observe the rules of war. What are the rules of war?**

The rules of war are something known as ‘International Humanitarian Law’ (IHL), which lays down rules for how wars should be fought. The core of IHL is the Geneva Conventions, a set of laws for war negotiated after WWII. IHL attempts to achieve a balance between the necessity of defeating an opponent by winning the war on the one hand, and limiting suffering on the other. IHL is underpinned by Western (i.e. Christian) traditions of the idea of ‘just war’.

Hamas follows Islamic law, which is something altogether different. Key differences are that Islamic law allows male prisoners to be killed; it considers enemy prisoners to be slaves who are owned by their captors; it allows the rape of captive females by their owners; and it allows permanently enslaving captive children, who can be brought up as Muslims. Furthermore, according to many rulings from leading contemporary Muslim scholars, Islam allows attacks which target Israeli civilian, including so-called suicide attacks. Furthermore, Islamic military strategy has always involved taking hostages and using them as bargaining chips or kept for ransom: this too is regulated by the sharia.

A key point is that Islamic law does not make a clear distinction between civilians and combatants. Rather the distinction is between adult men on the one hand, and women and children on the other. All adult men are, in effect, treated as combatants.

The Islamic laws for war are also deeply influenced by the principle that non-believers are inferior to Muslims: their blood is not equal in value to Muslim blood. The idea of human equality which underpins the IHL rules is absent from Islam.

When one side is fighting by IHL rules, and the other side is fighting a genocidal war using sharia rules, the result is a asymmetrical struggle, with one side having options which are not available to the other. For example one side can kill, enslave and rape captives, while the other side is constrained to treat captives humanely. One side can use terror attacks on civilians to incite terror while the other side cannot deliberately target civilians.

### **How to interpret the killings, rapes and taking people captive, and killing children? Are such actions permitted by Islam?**

As noted above, Islam’s rules of law allows men to be killed, and women and children to be enslaved. Raping of captive women is permitted. Although, in principle, killing children or women is not allowed in the sharia — they should be enslaved instead – but contextual exceptions have been made in various fatwas (Islamic rulings).

Not all Muslims agree on such rulings. For example, after 9-11 there were disagreements among Muslims about whether such attacks were religiously permissible.

### **In the current circumstances, what does a ‘proportionate response’ mean?**

For decades Israel has pursued a policy of deterrence, which meant that after terrorist attacks on Israelis, there would be a violent reprisal, to deter future attacks. This idea of deterrence is different from reprisals, in which one side exacts casualties from the other side, as tit-for-tat revenge.

The current Israeli plan to invade Gaza is not meant to be a deterrence. Its purpose is neither to discourage Hamas from killing Israelis, nor to achieve revenge, but to defeat Hamas: to destroy it completely. No doubt there are some Israelis who would like revenge, but the point of this attack is neither deterrence nor reprisal, but victory. Therefore, the questions to be asking about the battle for Gaza is not “Is this a proportionate response?”, but “Is this the best path to victory?” And, “Is victory a reasonable response to the threat of genocide?”

## **PART 8 - SOME FINAL THOUGHTS**

### **Do Palestinians have legitimate grievances?**

Yes, of course they do. Their situation is heart-breaking. And their grievances are not only against Israel: they have legitimate grievances against their own leaders, who are deliberately and callously taking them down a path of bloodshed and death.

### **Who should we feel compassion for in this conflict?**

For both sides. The Palestinians' situation is terrible. I feel sad for all they have endured and will endure. As human beings they deserve much, much better than being used as proxies in a long fight to the death against Israel. I also feel deeply for Israelis who want to be left in peace, while those who hate them want to wipe them off the face of the earth, and spout lies against them.

### **Can Hamas be defeated?**

Yes and no. The ideology is persistent and will endure. But Hamas's hold on Gaza can and must be defeated. The organisation itself can be defeated. The ideology can be discredited, but it will never be fully eradicated.

### **What does Israel have to do now?**

Sadly, it has to fight for its security. Hamas has slammed shut all other doors. It must win against Hamas. And it must show, yet again, that the lie about Jews loving life too much to fight is just that: a lie.

That battle a head is not about achieving a 'proportionate response'. This is not a tit-for-tat war, in which one side's casualties justify or validate an equal number of deaths on the other side. That would be a morally repulsive idea. On Israel's side this is a war for survival and security. For the Palestinians' fighters it is a war to eliminate Israel.

### **What can I do?**

Know and speak the truth. Honour all people, as a matter of principle. Reject hate.