



INTERVIEW WITH RAMADAN SHALLAH (Part II)

The Palestinian Resistance— A Reexamination

In the text that follows, which is the second of a two-part interview, Dr. Ramadan Shallah, the secretary-general of Islamic Jihad in Palestine discusses national unity, the prospects of the Palestinian national movement, the role of the resistance, and Islamic Jihad's view of nationhood.

Shallah, born in the Gaza City neighborhood of Shuja'iya in 1958, obtained his doctorate in economics from the University of Durham in the United Kingdom and was subsequently adjunct professor at the University of South Florida in the United States. In 1995, he assumed the leadership of Islamic Jihad after the movement's charismatic founder, Fathi Shikaki, was assassinated in an Israeli operation in Malta. The Shikaki assassination is often portrayed by Israel as an instance in which an organization is dealt a mortal blow by the physical elimination of its leader. While Islamic Jihad was indeed slow to recover, today it is an integral component of the Palestinian national movement, politically as well as militarily, and particularly so in the Gaza Strip.

Shallah himself remains based in Damascus, reflecting the closer relations Islamic Jihad has traditionally nurtured with Iran and Syria, when compared to Hamas. On the strength of its relationship with what is often referred to as "the axis of resistance," Islamic Jihad boasts a military arsenal and capability that is second only to that of Hamas. Within Palestine, the organization has managed to remain equidistant from both Hamas and Fatah, declining to join the Palestinian Authority while remaining a major proponent of national reconciliation. Despite periodic and sometimes violent tensions with each, it has generally managed to maintain constructive relations with both, and it coordinated closely with Hamas during Operation Protective Edge, Israel's summer 2014 attack on Gaza.

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What are your thoughts on the war on Gaza? And what are your views on overhauling the Palestinian national project?

I'd like to start by saying that Israel's war on Gaza this time, a war that lasted fifty-one days, wasn't just a random occurrence in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict but a turning point in that history—and its impact has been commensurate with the scale of the attack in every respect. As to the future of the Palestinian national project, to be quite frank, I'm afraid, that in its

current iteration that project is unable to fully integrate or absorb the achievements and accomplishments of the latest conflict—besides being incapable of addressing the postwar challenges or the destruction and devastation wrought by the war. My reservations stem from the depth of the crisis at hand, the total impasse that has led many to ask themselves if there even remains a Palestinian national project and, if so, what exactly it is. What are its goals? What are its methods, capabilities, or allies? And what are its prospects in light of the huge changes sweeping the region and the world?

Over two years ago already, I had stated that the national project spearheaded by the Palestinian Liberation Organization [PLO] and formulated as the two-state solution was finished. The reasons for such a conclusion are obvious and well-known. Does that mean that Hamas or Islamic Jihad has come up with an alternative? It's not that simple. A national project is not like an electoral platform for establishing power in the shadow of the Israeli occupation, nor is it about the bullets or rockets fired by the resistance, despite the latter's importance. In the case at hand, it's a far more complicated project, it is an existential issue that goes to the core of the question of Palestine as a people and land, and it can be viewed only in the context of the entire history of the conflict [with Israel], whether present, past, or future.

As to the impact of the Gaza war on overhauling the national project, I will say that it will be determined by the following: first, what I would call the intra-Palestinian situation, that is, the internal dynamics and relationships between Palestinians, which have been and remain characterized by a deep split; second, the conflict with Israel—I will not say Palestinian-Israeli relations, because I can frame the Israeli occupation only from the vantage point of the conflict; third, the Islamic-Arab dimension, by which I mean the wider Arab and Islamic hinterland of Palestine, its holding vessel so to speak, and specifically, the support the Palestinian national project can rally; and last, the international community's stance and, specifically, its position vis-à-vis the Palestinian people, their rights, their resistance, and their future.

Looking at those four factors through the prism of the Gaza war gives us an insight into the war's impact on the Palestinian national project. Personally, my view is that overall, the impact can be considered positive, provided that we seize the historical moment and make it work in our favor.

What are your views on the question of national unity?

We can't talk about national unity without addressing the issue of Palestinian nationalism, and that is something on which we all remain united—and that is to what I will be referring when I talk about the Islamists' role.

We are still in the midst of a national struggle and the national movement has yet to achieve the goals that it set out to accomplish ever since the early days of the conflict. In the process of struggle for national liberation, unity is not an option: it is a duty, an existential necessity, and a prerequisite for every Palestinian—which is why we saw Palestinians raise the slogans, “the people demand an end to Palestinian division” and “the people demand the end of the occupation” simultaneously and spontaneously. Thus, ending the division and the occupation are inseparable goals because unity and liberty are two sides of the same coin. Still, the important question remains regarding the nature of such national unity. Is it a mere tactic to reap short-term gains or is it a strategy for the overall struggle? Unfortunately, ever since the Palestinian political establishment began going

down the road of compromise, the issue of national unity has gone from being a strategic, long-term, and organizing principle of the struggle to a tactical, short-term, and minor consideration.

In the past, discussions of national unity began with a political agenda, and the concept of unity was both a measure of our work and the banner [under which it proceeded]. Today, just agreeing on the smallest political initiative has become difficult, and reaching consensus on a unified political platform is impossible. Given that, I consider it a major achievement that all the political factions were represented in the delegation attending the Cairo negotiations [to end the summer 2014 assault on Gaza]. Does this mean that we should abandon any hope of achieving national unity? Of course not! We must strive unrelentingly toward laying its foundations. In that regard, I believe that unity should not be discussed in terms of blood ties or destiny, nor in terms of history and land, since all these elements, which are generally regarded as constitutive of a nation, have already been compromised. I will enumerate the four founding principles that I consider essential to national unity.

First and foremost, our overall objective: In other words, what are the Palestinian people and their national movement seeking to accomplish? From the beginning of the conflict and until the interim platform of 1974,* the main goal of the movement was to liberate Palestine from the river to the sea [from the Jordan to the Mediterranean]. The 1974 platform trimmed that goal down to establishing a national authority in those areas that had been liberated. Later, after the Algiers Declaration of 1988 [when then-PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat declared Palestine a state], the objective shifted to establishing a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. Then there was Oslo, and the PLO's recognition of Israel in exchange for "self-governance" in the West Bank and Gaza, ostensibly as a first step toward full-fledged statehood in the framework of a two-state solution. But in actual fact, Oslo went way beyond the 1974 interim platform. It established that a [Palestinian] state would recognize Israel, normalize relations with it, and back down on the [Palestinian] right of return and of self-determination, all of which had been explicitly ruled out by the interim platform, which had moreover stipulated that any governing Palestinian authority or state would be established on territory that was "liberated" by armed struggle and not obtained via negotiation.

To be succinct, no liberation movement in history has recognized the legitimacy of its enemy before achieving its own goals, barring utter defeat or surrender. The PLO recognized its enemy in exchange for being recognized as an organization! Even with a Palestinian position favorable to gradualism and the incremental achievement of political goals, the question of recognition and reconciliation should have been left up to the Palestinian people as a whole, and only once they had gained statehood. As it was, the Palestinian side was divested both of its goal [liberation] and the means to achieve it [armed struggle], and, furthermore, was required to guarantee the security of its enemy while being engaged in a struggle for national liberation! That was a grave mistake and it is the first item that needs revisiting in the framework of the Palestinian national project. Believe me, I'm not trying to place obstacles in the way of national unity, nor do I want to widen the gap between the different factions of the Palestinian liberation movement. What I am trying

* In 1974, the PLO endorsed the idea of an "interim" phase in the national liberation struggle, effectively accepting the idea of Palestinian sovereignty over any part of land liberated from Israeli occupation.

to do is set aside the illusion that we can attain the unattainable. The two-state solution is dead. The dream of establishing an independent Palestinian state via negotiations is impossible, first, because the balance of power precludes it and, second, because the directions for achieving such an outcome were drawn up in reverse order: recognition and reconciliation and the “renouncing of violence” before statehood—in other words capitulation—and forsaking the Palestinian gun or using it in the service of Israel! As far as we [Islamic Jihad] are concerned, recognizing Israel is unacceptable regardless, but here I’m shedding light on the historical mistake made by the chief decision-maker when he agreed to relinquish the overall objective before taking a single step toward a solution.

And now I come to the second element in this enumeration: How is the overall objective to be achieved, through negotiation or resistance? I think that both the negotiations process and the Gaza war answer that question. The former has reached a dead end, demonstrating the futility of the negotiated option, and the latter has shown us that there *are* prospects for resistance, which hinge on the Palestinian people’s continuing support for the resistance and their readiness to accept the very high cost involved.

Third, is the issue of institutions. In brief, we have two institutional players, the PLO and the Palestinian Authority or PA. The former has, in my opinion, become a burden, both to the Palestinian cause and to the people. The PLO has been at the forefront of the backsliding that has turned the conflict from one with Israel/the occupier into an intra-Palestinian struggle for power. The organization that was supposed to provide the solution has instead become the problem. Rather than being the inclusive and participatory structure that represents all Palestinians it was meant to be, the PLO has become a source of internal conflict between factions. Unfortunately, all efforts at reconfiguring the PLO have been largely in vain, and it’s not clear what the organization wants. Should it co-opt the Islamists into an organization that has recognized Israel? Or correct the mistake [of Oslo] and redirect the struggle so that it can once again embody the goal for which the organization was established? Your readers might be surprised to hear that such a question is not raised in PLO leadership meetings and that even when it is raised, it is never seriously addressed.

The fourth and last issue that goes to the core of national unity is the Israeli peril. By this I mean, the continuing settlement of the West Bank, the Judaization of Jerusalem, and the persistence of the blockade and devastating wars on Gaza. The brutality of the Zionists, their targeting of our land, our people, our sacred sites, as well as our history and geography should have us focusing on the true conflict, the one with Israel, and downplaying our own differences. The Israeli danger is undoubtedly a unifying element, but there will be no closing of ranks without a bold and transparent examination of the four factors I have just outlined. We cannot correct the errors that were made along the way or readjust our aim merely by deploying the rhetoric of slogans and yearning for unity without building consensus.

How do you envision the role of the Palestinian diaspora and the Palestinians of ’48 in the struggle for national unity?

One of the great perils of our situation as Palestinians is the absence of a unified society on a shared land. Palestinians today are dispersed in small communities across the world where they

live under very different circumstances, in different environments, and with different concerns. True, Palestine unites them, but to what extent and for what purpose?

Palestinians are generally divided into three categories: the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza, those of '48, and those in the diaspora. But that's a very general classification, within which are a myriad of complex, arduous, and frustrating details. I believe that we are still paying the price of the Nakba and that its impact is ongoing, and I attribute that in large part to the political course taken by the Palestinian national movement, going all the way back to the interim [1974] platform, which basically disregarded the Palestinians of '48 and the Palestinians living in the diaspora. Further concessions under Oslo limited the conflict and its possible solutions to the 1967 lines, which were defined in the accord as "disputed lands," absolving Israel from the consequences of the Nakba, in other words, forsaking the Palestinians' right of return. It is well-known that the majority of Palestinians live in the diaspora, but what is their role? What are their rights? According to information that leaked out during the [Oslo] negotiations (and was verified by sources on both sides), Palestinian negotiators agreed to a maximum of one hundred thousand Palestinians returning to Palestine, out of the six million living in the diaspora. Under the Olmert government [2006–9], the State of Israel accepted the return of five thousand Palestinians, and the conditions of their return stipulated that they be chosen by Israel, that they return only to Gaza or the West Bank, and that their return take place over a span of five years! During the most recent round of negotiations [that broke down in July 2014 and were led by U.S. Secy. of State John Kerry], the issue of the right of return was dropped altogether while the Arab Initiative [of 2002] called for a "just solution to the problem of refugees" in accordance with United Nations [General Assembly] Resolution 194—none of this was new, as all of these initiatives recapitulated what was set forth in United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 [the so-called land-for-peace resolution of 1967] that makes no mention of Palestine in so many words, affirming only the necessity of "achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem."

Palestinians in the diaspora who remain refugees have been victimized twice over: they lost their homeland as well as their homes during the Nakba, and are once again victims of the circumstances in which they live across the world. Take the example of the Palestinians in Syria and their experiences in the Yarmuk refugee camp. Look at how Palestinian refugees live in the camps in Lebanon. Palestinians everywhere are paying a heavy price for the violent upheavals all over the Arab world, sometimes to an even greater extent than the local populations. Today, Palestinian youth are faced with the choice to join extremist organizations, so-called Salafists, or immigrating to Europe, and drowning at sea on the way. What does the PLO do for these young people? Where is the authority of recourse that represents Palestinians everywhere?

As for the Palestinians of '48, we know that in spite of their suffering and their bitter experience of egregious racial discrimination in Israel, their continued presence on the land of Palestine is one of the most important strategic assets of our cause. They are testimony to the untruth of the Zionist establishment's claims and founding myths, and are flesh-and-blood obstacles in the way of Israel's attempts to bring about a "Jewish state." They are, as a result, the victims of a slow and mostly silent ethnic cleansing, especially in the larger cities of Haifa, Acre, Lydda, and in the Negev/Naqab, where they suffer house demolitions, land confiscations, internal displacement, and all manner of harassment. We saw how the Palestinians of '48 demonstrated solidarity with the

people of Gaza during the war. Despite the absence of a unified people living in a shared land, the solidarity of the Palestinians of '48 with the people of Gaza demonstrates that Palestinians as a people have been able to maintain an overall sense of national unity. It also shows that despite their geographic dispersal, the people's spirit cannot be broken, and neither can their will or their sense of belonging. No matter where they are or what their beliefs may be, Palestinians are one people with one cause.

You claim that the two-state solution is dead. You compared its current formulation with that of the interim platform, about which you also expressed reservations. What then, in the view of Islamic Jihad, is the solution?

Islamic Jihad doesn't generally concern itself with proposing solutions or alternatives such as the two-state versus the one-state solution, for a number of reasons, chief among them the PLO's experience. The PLO [under Oslo] offered what was termed a "historic compromise," accepting the establishment of a state over 22 percent of the land [of historic Palestine], a proposal that was of course rejected by Israel.

We have no illusions, and are well aware that our problem is immensely complex because Israel's settler-colonial enterprise is very different from other projects of colonial conquest. Israel is an invading settler-colonial state. The Israeli army does not consist of 180,000 regular soldiers and 400,000 reserves—it's not like Algeria or Vietnam. The Israeli army is composed of every single Jewish inhabitant of the State of Israel, all of whom believe that the land of Palestine in its entirety—from the river to the sea—is the "Land of Israel" to which they have a providential right.

How are we supposed to deal with the Israelis, and what formula or solution could convince them to live side by side with the Palestinian "other" under a two-state solution or to coexist in one state?! Israel's rejection of a compromise on the basis of even the most minimalist solution is due to the power imbalance: Israel considers itself the winner in the Arab-Israeli conflict and therefore feels entitled to impose an Israeli solution to the conflict under conditions which, essentially, do not go beyond self-rule, with some sort of linkage between the West Bank and Jordan.

This is why we believe that discussing frameworks and solutions—from Fatah's original 1968 idea of a single democratic state, to the 1974 interim platform, and including the two-state framework—will have absolutely no effect whatsoever on the Zionist stance. The only thing that will produce change is maintaining the military pressure on Israel such that a shift occurs, both in the balance of power and in perception, thus allowing new parameters to emerge. That is the mission and work of the resistance, as we saw in Gaza, even if the PLO chooses to follow the negotiated settlement route. I think the late Yasir Arafat understood this quite well and was leaning that way during the second intifada—which is why they killed him.

Thus, based on the failure of the negotiated settlement option, we believe that despite the fact that there is no level playing field—as the international community continues to support a negotiated settlement that is basically an acquiescence to Israel's demands, on the one hand, and persists in decrying and hemming in the resistance, on the other—it is our belief that thanks to its unshakeable resolve, the Palestinian people will prevail.

Consequently, I can state that our vision is for the struggle and resistance to continue until the entirety of the West Bank and Gaza Strip are freed from occupation unconditionally and without

qualification. This should not be understood to mean that we are waiving our rights to Palestine within the 1967 borders, but only that we are aiming for a goal around which there is general agreement among Palestinians as well as broad support among the wider Arab and international communities—regardless of the fact that it could be pointed out that resistance to foreign occupation is sanctioned under international law. And by unconditionally and without qualification, we mean liberating the land with no obligation to recognize Israel or to forfeit any claims on the rest of Palestine.

What is the role of the Islamist currents in the overall national movement? And what is the nature of their relationship to the movement's more secular groups?

To understand the role of the Islamists, we should set aside diplomatic niceties and be candid about the Palestinian national movement's emergence and the historical circumstances attendant to its development. That is why I said earlier that the question of "Palestinian nationalism" must precede any discussion of Palestinian unity today.

The first iteration of "Palestinian nationalism" arose in the early part of the twentieth century, in the context of the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I, and the British occupation and Zionist colonization of Palestine. In response, there were the first stirrings of resistance: political parties were formed and nationalist leaders emerged during the 1920s and 1930s, including a movement led by Shaykh Izzeddin al-Qassam [who was educated at al-Azhar University]. The nationalist movement, placed under the leadership of Haj Amin al-Husayni (and I will not comment here on how that choice was made), was shaped by two defining ideas: confronting and resisting the Zionist project, on the one hand, and the wider Arab-Islamic dimension of the struggle, on the other. At the time, there was no problem of identity, nor a split or contradiction between the three elements of nationalism, Arabism, and Islam. As such, Haj Amin embodied a Palestinian nationalism that encompassed all three key elements and was thus inclusive of all.

The second iteration of Palestinian nationalism came about after the Nakba of 1948 and flourished during the 1950s and 1960s when it was subsumed under the broader pan-Arab movement, a left-leaning nationalist trend in the Arab world with a pronounced bias toward secularism. Thus, the Palestinian liberation movement became part of a broader pan-Arab struggle for liberation. Because of the [ideological] clash between nationalists and the Islamic current in the broader arena, that split between pan-Arabism and Islam in the Palestinian context meant that the Islamic dimension was overshadowed to the extent that it no longer formed part of the Palestinian national movement's landscape. The movement thus lost its earlier cohesiveness, and now retained only one of its defining features, namely resistance to and struggle against the Zionist project, in the guise of a modern Palestinian revolution.

Following the 1967 Arab defeat [in the June War] and Fatah's takeover of the PLO, whose establishment [in 1965] had expressed the Palestinian "totality" or whole, so to speak, the cause became infused with a strongly nationalistic spirit, undergoing "Palestinianization," so to speak. As the call for national self-determination grew louder, the pan-Arab dimension now began receding from the picture, and the PLO charter changed from one that was "national" in the broad pan-Arab sense to one that was "nationalist" in the narrower Palestinian sense. This was

now the third phase of the Palestinian national movement, which still maintained its commitment to confronting and resisting the Zionist project. The end of this phase witnessed the emergence of the Islamist currents, spearheaded by Islamic Jihad, and that paved the way for the Islamist return to the national fold; Hamas only emerged later, with the start of the first intifada in 1987.

Not to crow about our achievements, but as a matter of historical record, I'd like to note that the emergence of Islamic Jihad, followed by that of Hamas, brought about a significant shift in the conduct of the struggle, as it rectified the earlier imbalance in the Palestinian national movement. This not only restored the movement's three-pronged cohesiveness (nationalism, Arabism, and Islam) but it also reinforced the notion of struggle against the Zionist project by way of resistance.

In order for the Islamist current not to be misunderstood as seeking to replace or take over the national movement, early on during the first intifada, Islamic Jihad adopted the concept of a nationalist collectivity that would subsume the three elements outlined above. But nobody was patient enough to give Palestinian nationalism the necessary time to recalibrate. Starting with Madrid [in 1991] and ending with Oslo in 1993, the emergent Islamist current was portrayed as a monster from which to run, so that the groundwork could be laid for an agreement with Israel. Don't forget that the Oslo accords were arrived at by way of backdoor negotiations, conducted by Mahmoud Abbas, with the knowledge and under the direction of the late Yasir Arafat, with a view to establishing the PA, which was done by 1994. And this is when the fourth phase of Palestinian nationalism begins—and what a phase! Ever since, the national movement has undergone a process of gradual dismemberment if not outright disintegration. Where “Palestinianization” saw the shift from a national [read pan-Arab] charter to a strictly [Palestinian] nationalist one, then what some have termed “Israelization” in the shadow of Oslo has effectively obliterated the charter, specifically its provisions regarding the resistance struggle, and replaced it with the creation of the PA.

During this last phase, we have witnessed the systematic erasure of the two aforementioned distinguishing features of the national movement: its cohesiveness (and the inclusion of the Islamic current in the overall picture) and resistance against Israel. And now, it is the Islamists, and not Israel, who are portrayed as the danger because of their commitment to that resistance! Ever since the split between them, Hamas has become the enemy in Fatah's view, and vice versa.

The proponents of Oslo never understood that closing the door to armed struggle against the enemy occupier would lay the national movement open to fighting within its own bosom over issues of identity, belonging, and power to the point that it would implode. That is why Islamic Jihad's decision not to join the PA's ranks not only demonstrates its refusal to serve the occupation, but it also reflects its sober understanding of the charade underway, namely creating “alternative enemies” within the Palestinian arena. This charade has now overtaken the politics of the entire region, such that today Iran is regarded as enemy, and not Israel.

If I were to sum up everything I've laid out here, I would say that Palestinian nationalism will neither survive nor thrive if it is severed from its broader Arab and Islamic contexts and if it forsakes resistance to the Zionist project while Palestine remains occupied.

As to the question of the relationship between the Islamist and secular elements of the movement, I think both sides bear a tremendous responsibility: the Islamist groups must not substitute the struggle against Israel with a struggle over Palestinian identity, and should be using dialogue as a means to promote understanding and coexistence; and the secular groups, for their

part, must recognize that the Islamists' existence is both a necessity and a national imperative if Palestinian nationalism is to recover the cohesiveness and equilibrium it enjoyed at its inception. Given what is happening in the region, these elements of balance and cohesiveness are needed today more than ever. Insofar as they are forces of moderation and mediation, Hamas and Islamic Jihad are essential to Fatah and the more left-leaning factions in order to guard against extremism in the Palestinian political arena. Those who today decry Hamas or Islamic Jihad will tomorrow find themselves faced by an alternative far more horrifying.

Can you shed more light on Islamic Jihad's idea of a nationalist collectivity?

As I mentioned earlier, this idea had been proposed early on by Islamic Jihad. The Islamic movement in all its manifestations was influenced by the concept of “Islamic nationalism,” specifically, Abul Ala Maududi’s negative views of nationalism and Sayyid Qutb’s understanding of the nationality of a Muslim as his creed.* The idea is simple [and it can be summarized as follows]: “I am a Muslim and I am proud of my affiliation with Islam.” However, belonging to a religion or having a religious identification does not preclude the possibility of having other aspects to one’s identity, be they nationalist, transnational, or humanistic. The Prophet Muhammad established a governing charter, or constitution, for Medina called *al-Sahifa*, which recognized the ethnic and religious pluralism of society—at the time, Medina was comprised of different groups of people who followed diverse religions and were of distinct ethnic backgrounds. But such differences did not hinder the establishment of a political entity based on “citizenship” where people enjoyed rights and obligations in conformity with that document. It is well-known that the Constitution of Medina defined Muslims as “a (religious) community apart from all others,” this being the community of the creed, or *ummah*, as discussed by Sayyid Qutb, and that this was the first time that Arab society defined itself on the basis of a shared common faith without regard to tribal affiliations. That notwithstanding, other sections of the document refer to Jews as a “community alongside the believers” (that is, Muslims), this being the *community of political citizenship*. More explicitly, the document specified that “the Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs, both themselves and their clients, barring only he who is unjust or sinful.”† The Constitution of Medina is not insignificant in the history of Islam, although Islamist currents had accorded it little importance until recently. Islamists were, and remain, unsympathetic to the idea of establishing a homeland or nation based on geography, as is the case of the modern European nation-state, in contrast with empires based on religion or ethnicity. All that Islamic Jihad is saying is that while geography should not be regarded as the basis of commonality between people in other places, the case of Palestine is different. Precisely because the geography of Palestine has been ravaged and lost, it is neither a matter of positing or denying [geographically-based] affiliations, or indeed of regarding

* Maududi and Qutb were the Islamic movement’s two leading ideologues in the twentieth century. Maududi (1903–1979) held that nationalism was contrary to the Islamic ideal of universalism, while Qutb (1906–1966) emphasized the responsibility of individuals to create an Islamic political and social order.

† The reference to “clients” (*mawali* in Arabic) is to a widespread custom in pre- and early Islam whereby persons “attached” themselves to a pure Arab clan and became a part of that clan though not with the same privileges.

these as antithetical to Islam, but a matter of jihad that is incumbent on an individual when it comes to liberating despoiled land, and especially Palestine, whose status is well-defined in religious doctrine.

It is important to note that Palestinians as a people are homogenous in terms of sects and ethnicity, unlike the population of other countries like Syria, Lebanon, or Iraq. Of course, there are Christians and Muslims in Palestine, but that has never been a problem, either in the history of Palestine or within the Palestinian national movement. The internal conflicts and plurality of stances within the movement are the result of ideological and factional differences and not religious ones. This is why Islamic Jihad has proposed the idea of a nationalist collectivity so that a national movement could be based on the notion of affiliation to the homeland, and removed from ideological or religious considerations. The resistance against Israel and its occupation is the only legitimate struggle, and the one that must be prioritized.

Do you believe that Fatah's concept of a "national collectivity" is close to Islamic Jihad's idea of a "nationalist collectivity"?

Both movements share a commitment to intellectual pluralism, at least within society as a whole if not within the organization.

But here are the differences: first, Fatah bases its vision of a national collectivity, that is, society or state, on the European model in which secularism and democracy go hand in hand—in other words, for a society to be democratic, it must be secular. This has not always been the case either in European history or even in present-day Europe. There are, for example, European models of Christian democracy. Second, on an organizational level, Fatah views itself as a secular organization that can encompass Islamists, nationalists, and Marxists. Islamic Jihad, on the other hand, is a doctrinal organization: its worldview is Islam, and while that is the central reference point, it is broad enough to accommodate humanistic principles. Therefore, we do not belong to what the Western and Zionist/Israeli media now refer to as "global jihad," even though the term jihad is part of our name. We are a Palestinian resistance movement whose reference is Islam. The reason for our conflict with the Jews has nothing to do with their religion. We are not fighting them because of our religious differences. Our conflict is over the land of Palestine, because we have been dispossessed of our land and expelled from our homes by force and through terrorism. We are freedom fighters and we do not believe in imposing our religion on others. Our faith clearly states that there is "no compulsion in religion."